

High school students taste college-level work

written by Aprille Hanson Spivey |



For a real-world taste of college courses within the confines of a high school, many students opt for concurrent courses.

All Catholic high schools in Arkansas offer general education concurrent courses that count toward college credit. The classes are taught by high school teachers that hold a master's degree with 18 or more hours in the subject they're teaching and are taught within the student's normal high school schedule.

"The idea is that the students experience a college class here on the high school campus," said Teri Breeding, academic dean and counselor at St. Joseph High School in Conway. "... They want to make sure students are experiencing the college environment — the rigor, amount of course work, independent responsibility."

Depending on the college offering concurrent classes, student eligibility varies, from making a certain score on the ACT or taking a test similar to the ACT to applying to the college itself and having a certain GPA. Classes can be mixed with students not earning college credit, depending on interest in the concurrent course and college policy.

Courses are generally transferrable between Arkansas public colleges and can be checked on the Arkansas Course Transfer System (ACTS) at the Arkansas Department of Higher Education, at acts.adhe.edu. Students who want to attend a college out of state must check with a particular school to see if credits will transfer. Besides the credits, high school students receive a student ID that offers various on-campus perks, from using the college library and

athletic center to free or reduced prices for college games.

The University of Central Arkansas in Conway sponsors classes for St. Joseph in Conway and Catholic High School in Little Rock.

Breeding said the course syllabus and curriculum must be approved by UCA. For the 2017-2018 school year, Breeding said there are about 19 students so far signed up for World History I and II, three credit hours each, and about 17 in Algebra/Trigonometry, with five total credit hours. UCA charges students \$10 per credit hour.

"They actually earn a grade. They're starting their college GPA," Breeding said.

Catholic High School expanded their concurrent course offerings as more teachers received their master's degrees. Classes are Introduction to Fiction, College Physics, Calculus, Trigonometry, Algebra/Trigonometry and Statistics.

"We find the partnership with UCA to be pretty satisfying," said Catholic High assistant principal Matt Dempsey. "I really think we're going to have more and more kids looking at UCA, because they'll graduate here with 10, 15, 18 hours of college credit."

While the cost savings are a plus, which can sometimes be "\$10 a credit hour versus \$400" after high school, Dempsey said students are also more willing to go deeper into the material.

"The teacher is able to sort of use it as leverage in motivating the students and getting through material and presenting more complex material," when they know a college credit is at stake, he said.

However, Dempsey said some students shy away from the classes because they may not transfer to a school out of state or they're afraid of making a lower grade than an "A" to start off their college GPA.

Fred Baker, director of college counseling at Catholic High, who previously served as associate vice president for enrollment and director of admission at Hendrix College in Conway, said, "Students want to challenge themselves to the highest level possible" and completing a concurrent course achieves that goal. It also looks positive on a college or scholarship application, he added.

Mount St. Mary Academy in Little Rock offers 32 hours of credit, nine classes total including English, math, science and theater appreciation. The school partners with the University of Arkansas at Little Rock. Most high schools offer the concurrent courses to just juniors and seniors, but MSM includes sophomores. About 76 students out of 510 at the school are signed up this year for a college course, which charges \$50 per course.

"They get to the meat of what they really want to learn about in college. The girls that are in the concurrent program I want to say are a little more familiar with the college process," said Sara Jones, MSM assistant principal.

Subiaco Academy began offering concurrent classes last year and Andrea Cooper, the academy's college counselor who does everything from testing to college and career advising, said the student feedback has been positive. The school partners with Arkansas Tech University in Russellville offering Composition I and II and U.S. History I and II. Concurrent

courses are free through the university.

“They can rest assured the effort they’re putting in now will be invested in something,” Cooper said.

With the University of Arkansas Community College at Morrilton just a stone’s throw away from Sacred Heart High School, students take college courses on campus during their school day, including Composition I and II, algebra, history and psychology. Counselor Jennifer Roscoe said classes can sometimes include college freshman, but generally during the school year, Catholic school students are in a concurrent class with public high school students. Of the school’s 12 seniors, six so far have signed up for concurrent classes.