Dual Credit Programs: 30 Years of Powerful Mentorship

A welcome source of strength and inspiration to a newcomer is someone who has, as U of M Professor Ken Leopold claims, “knowledge of the path ahead to validate and encourage their trajectory.” This is no less true in our dual credit programs.

In Post-Secondary Enrollment Options (PSEO), professor-student mentorships not only help students learn to excel academically but also add a special spark of connection to their instructors. A peer-to-peer mentoring program, organized by the PSEO Student Association, helps new PSEO students integrate into the fabric of the University and succeed both socially and academically.

College in the School (CIS) thrives because faculty coordinators and experienced teachers care about and take time to advise and guide teachers new to CIS. CIS staff often mentor other, less well-established concurrent enrollment programs through the process of applying for national accreditation.

Three decades have passed since 1985 when Governor Rudy Perpich signed dual-credit programs into law in Minnesota. How far those early dreams have reached! In the intervening years, the caring and talented individuals that are part of CIS and PSEO have touched the lives of thousands of young people.

Join us in celebrating 30 years of nurturing the kind of supportive relationships between and among students, U of M faculty, and high school teachers, that make exemplary teaching and learning possible.

Warm regards,

Scott Coenen, Director
Post-Secondary Enrollment Options
612-626-1666
scoenen@umn.edu

Julie Williams, Director
College in the Schools
612-626-8179
juliew@umn.edu

Excellence in a Partner High School

St. Anthony Village High School, with students participating in both PSEO and CIS, has been named a National Blue Ribbon School. This prestigious award honors schools for excellence in academics and outstanding progress in closing the achievement gap between white students and students of color in 2016.

CIS instructor Bill Blomstrom, who has taught U of M Spanish courses at the high school for over a decade, accompanied his principal, Wayne Terry, to a recognition ceremony in Washington, DC in November. “CIS is in lockstep with a high academic bar and equitable access for all students. It enriches our students’ lives because it gives them the confidence that they can handle a college-level class.”

“CIS is in lockstep with a high academic bar and equitable access for all students. It enriches our students’ lives because it gives them the confidence that they can handle a college-level class.”

—Bill Blomstrom, CIS instructor
CIS and PSEO Celebrate 30 Years!

The Minnesota Post-Secondary Enrollment Options (PSEO) Act, passed in 1985, provides for two distinct types of dual-credit opportunities for high school students. PSEO students take college courses on the college campus with post-secondary faculty, while concurrent enrollment (known as CIS at the U of M Twin Cities) students take college courses at the high school with high school instructors who are selected, prepared, and supported by the college department. Both are free to students: in PSEO, a percentage of high schools’ per-pupil state formula pays the post-secondary institution while schools contract directly with post-secondary institutions for concurrent enrollment. In both cases, credit transfers to most other post-secondary institutions.

Milestones for CIS

The priorities for CIS have always been to offer students access to rigorous U of M courses and to strengthen the ties between the University and Minnesota high schools. Today, faculty continue to provide oversight, high school teachers continue to participate in collegial academic communities, and program outcomes are still regularly evaluated.

1986–87: U of M recruits 10 high schools to offer a composition course. In the first year, 250 students participate. Thirty years later, all 10 schools are still participating: Highland Park, Harding, Johnson, Humboldt, Richfield, Burnsville, Apple Valley, Mounds View, North High (North St. Paul), and Irondale.

1989–90: A University evaluation of the program finds that “a significant strength of the program is the democratic and collegial manner in which University coordinating faculty work with high school instructors selected to teach University courses,” but recommends learning more about the impact on students.

2001–02: First comprehensive student survey finds that 92% of respondents who request credit recognition from colleges and universities other than the U of M are successful.

2003–04: An independent evaluation of the program by the University’s Center for Applied Research and Educational Improvement (CAREI) concludes that “the overall impact of CIS on teachers, students, and schools is clearly positive.”

2004–05: CIS earns national accreditation, demonstrating that the program meets rigorous standards related to instructor qualifications, curriculum, student assessment, and program evaluation.

2006–07: First state funding appropriated to partially reimburse high schools for costs incurred in offering concurrent enrollment courses.

2009–10: CIS launches the Entry Point Project (EPP) to improve access and the likelihood of success for students underrepresented in higher education.

2010–11: CIS hosts a national conference, “Building Our Quality, Broadening Our Reach,” showcasing the work of CIS faculty coordinators, high school teachers, and staff.

