

WHAT IS DUAL ENROLLMENT – AND WHAT'S SO GREAT ABOUT IT

August 04, 2020

You are here: [Home](#) > [News](#) > [Featured Articles](#) > What Is Dual Enrollment – And What's So Great About It

Over the past decade, the number of American high school students taking community college classes has continued to grow. According to a [nationally representative study conducted by the U.S. Department of Education](#), about a third of U.S. high school students (34%) took dual enrollment courses in high school.

What is dual enrollment? In a nutshell, dual enrollment (also called concurrent enrollment) is a way for students to earn college credit while still in high school and prove that they are college-ready — equally important, dual enrollment can save students and families significant tuition dollars.

That's the case with Northern Virginia Community College's (NOVA) dual enrollment program where students (typically high school juniors and seniors and equivalent home-schooled students) can fulfill high school requirements and earn college credit at the same time. NOVA's program offers these students a jumpstart on an associate degree or a bachelor's degree by fulfilling some introductory course requirements before they get to college.

"Dual enrollment courses are a great way to begin your college education," says Amy Nearman, the Director of Dual Enrollment at NOVA. "They serve the dual purpose of earning both high school credits for graduation Dual Enrollment at NOVA. "They serve the dual purpose of earning both high school credits for graduation requirements as well as beginning that college transcript — with one course. Students can avoid having to take those same courses when they start college."

In addition, dual enrollment through NOVA gives students first-hand experience with the demands of a college course while they are still in the familiar environment of high school. Exposure to college-level teaching before high school graduation prepares students for more rigorous expectations, allowing them a better chance of college success later on. For some students, getting these credits completed in high school can even accelerate completion of their college degree.



What is Dual Enrollment?

Dual Enrollment: The Basics

According to Nearman, many parents and students are eager to learn how NOVA's dual enrollment program works. She explains that the NOVA program encompasses curated courses that cover basic college requirements so students can complete those while they are still in high school. "We've designed a lot of our dual enrollment offerings to fulfill general education, entry-level college courses — freshman and sophomore year courses," says Nearman. "We purposefully select courses in English and composition and U.S. history. We carefully select different math classes or lab science classes that are pointing to, or plug and play into, degree paths at colleges or universities."

The curriculum is just one aspect of the NOVA program's effectiveness; the quality of the teaching faculty also plays a big role. "The faculty who teach dual enrollment classes have to meet the same high expectations as all our college faculty," says Nearman. "They have to have, at a minimum, a master's degree in the teaching field or at least a master's degree in another field and 18 graduate-level credits in the teaching field."

In addition to experienced faculty, the financial and support benefits of dual enrollment can make a big difference in student success. Dual-credit classes taught at high schools are free and provide a support system that can benefit these younger students beyond earning college credit. "The students get to take those classes in the high school environment," says Nearman, "with all the high school support in addition to the college support, like reading and writing centers. It's a great way for students to start that college journey and understand how to navigate a syllabus or college grading policies, all those things that are a little bit different than in high school. They can learn those processes early. And then when and if they do come to NOVA full time, they're better prepared because they understand and know what's expected of them."

In addition to taking dual enrollment courses on a high school campus, courses can be taken online or on a NOVA campus. These options carry full tuition, but they are still offered at a fraction of the cost of classes at a four-year institution. Many students who are busy with sports or other high-school activities see the online courses as valuable options that may fit into their schedules more easily. Moreover, distance learning has been especially important in 2020 during the COVID pandemic and may continue to be for the fall semester for many students.

How Do Dual-Credit Courses Compare to AP Class Credits?

Starting college with credit already on your transcript saves time and money, whether the credit comes from dual-enrollment classes or from [AP \(advanced placement\) classes](#). “We know the cost of a college education has gone crazy,” Nearman acknowledges. Given that reality, any leg up on college credit can help students and families make higher education more affordable.

There are important differences to keep in mind between dual-enrollment credits and high school AP courses, however. While both have rigorous expectations, students encounter different requirements to make the courses count at college. If a student earns a grade C or better in a dual-enrollment course, it will count as college credit when the student transfers to a college with a NOVA transfer agreement. In contrast, AP college class credit hinges on a standardized exam score. AP exams are graded on a scale of 1-5. Technically, a score of 3 is considered passing, but some schools will only grant credit for scores of 4 and 5. "With AP, we call it articulated college credit, where depending on your score on the AP exam, a college can then decide if they want to give you a credit," says Nearman. "There are more hoops to jump through, if you will. And it's 100% dependent on that score at the end-of-course exam." As a result, credit goals may be more difficult for students to achieve.

