

CASE STUDY: STUDENTS, PARENTS, EDUCATOR  
PERSPECTIVES ON THE EARLY  
START EXPERIENCE

by

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of

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## ABSTRACT

Early start programs were initially developed to provide high school students with a jump start on college credit. In order to determine the effectiveness and transferability of early start programs, post-secondary education administrators and high school counselors need to have an in-depth understanding of students' early start experience. This qualitative case study examined the early start experience from the viewpoint of 20 college students who previously participated in an early start program such as Advanced Placement or dual credit while in high school; the students interviewed attended the same four-year research university. With the students' consent, eight mothers of the former early start participants were interviewed to gain an understanding of their view of the early start experience. In addition, a director of admissions at a four-year research university was interviewed to provide insight on the early start experience from a post-secondary education perspective. Document analysis of student academic transcripts evaluated the transferability of early start courses to a four-year research university. This research discovered that students participated in early start because they want to be challenged while in high school. The students took it upon themselves to initiate the early start conversation with their parents. Contrary to what has been reported in the literature, students in this study felt their high school teachers played more of a role in the early start experience than their high school counselor. The analysis of the academic transcripts revealed that early start courses fulfilled general education and elective credits at this one institution. The in-depth exploration of the early start experience provided insight on how secondary education and post-secondary education may work together to continue providing an early college experience for high school students.

## INTRODUCTION

### Introducing the Early Start Experience

A jump start on college sounds like an innovative idea for those high school students who are prepared to take college level work. Early start programs, for example Advanced Placement (AP) and dual credit courses, are programs designed to provide high school students with the opportunity to earn college credit while still in high school. These programs also provide ways to strengthen the education pipeline between K-12 and post-secondary education.

Research has demonstrated the education pipeline in the United States does not always facilitate a seamless transition for students from high school into post-secondary education. This study specifically explores the transition for former early start participants to a four-year research university. The Advisory Committee on Student Financial Assistance (2006) highlights that, “despite successful efforts to increase access and persistence through improved academic preparation, heightened aspirations and expectations, and greater simplicity in the financial aid system, losses of bachelor’s degrees appear to be increasing” (p.41). These losses are particularly prevalent for minority, low income and first-generation students. For example, the predicted total losses of low-income students from the pipeline in a 2004 cohort of graduating high school students was likely to be 1.011 million out of a total of 1.266 million (Advisory Committee, 2006).

Early start programs are designed to strengthen the educational pipeline and ease the transitions that students face when going from one education level to the next. Early start programs provide students with college level work so that they may potentially fulfill some of their college graduation requirements and it also provides students with pre-college experience so they may become familiar with the rigor of college level work and processes. "Dual enrollment is a mechanism for aligning high school and post-secondary education, not just a way to move bored or advanced students out of high school" (Hoffman, 2005, p.15). In addition, early start programs, specifically AP and dual credit programs, provide benefits to students and institutions on the post-secondary side as well. Fincher-Ford (1997) explains that dual credit program objectives, which have remained constant, are to "smooth the transition from high school to college, shorten the time needed to earn an undergraduate degree, and avoid unnecessary duplication of curricula" (p. 5).

The first Advanced Placement test was administered in 1956. Currently, "more than half of the nation's public high schools (58%) offer some type of AP program. These high schools enroll 85% of the nation's students" (Handwerk, Tognatta, Coley, & Gitomer, 2008, p. 15). Advanced Placement courses are taught in the high school and at the end of the course, students may choose to pay a test fee and take the AP test. Students score between 1 and 5 on the test. Individual post-secondary education institutions then determine the minimum scores that students need to receive to earn college credit; the average minimum score is typically a 3. According to Scott, Tolson, and Lee (2010), "Legislators, policy makers and supporters of education reform see AP

programs as an opportunity to promote high academic standards for all high school students" (p. 27).

The first dual credit partnership program was created in the 1970's. Dual credit programs are designed for students to receive both college and high school credit for the same class. Depending on the dual credit program, some courses are taught at the high school through an online university. By the 2002 academic school year, 71% of public high schools offered dual credit courses (Waits, Setzer, & Lewis, 2005). In 2009, a report in the National Center for Education Statistics highlighted that of the high schools which offer dual credit, "61% indicated that they offered courses for dual credit taught on a high school campus, 65% offered courses for dual credit taught on the campus of a post-secondary institution, and 25% offered courses for dual credit taught through distance education" (Bhatt & Best, 2009, p.2). In examining the college side of the dual credit partnership, Kleiner and Lewis (2005) report that "98% of public 2-year institutions had high school students taking courses for college credit during the 2002–03 12-month academic year, compared to 77% of public 4-year institutions, 40% of private 4-year institutions, and 17% of private 2-year institutions" (p. 5). There are a number of challenges that make dual credit programs difficult to establish and maintain. One issue that institutions of post-secondary education face deals with enrollment and who receives credit for the dually enrolled students; this is an issue that impacts the departmental budget. In addition, there is an issue regarding the quality of the dual credit course. Even though the students are still in high school, the dual credit course needs to meet college

standards to receive the college credit; so who is responsible in overseeing the quality of and rigor of the course?