2011–12: CIS exceeds 10,000 student registrations.

2015–16: Twenty-two U of M departments partner with CIS to offer 41 courses at 139 high schools. More than 400 teachers and 9,000 students participate.

PSEO: Then and Now

On the other side of the dual-credit coin, PSEO continues to attract highly qualified high school students to the Twin Cities campus to attend classes. Today, almost half of PSEO students attend full-time, taking 12 or more credits, and pursue STEM course work.

“There was no challenge in high school art classes and I wanted to continue art study. I like the extra responsibility expected of students in college classes.”

—17-year-old PSEO student, 1986

1970s: High school students enroll, on their own, in campus classes offered in the evening.

1982: Darryl Sedio, Extension counselor who eventually becomes the first PSEO director, begins advising these students, helping them find the classes they need and in which they can be successful.

1985–86: Advanced High School Student Services office is created to handle the influx of students and help insure they are college-ready. They admit 341 students from the top 20% of their class as full-time students. Students enroll in 1,340 courses and earn 3,698 semester credits. The aggregate GPA for all PSEO students in the entire U of M system that year is 3.07.

2014: The office name is changed to Post-Secondary Enrollment Options to help students more easily recognize the program and students served.

2015–16: The maximum enrollment of 600 students generates a highly competitive admissions program. Students, most of whom are in the top 5–10% of their class with an average (unweighted) high school GPA of 3.93, earn 12,811 semester credits in 3,698 courses. For the 2016–17 application cycle, 550 students are admitted from 1,281 completed applications. The average GPA for PSEO students on the Twin Cities campus is 3.45.
Program Overview

College in the Schools (CIS) at the University of Minnesota–Twin Cities is a nationally accredited concurrent enrollment program serving high school students, teachers, and schools. Students experience for themselves the rigor and pace of challenging University course work in their familiar high school setting; teachers are re-energized when they join the University academic community and participate in strong, continuous professional development; and the University deepens connections with high schools.

2015–16 program statistics

- Partnering high schools: 139
- Participating students: 9,200
- Course registrations: 14,008
- Registrations from students of color: 24%
- Participating teachers: 432
- College credits earned: 55,666

2015–16 courses

- English and Communications Studies – 4 courses
- Social Sciences – 8 courses
- Mathematics – 3 courses
- World and Classical Languages – 21 courses
- Science – 5 courses

Funding

Participating schools or districts pay a fee of $145 per student per registration, a significant reduction from resident undergraduate tuition at the U of M. This fee has not been increased since 2009–2010. State funding is available to high schools to partially offset the costs of offering high-quality concurrent enrollment courses.

Contact information

For complete program information, visit our website at cce.umn.edu/cis or contact Julie Williams, Director of College in the Schools, at juliew@umn.edu.

Susan McMillen Villar, former U of M Teaching Specialist and CIS Faculty Coordinator, Spanish.

As a faculty coordinator, I mentored CIS instructors when I visited them in their classrooms. I took notes, wrote a report, and shared it with the instructor; then the teacher and I compared my evaluation with how she or he thought the lesson went. Sometimes, these visits happened via video—a teacher videoed the lesson in progress and sent it to me, a process that allowed the instructor to also observe her or his teaching.

Mentoring and supportive collaboration routinely occur during CIS workshops. For instance, in our meetings, CIS teachers examine challenging teaching issues—e.g., how to teach the past subjunctive in a real language context—and after discussion and sharing their own approaches, exciting ideas emerge. It is not uncommon for the high school teachers’ ideas to be shared with the many University instructors who teach the same course with the same materials on campus. There are no one-way streets in CIS!

Kay Edberg, Spanish Teacher, Mora High School.

We, as a cohort, mentor each other. Countless times I’ve seen colleagues step in to help a new CIS teacher, answering questions and sharing activities and materials they’ve used in their own classes to ensure that the new teacher is successful. Mentoring happens across content areas as well. Whenever my colleague, who teaches German, returns from a CIS workshop, she shares the great ideas that inspired her that day. When I attend a workshop, I do the same. To me, this is what mentoring is about—collaboration, support, and inspiration.

Caroline Little, French Teacher, Saint Thomas Academy.

