

## Research and Rationale for the Dual Degree Program Approach

Our literature review revealed that the Dual Degree Program is **an innovative model** for university-community college partnerships to enhance degree completion. Though hundreds of such partnerships exist, none has all of the features of the Dual Degree Program. Most are based on traditional 2+2 agreements which, while essential, do not provide the type of student support necessary to enhance transfer. Following is the rationale for the unique features of the DDP.

### Why does the DDP require the completion of the associate degree?

If universities are to be successful in building meaningful partnerships with their community college colleagues, they need to affirm the importance of the associate degree pathway to the baccalaureate.

- Wellman's report (2002) cites research which indicates that students who complete their associate degree prior to transfer are more likely to complete their bachelor's degrees, and they do so in a shorter period of time. In her study, "only about a third of these 2/4 transfer students earned the associate degree prior to transfer; the rest transferred without earning a degree or credential. The bachelor's degree attainment rate was higher for those who had obtained an associate degree prior to transfer: 43% within five years, compared with 17% for those who transferred without the credential."
- Completion of the associate degree ensures that students are pursuing a *coherent plan of study*, not just accumulating credits. Doyle's research (2006) concluded that course-taking patterns at the community college have a huge impact on bachelor's degree completion: 82% of students who had all of their credits accepted in transfer graduated within 6 years, whereas only 42% of students who had only some of their credits accepted in transfer graduated within 6 years.
- The completion of the associate degree is an important milestone. Rosenbaum and Deil-Amen's work (2003; 2006) emphasizes the psychological and practical benefits, especially to first generation students, of obtaining short-term goals en route to long-term objectives.

### Most community college students attend part-time, yet the DDP requires students to enroll full-time. Why is full-time enrollment a requirement?

- Research clearly demonstrates a positive correlation between full-time enrollment and associate and bachelor's degree completion. Complete College America's recent report (2011), entitled *Time is the Enemy*, concludes that time is the enemy of college completion and notes that "these historic data have revealed a common thread—and an animating principle to guide our work to boost college graduation: The longer it takes, the more life gets in the way of success."

### Students are generally not very responsive to these types of research-based arguments. How does the Dual Degree Program provide meaningful academic and financial incentives and support for students to enroll full-time and complete their associate degree?

- DDP students who complete their associate degree are guaranteed admission to GSU.
- GSU tuition is frozen for DDP students in their first semester of enrollment at the community college. Students are given 5 semesters to complete their associate degree, and their tuition at GSU is frozen at the rate it was in the first semester of enrollment at the community college for four semesters after they transfer to GSU.
- DDP students are eligible to compete for GSU Promise Scholarships which will be available for low income students every year and which will cover all tuition, fees, and books that are not covered by Pell or MAP (Illinois-based financial aid). This will enable students to graduate debt free. A report from The Pell Institute for the Study of Opportunity in Higher Education (May 2011) provides excellent support for programs, like the GSU Promise Scholarship, which focus on low income students. The conclusion of this report is that "income-based inequality in educational attainment is a central obstacle to achieving the 2020 goal and that decreasing income-based attainment gaps must become a central focus of federal education policy." The report points out that if the overall graduation rate in the US were that of the students in the bottom half of the income distribution, the US would rank nearly last, but if the overall graduation rate were for students in the top half of income, the US would be in

first place! The conclusion: “reducing the income-based gap in bachelor’s degree attainment will, in time, enable the US to become the nation with the largest share of graduates.”

- DDP Honors Scholarships will also be available for students who do not meet the Pell eligibility requirements but who still demonstrate need and academic promise.

**The DDP provides structured, intentional, intersegmental advising and peer mentoring to students, beginning in their first year of enrollment at the community college, to ensure they develop and implement a four-year plan to complete their associate *and* bachelor’s degrees. DDP students are required to consult with their DDP Transfer Specialist every semester. Those who refuse to comply with this requirement will not be retained in the program. Why is this requirement so strict?**

- Kay McClenney has repeatedly said that community college students ‘don’t do optional.’ If we know that something is important to student success, it is important for us to require students to do it. And we know that good advising is critical to student success. Rosenbaum et.al. (2006) emphasized that first generation community college students lack college know-how and support systems, yet they are expected to navigate two college and university bureaucracies (admissions, financial aid, articulation) with little support or assistance.
- Davis Jenkins’ recent study (2011) focuses on the importance of students entering a program of study early in their enrollment at the community college. He concludes that “students who do not enter a program of study within a year of enrollment are far less likely to ever enter a program and therefore less likely to complete and earn a credential.”
- The Complete College America report concludes that colleges should “require formal, on-time completion plans for every student, updated annually.”
- The *College Completion Tool Kit* (2011) notes that the “lack of a coherent, navigable, and transparent transfer process both increases the cost and time needed to earn a degree and diminishes the likelihood of completion.”
- Scott-Clayton’s recently published work (2011; part of the Community College Research Center’s project) reaffirms the importance of providing structured coursework and advising for community college students. She suggests that “for many students at community colleges, finding a path to degree completion is the equivalent of navigating a shapeless river on a dark night.” Scott-Clayton concludes that “community college students will be more likely to persist and succeed in programs that are tightly and consciously structured, with relatively little room for individuals to unintentionally deviate from paths toward completion, and with limited bureaucratic obstacles for students to circumnavigate.”
- The 800-1 student/advisor ratio in most community colleges leaves little time or resources for transfer advising. For that reason, DDP Transfer Specialists\* and Peer Mentors\* are collaborating with their community college colleagues to enhance advising for both associate degree completion and successful transfer.
- The recent College Board report (2011), *Improving Student Transfer from Community Colleges to Four-Year Institutions—The Perspective of Leaders from Baccalaureate-Granting Institutions*, notes the importance of creating a “transfer going” culture at community colleges and a “transfer-receptive culture” at four-year institutions. The DDP fosters the transformative culture that is included in the College Board recommendations.

## THE KRESGE FOUNDATION

\*Generous funding from the Kresge Foundation has enabled us to enhance the Dual Degree Program by adding Transfer Specialists, who will spend two days per week on site at the partner community colleges, and a Peer Mentorship Program that will provide DDP students with peer mentors, both from the community college and from GSU.

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