First in a series

High school students get a head start on college

Editor's note: The Collegian begins a series of articles today that will take a closer look at the different types of students who attend UTB/TSC. Today's article focuses on Dual Enrollment students.

By Isis Lopez
Staff Writer

A group of UTB/TSC students almost goes unnoticed. That is because they are not here. Dual Enrollment students take college courses in their own high school, saving time and money.

"I heard about the Dual Enrollment program through my high school counselor, Ms. Susan Cowen," said Christian Martell, a Hanna High School senior. "She was also the one who helped fill out my paperwork, and since she already knew I like to take the most advanced classes, I was the first one she told about the new economics Dual class."

Martell, who took a college trigonometry class while a sophomore at Hanna and plans to take an economics course as a senior, is among hundreds of students in the university's Dual Enrollment program.

"I decided to take the class because it would help me earn college credit, no matter what," Martell said. "I [also] wanted that extra weight for my GPA. Senior year is very important for me, and being given the chance to take a new and challenging class while also having the added bonus of a higher class ranking is very appealing."

Students who take Dual credits can transfer those credits to almost any public university, and the weight of the course score is much higher than a regular high school class, said Linda Fossen, associate vice president for Enrollment Planning.

"[I took Dual Enrollment classes] so I don't have to take them while I'm here at college," said Claudia Chavez, a freshman biology major. "It's less money. … If you can take a class for free, why pass up the chance?"

Earlier this year, Chavez graduated from Hanna, where she took U.S. History I and II, trigonometry and calculus Dual Enrollment classes.

"I come in with more knowledge," Chavez said. "I wanted to get ahead 'cause I know my major [requires] a lot of hours and if I hadn't taken those classes I would have had to be taking summer classes. So, it's an easy course for free college credit, why not take it?"

The Dual classes are more demanding than a regular high school class, Fossen said.

"It's the same curriculum [as in college], and the Dual Enrollment

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instructors who teach in the high school have to have the same qualifications as the faculty members who are teaching on campus," Fossen said. "[Dual students] need to recognize, and also their parents, that if they do poorly in their grades, that will be on their college transcript and will follow them forever."

Chavez hit the books.

"For the history [class] I spent like three hours [studying] before every test to memorize every sheet," Chavez said. "If you just sit there and pay attention, it's just as easy as any other class you take."

Maintaining a grade of C or better in their classes is the only thing Dual students have to worry about.

"I think [Dual Enrollment classes] are easier to take in high school than to take them here because here you have to worry about your other classes and about passing, and at the high school you just have to worry about passing that class," said Vanesa Treviño, a freshman nursing major.

Treviño said her Dual composition classes improved her grammar and public speaking.

She took Composition I and II at San Benito High School a year ago.

"The teachers were expecting college [work] while we still had all our high school classes to complete," Treviño said.

Martell agreed.

"In a sense all teachers are the same: They all give out tests and demand their homework to be your first priority, but Dual Enrollment teachers are different because they know that their students are eager to learn and, with that in mind, they set certain goals for the class to meet," Martell said. "At times they are also much more qualified and much more enthusiastic to teach every day."

Chris Salazar, a sophomore criminal justice major who took Composition I and II three years ago at San Benito High School, said he had to study for about three hours each day for his Dual classes.

Dual Enrollment has been around for almost six years, but it wasn't until a few years ago that it became popular among the school districts.

"Last year we had around 1,500 students; 600 students took Dual [Enrollment classes] in the fall and 900 in the spring," Fossen said.

The numbers are expected to increase. UTB/TSC wants more students to know about the benefits that the Dual Enrollment program has, and is sending fliers to parents and high school students.

"I think it's a good opportunity for those kids, especially [the ones] who maybe don't think that they're college material," said Sasha M. Parris, an academic adviser for the Dual Enrollment program. "It gives them a boost in self-esteem to let them know that they can do it when they succeed in one or two classes, and it lets their families know, too, because a lot of them don't have the family support down here."

Most school districts pay the $5 fee required for each Dual course, and textbooks are provided to the students.

The courses available for Dual are Composition I and II, United States to 1877 and since 1877, American Government I, art appreciation, introduction to theater, music theory, music fundamentals, Intermediate Spanish I and II, Hispanic Language and Culture I and II, introduction to psychology, sociology, criminal justice, Accounting I and II, computers, and health professions. Also offered are Crime in America, college algebra, pre-calculus, elementary statistics, Calculus I, macroeconomics, integrated software application, basic health profession skills, medical terminology, Medical Law and Ethics for Health Professions, and General Biology and Physics I and II.

The list might get longer, Fossen said.

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