I am a department of one at my school. I have no other French teachers with whom to share ideas, collaborate, or talk with about my French classroom. That isolation disappeared when I was accepted into CIS. I remember when Associate Professor [and CIS Faculty Coordinator] Betsy Kerr offered me great advice about teaching the past tense after observing my classroom, but then—to my amazement—she even emailed me at 10:30 that night when more ideas sprang into her mind! I have been consistently mentored by other teachers and staff in the CIS cohort as well. When I won the American Association of Teachers of French (AATF) National French Teacher of the Year award in 2015, I knew I owed a huge debt to my CIS colleagues who had pushed me to be my best!
Kiffin Deihl, Public Speaking Teacher, New Prague High School. Our CIS cohort is one big mentoring family. Anytime I may be struggling with an idea, I simply reach out to a member of my cohort. Everyone has been really helpful.

Jena Dennis, College Algebra through Modeling Teacher, Pine City High School. CIS mentoring has had a huge impact on my teaching of math. Not only do I use the discovery and hands-on approach I’ve learned from Associate Professor [and CIS Faculty Coordinator] Sue Staats, but I also use this approach in the three other levels of high school math I teach. I apply them to all my classes. Conversations with my CIS colleagues—via email and telephone calls and CIS workshops—have sparked ideas for projects or teaching techniques that I would not have thought of on my own.

Rob Luke, Writing Studio Teacher, Delano High School. The mentoring from Teaching Specialist [and CIS Faculty Coordinator] Jan De Noble has greatly enhanced my teaching. Her leadership and the multicultural curriculum she shared with us motivated me to explore broadening the literature selections I taught in my predominantly white school. I was further inspired to write a paper for my graduate degree program on multicultural literature. With new knowledge and energy and with the insights shared by other CIS teachers working in more diverse schools, I have developed as a student, teacher, and human being. Consequently, I can better help students see that the world is much broader than the boundaries of our outer-ring school district.

Linda Albertson, French Teacher, Eagan High School. Mentoring—the sharing of professional or personal experiences to help others succeed—is the underpinning of the CIS French cohort. When we say that CIS workshops are the best staff development we’ve ever had, we are saying that the sharing among high school and University faculties lifts up French teaching and learning in high schools throughout the state. My CIS colleagues challenge me and push me, support and celebrate me in a way that no other professional group can.

CIS alums say…

I was able to start in college courses I actually wanted to take [because] my courses through CIS exempted me from general education classes.

90% of students who requested credit recognition from colleges and universities other than the U of M were successful at having some or all of their U of M credits earned through CIS recognized.*

College in the Schools was the best idea ever. It helped me get credit for college while still getting the high school experience.

95% rated their overall experience with College in the Schools as excellent or good.*

[My CIS teacher] is an amazing teacher...! I was very well prepared for microeconomics at Johns Hopkins after taking [his] class!

88% felt that as a result of taking U of M courses through CIS they were better prepared academically for college.*

It was great! I would recommend it in a heartbeat to anyone!

98% stated that they would recommend CIS to current high school students.*

*From results of a survey of CIS alums who graduated from high school in 2015. For complete survey results, visit the CIS website at cce.umn.edu/cis.
Post-Secondary Enrollment Options

Program Overview

Post-Secondary Enrollment Options at the University of Minnesota–Twin Cities allows advanced high school students to explore the rigor of college coursework as well as, in most cases, the unique atmosphere of a college classroom and campus while they are still living at home and making their decisions about what to do after high school. The program allows students to register part time, enabling them to continue participating in high school classes, or full time, providing the opportunity for immersion into the college setting. Perhaps because of their experience in the PSEO Program, many students make the decision to remain at the University of Minnesota–Twin Cities after high school graduation.

2015–16 program statistics

- Served students from over 131 Minnesota public and private high schools.
- 640 individual students served through on-campus and distance learning, earning 12,811 U of M credits through PSEO. The average number of credits per student was 19 for the academic year.
- Over 1,200 prospective students submitted PSEO applications for 500 available on-campus spots.
- Served an ethnically diverse student population, with 34% of the PSEO population self-reporting as students of color (4% did not report ethnicity).
- 58% of the participants were female, and 69% were in their senior year in high school.
- The average 2015–16 academic year U of M GPA for PSEO students on the Twin Cities campus was 3.45.

Courses

PSEO students can take almost any course a freshman student can take, but some of the most popular courses include ECON 1101 (Principles of Microeconomics), WRIT 1301 (University Writing), MATH 1271 (Calculus I), POL 1001 (American Government and Politics), MATH 1272 (Calculus II), PSY 1001 (Introduction to Psychology), MATH 1151 (Precalculus II), and MATH 2263 (Multivariable Calculus).