Dual Enrollment and the Path to a Bachelor's Degree

Nearman says that students who earn dual-enrollment credits have a higher success rate in college. "There's been a lot of national research showing how students who take dual enrollment classes have higher GPAs in college, higher persistence rates, and more are graduating with that bachelor's degree in four years than students who don't come in with those dual-enrollment credits." One study reported that **88% of community college dual enrollment students** continued in college after high school, and most earned a degree or transferred within six years.

When it comes to planning for a degree, the sooner a student begins, the better. High school is the perfect time to focus on the ways that dual-enrollment classes can build toward a major and a four-year degree. "We can already get them on an advanced track, even while they're still in high school," says Nearman. "It's a great way for students to ensure that the courses they're taking are going to work to fulfill degree requirements." If students begin their college education at NOVA, dual-credit courses can contribute to a [general education certificate](#). This certificate includes courses typically needed for the first years of college, such as math, English, and lab sciences.

A student's NOVA credits can transfer to the majority of four-year colleges around the country, including those that maintain a guaranteed transfer agreement with NOVA. Credits can also transfer to colleges that don't have agreements with NOVA, although those transfers are not guaranteed and must meet individual school requirements. These transfer options for NOVA students continue to build upon the benefits of college credits earned in high school and can be used in other dual enrollment options when students matriculate at NOVA.

One of the most popular transfer options for NOVA students is [ADVANCE, the partnership between NOVA and George Mason University](#) which facilitates the transfer process and ensures that students have the resources and support needed to complete their bachelor's degrees — and save money on their education. ADVANCE is available to NOVA students in good academic standing with less than 30 degree credits earned and who plan to transfer to Mason to pursue a bachelor's degree in any of the programs offered. A specialized, aligned curriculum from NOVA to Mason ensures all credits transfer seamlessly toward a student's chosen degree program. Students are eligible to take select dual enrollment classes at Mason while at NOVA and can participate in special internship and co-curricular experiences that prepare them for career success. There is no additional application or application fee required and success coaches are available to guide students from the time they enroll at NOVA through their graduation at George Mason. About 3,000 NOVA students transfer to George Mason University each year and, not surprisingly, many of them are on a mission to succeed.

NOVA students can benefit from other transfer agreements as well. "NOVA also has really strong partnerships with additional schools, and we can do the same thing to help students prepare for their next steps," says Nearman.

Career-Focused Dual Enrollment

Transfer to a four-year institution is not the only option for dual enrollment students. High school students who complete dual-credit courses in high school can continue to a career-focused associate degree at NOVA. For example, NOVA's cybersecurity program is one of the fastest-growing programs of its kind in the U.S. and gives students access to a booming field. "Those IT courses are very popular," Nearman says. "In cybersecurity, thousands and thousands of jobs are unfilled in the Northern Virginia metro area."

Students who earn associate degrees in medical fields can become nurses or radiologic technicians, which are also career areas with many job openings. Further fields open to graduates with associate degrees include welding, automotive technology, and heating, ventilation, and air conditioning.

Dual-enrollment is a bridge to a college degree no matter what students want from their education. Nearman says she is happy to see the growth of the dual-enrollment program. "It's amazing how the public schools have embraced this and have been working hard to incorporate the offerings in their schools. Even more fantastic is how it's been received by the parents and students." If you are interested in learning more about dual enrollment at NOVA, [please visit the program page on our website](#).

Northern Virginia Community College is the largest institution of higher education in the Commonwealth of Virginia and one of America's largest community colleges. NOVA enrolls more than 75,000 students at its six campuses in Alexandria, Annandale, Loudoun, Manassas, Springfield and Woodbridge, and through NOVA Online. For more information about NOVA and its programs or services, call 703-323-3000 or visit the College's Web site, www.nvcc.edu.

Share:



Questions? Call 703.323.3000

Email

Chat

Follow #NOVANighthawks



NOVA OFFICES | FACULTY EMAIL | FACULTY & STAFF DIRECTORY | JOBS | CLOSINGS & EMERGENCIES
VIRGINIA EDUCATION WIZARD | IT HELP DESK | NEWS | NOVA A-Z | POLICE

NOVA is part of the VIRGINIA COMMUNITY COLLEGE SYSTEM | Northern Virginia Community College © 2020 | [STATEMENT OF NON-DISCRIMINATION POLICIES, PRIVACY & FOIA](#)

WEBSITE CORRECTIONS - Help NOVA make our website better by sending us any corrections!

All opinions expressed by individuals purporting to be a current or former student, faculty, or staff member of this institution, on websites not affiliated with Northern Virginia Community College, social media channels, blogs or other online or traditional publications, are solely their opinions and do not necessarily reflect the opinions or values of Northern Virginia Community College, the Virginia Community College System, or the State Board for Community Colleges, which do not endorse and are not responsible or liable for any such content.