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2 Comments

### More Valley students opting for dual enrollment



Desert Vista High School graduate Adrien Nichols walks at her ceremony in Ahwatukee Foothills on Thursday. Nichols earned both her diploma and her associate degree by taking dual-enrollment classes through Rio Salado Community College.

Patrick Breen/The Republic

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By Kerry Fehr  
The Republic | azcentral.com  
Mon May 27, 2013 10:16 PM

A growing number of students are collecting more than their high-school diplomas when they cross the graduation stage this month.

Many have earned college credits, too. Adrien Nichols, a recent Desert Vista High graduate, earned enough for a community-college degree.

When the 17-year-old graduated in Ahwatukee Foothills on Thursday, she also earned an associate degree from Rio Salado Community College.

"It was actually pretty easy," Nichols said. "I took a few extra hours my senior year. ... It was hard sometimes but I got it done."

Nichols, who also works as a lifeguard at a city pool, has been accepted to Arizona State University, where she plans to study print journalism at the Walter Cronkite School of Journalism and Mass Communication.

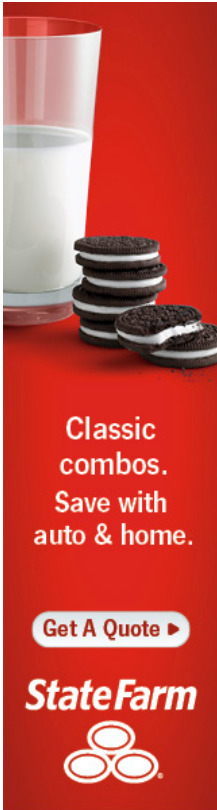
Students pay for dual-enrollment courses, but the cost is much less than credit-hour pricing at a state university. Classes through the Maricopa Community Colleges system is a relative bargain at \$76 per credit hour compared with \$135 to \$945 at ASU.

Community-college district officials have not yet compiled data for the current academic year, but in 2011-12, there were 34,022 dual

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enrollments in the district, up from 32,637 in 2010-11 and 29,972 in 2009-2010.

Rio Salado, which offers classes online, has the largest dual-enrollment program of any of the 10 colleges in the system. In 2011-12, there were 17,134 enrollments, followed by 7,252 at Chandler-Gilbert Community College and 2,794 at Glendale Community College.

Teresa Leyba Ruiz, interim director for dual enrollment, said the practice of students enrolling in college courses while earning high-school credits has been growing over the past decade.

"Not only that, but our course (offerings) bank is growing," she said.

The college district offers 396 courses in subjects as diverse as computer programming, Arabic, English, math and biology.

Leyba Ruiz said dual-credit courses serve college-bound students well.

Those who take them "have a very high success rate and a higher probability of earning a four-year degree," she said.

Community colleges work with public, private and charter high schools to develop the curricula. Instructors must have at least a master's degree and requisite number of course hours in the area in which they teach.

For example, students who take Biology 160 Anatomy and Physiology for dual credit at a high school get the same experience as if they took the class at the community college.

"The textbook and syllabus must be the same quality," Leyba Ruiz said.

Dual-enrollment growth is especially beneficial to students from low socioeconomic status, according to the journal *Educational Evaluation and Policy Analysis*.

"Dual enrollment provides students with an inexpensive way for them to take college courses and earn college credits while in high school," researcher Brian P. An of the University of Iowa wrote. "Research further shows that low-SES (socioeconomic status) students may benefit more from dual enrollment than high-SES students."

The popularity of dual enrollment addresses two problems: poor academic preparation among many college entrants and low graduation rates, An concluded.

Students in the Chandler Unified School District are earning more college credits though dual enrollment than ever. This academic year, students earned 13,375 credit hours, up from 11,161 in 2012 and 7,768 in 2011, according to Matt Strom, the district's director of research and accountability.

That includes 5,198 hours accumulated in science, technology, engineering and math courses. An additional 3,232 hours were accumulated in languages including Spanish, German, French, Chinese and American Sign Language.

And the number of dual credits earned by Chandler Unified students is expected to grow. The district is teaming with Embry-Riddle Aeronautical University to allow high-school students to take courses for college credit starting in the fall.

In Tempe Union High School District, 2,376 students are in dual-enrollment classes through Rio Salado, spokeswoman Linda Littell said.

Although 18 Tempe Union students could have graduated with an associate degree as well as a high-school diploma this month, most are applying their college credits earned in high school toward a bachelor's degree at a four-year institution.

High-school senior Kendra Gossel, among those in Mesa Public Schools earning credit for college coursework, took a college-level chemistry class as a sophomore for which she received dual credit. This year, she took dual-enrollment English 101 and English 102.

"Dual-enrollment classes are much harder than even AP (advanced-placement) classes," Gossel said. "They are fast-paced and they expect a lot of you."

Gossel, an 18-year-old Mesa resident, plans to major in English at the University of Arizona in the fall and said she likes the challenge of college-level classes. She noted that she was treated like a college student and given freedom to decide which topics to write about in class.

At Gilbert Public Schools, Angelo Skyhawk Wyaco is graduating this month from Mesquite High with a high-school diploma and an associate degree in general studies from Chandler-Gilbert Community College.

"It was a little bit hard, but once I got into the flow of it, it became easier," said Angelo, who entered the dual-enrollment program in the fall of his junior year. "Some nights, I had to stay up late and work on project, sometimes like 2 or 3 a.m."

This fall, Angelo plans to work toward a bachelor's degree in business at Northern Arizona University with the goal of working in international business.

Angelo, president of Mesquite's Japanese Club, studied the language all four years in high school. This summer, he'll vacation in Japan.

Republic reporters Cathryn Creno and Luci Scott contributed to this article.



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