Funding

Tuition and textbook costs for students participating in PSEO are paid for by the Minnesota Department of Education (MDE). MDE reimburses the post-secondary institution at a per-credit rate that is determined annually by the state legislature.

Contact information

For complete program information please visit our website at cce.umn.edu/pseo or call 612-626-1666.

Jens Damgaard, PSEO Student. When I first met Professor Briggs, I knew I had met someone who would make me the best student I could be. I had scheduled my first meeting with her because I was concerned about my performance on the first two exams. When I approached her office in Elliott Hall, she greeted me with a warm smile and, before jumping into a discussion about my academic performance, she inquired—with genuine interest—about my general well-being. I quickly became so comfortable that I felt I could talk to her about everything, from how much of the course material I had studied to how late I had studied it!

When we turned our focus to my work in the class, she began by asking me how I felt I could improve. I felt that this induced self-reflection was much more fruitful than had she simply criticized my study habits. After I responded, she noted that I had not completed all of the exercises in a timely, effective manner and suggested that I alter this pattern. I met with her again after the next exam and prior to the final, each time offering new suggestions and giving her time generously.

From Professor Briggs, I learned exactly how a college student needs to manage time. She was confident that if I changed how I studied for the psychology exams, I would see an improvement. Indeed, while I may have started the semester with a C-, I ended it with an A-.

What I value most from our time together were the discussions on everything, from food to family to religion and even to politics. The conversations were great, and while we didn't see eye-to-eye on a few subjects, I learned that friendly disagreement can always be had in good company.

Theresa Leibig, PSEO Student. On the first day of Chemistry 1061, Professor Leopold announced his office hours and invited people to come see him, even just to say hello. The next week, I went to his office hours, and, like all professors, he answered my question, but he also asked what my major was and how I was enjoying the University. I started going to office hours every week, and we had interesting conversations about life and school. I read two of Professor Leopold's academic papers, and he walked me through the concepts and jargon I needed to know in order to understand them. His attention and appreciation for my questions has helped give me the confidence to start seeking undergraduate research positions.
Kathleen Briggs, U of M Education Program Specialist, Psychology. Mentoring can help students clarify goals and acquire the knowledge, skills, and resources to achieve them. I try to understand the student and support his or her development as I can. Exactly what I do varies from student to student.

I think the most important thing I did for Jens was explain what he needed to do to excel in Introduction to Psychology (PSY 1001). He had been able to do well in high school without much effort, but needed to pick up his game to succeed at college. Once he understood what he needed to do, he did excel. Jens had a particular interest in one area of psychology, and we discussed classes that he could take to deepen his knowledge in that area. Months after class was over, I let him know about a related research opportunity that I had heard about.

As part of mentoring students I also write letters of recommendation, provide feedback and reassurance, have regular luncheons, introduce individuals to others who might be able to help them, and hire students to work as undergraduate peers.

One of the things I love about my job is working with young students. I find the PSEO students to be particularly delightful. As high school students, they have many challenges and choices ahead of them—choices and challenges that are behind for the matriculated University students—and it is marvelous to watch them rise to the occasion.

Ken Leopold, U of M Professor, Chemistry. I think mentoring is best when you’re not thinking about it. If you say to yourself, “I’m the experienced one and this is part of my job description,” it feels artificial. This is not to say that good advisers don’t have important roles to play. They certainly do. But mentoring strikes me as a different type of relationship.

Theresa and I started talking about my introductory chemistry course, because she was genuinely interested in the subject—always seeking more information and new ways to put it together. But eventually, we ended up talking about my research, her summer research, her classes and family, her college visits, etc. I think we both enjoyed these conversations very much, but it never occurred to me that I was “mentoring” in any way. It was just conversation between people with similar interests and like mindsets.

Students need at least one individual with knowledge of the path ahead to validate and encourage their trajectory; sometimes this dynamic is most meaningful when it develops organically. The student benefits, of course, but so does the mentor, because interacting with bright and enthusiastic students is what makes teaching a special privilege. In my job, you don’t necessarily see the long term effects of everything you do, so, if I’ve been helpful, that’s great.
"Thank you to all the educators in our partner high schools and across campus who teach, and take the time to mentor their students and help guide them to academic success."

—Dr. Mary L. Nichols
Dean, College of Continuing Education