

HOW HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS CAN REDUCE THE FINANCIAL BURDEN OF COLLEGE

By Heather Ricker-Gilbert, D.Ed

Fewer than 40% of all students finish college in four years. In order to graduate in four years college students need to take at least 15 credits or five courses every term. This can be a demanding schedule, particularly if college students work or can't get the required courses needed to complete a major. One way to keep from paying tuition for too many years is to consider taking college level courses while young people are juniors and seniors in high school. College level courses also provide academically talented students a chance to excel and take challenging higher level courses prior to college.

There are several ways to achieve the goal of "stock piling" some college credit before formally matriculating at a four year college or university. These strategies include taking Advanced Placement courses, enrolling in the UCONN Early College Experience Program, participating in the College Career Pathways Program, registering for the Community College Partnership Program or attending summer sessions on university campuses which are designed for high school students.

Most high schools in the greater Hartford area offer a variety of Advanced Placement courses in particular subject areas such as A.P. United States History, A.P. Studio Art, A.P. Biology or AP English Literature. These are demanding college level courses taught in the high schools. Upon completion, if a student scores well on the nationally administered AP examination, she or he will be awarded college credit which is accepted by many colleges. A student I know, who attended George Washington University, had so many AP credits, which she earned during high school, that she graduated in three years. Thus, through acceleration, she saved a whole year of tuition and could start a year early on her graduate degree.

In addition to Advanced Placement courses, University of Connecticut courses, taught by specially certified teachers at 130 high schools in Connecticut are offered through The UCONN Early College Experience Program. While still in high school, students may choose from a wide variety of UCONN courses such as Introduction to Engineering or Plant Science and upon successfully completing the course earn university credits. Currently 5,400 Connecticut high school students participate in The UCONN Early College Experience Program.

High School students may also take college courses through The College Career Pathways Consortium. The Pathways Program is an agreement between the community colleges in the state and local high schools whereby students may take designated courses in their high schools and receive community college credit for these courses. For example, Bolton High School has articulated courses with Manchester Community College in Basic Baking and Pastry Arts, Electronic Publishing, and Introductory Physics. Some of the articulated courses offered by MCC and Glastonbury High School include: Introduction to Early Childhood Education, Human Biology and Financial Accounting. Students earning these community college credits, while still in high school, can use them toward earning a college degree either at a community college or another institution.

There is also the opportunity for high school juniors and seniors to participate in the “Partnership Program” at their local community college. Juniors and seniors with a B average who are recommended by their guidance counselors, can attend their local community college, tuition free. They can come to the campus of their nearest community college and take such classes as sociology, calculus, world history or chemistry and use these courses to fulfill general education college requirements.

Another way high school students can earn college credit before college, and also get a sense of what it is like to be in college, is to attend one of the numerous summer programs sponsored on college and university campuses. The long established Cornell Summer College allows high school students to take college level courses in three week and six week sessions. Students live on campus with other young people from around the country, attend classes and have special programs planned for them. It is a good way for a young person to determine if she really likes architecture or to find out what college level economics is all about. Likewise, for many years Harvard University has offered a Summer School Secondary School Program for qualified students to come to Cambridge and take college level courses for credit. For those students interested in the arts, The Savannah College of Art and Design offers a five week residential program for students between their junior and senior year to come to Savannah and earn up to 10 hours of college credit. The University of Virginia awards one hour of college credit to high students attending Presidential Classroom in Washington D. C. This well respected week-long program offers wonderful on-site sessions on such topics as “Law, Justice and Human Rights”, or “Intelligence and National Security” or “The Art and Architecture of the Nations’s Capital.”

Advanced Placement courses, UCONN’s Early College Experience Program, The College Career Pathways Program, and the Community College Partnership Program, along with special summer sessions designed for high school students, are viable options for motivated students to experience the academic rigor of college work. Earning college credits while still in high school is a good way to get started on your higher education and may just save you some time and money.

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