The growth in how many schools offer AP and dual credit opportunities is evident, but how do these programs impact participants? Research on the impact of early start programs on student outcomes focusing on issues such as earning credit, student performance, and persistence (Andrews, 2004; Welsh, Brake, & Choi, 2005; Mechur Karp & Hughes, 2008) is ongoing. Due to the lack of research, it is unclear to what extent students are actually able to transfer their credits that they earned while participating in an early start program to a college or university. Hughes, Mechur Karp, Fermin, and Bailey (2005) suggested in their report that future research needs to be conducted to determine if students who are participating in early start programs are earning “college credit and if so, are they able to apply it toward a college degree” (p. 54).

### Problem and Purpose

Early start programs were initially developed to provide high school students with a jump start on college credit. In order to determine the effectiveness and transferability of early start programs, post-secondary education administrators, secondary education educators, students, and parents need to have an in-depth understanding of the students’ early start experience. The purpose of this collective case study was to provide an in-depth understanding of the early start experience for students; specifically looking at the early start experience from the students’ point of view, the parents’ point of view, and the post-secondary education point of view. The early start experience refers to the students

participation in an Advanced Placement program, dual credit program, or both an Advanced Placement and a dual credit program while the student was in high school.

### Research Questions

1. How do students view the early start experience?
  - a. What were their expectations?
  - b. What actually happened?
2. How do students experience the process of transferring early start credits to a post-secondary education institution?
3. How do parents view the early start experience?
  - a. What were their expectations?
  - b. What actually happened?
4. What is the role of high school counselors in the early start experience?
5. How transferable are early start courses to a four-year research university?
  - a. If early start courses are transferring to a four-year research university, are those credits fulfilling a core requirement, major requirement, or an elective requirement?

### Introduction to the Literature and Conceptual Framework

The first step in being able to understand the early start experience is to first study the research that has already been conducted. Chapter 2 provides an extensive literature review that explores the history of early start programs. In addition, it describes the education pipeline and the relationship between secondary education and post-secondary

education. In order to gain an understanding of the impact of early start programs on the education pipeline for students, we need to first understand the relationship between the two educational levels. There needs to be an understanding of how access to education impacts early start programs. Socio-economic factors and ethnicity has previously played a role in the accessibility of education. The literature review explores the accessibility of education and the role that early start programs play in increasing access for students.

It is essential to understand who plays a role in students' decisions to attend college and create a college going culture. Research has reported the roles that parents, high school guidance counselors, and post-secondary education administrators play in creating a college going culture; these roles all have an impact on the early start experience and are explored in the literature review. After discussing the history of early start, exploring the education system, and defining various constituent roles the literature review takes a look at the early start credit transfer process and outcomes for early start participants. Though this study provides additional insight in the transfer process it is beneficial to provide a background of what research has already demonstrated and suggested what practitioners and educators still need to know.

This qualitative case study is built on a foundation of gaps in the literature and a conceptual framework bounded by the guidance framework in the mentoring theory (Tierney, Corwin, & Colyar, 2005) and the Person-Environment Interaction Model (Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005). I, the researcher, developed the Conceptual Model presented in this study. The model was created based on the literature and is presented in Chapter 2. It is revisited and updated in Chapter 5 with information discovered from this

specific study. The Conceptual Model demonstrates the relationship between students and their constituents, such as high school counselors and parents. Based on the guidance framework, it supports that high school counselors provide students with the cultural and social capital to be introduced to a college going culture and participate in an early start program. The model also explains that the Person-Environment Interaction Model (Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005) plays a pivotal role in the early start participants' decision to attend college after graduation. Based on this interaction model, it exhibits the interaction between the institution and the early start participant will dictate the outcome of the experience.

### Methods

This research was designed to fill a gap in the literature by exploring the students early start experience, through the analysis of multiple case studies. "A case study is an in-depth exploration of a bounded system (e.g. an activity, event, process, or individuals) based on extensive data collection" (Creswell, 2008). This research was a collective case study, which examined the individual experience of 20 former early start participants; specifically exploring their experience in transferring early start courses to a four-year research state university. In this study, the students all attended the same four-year research state university located in the state of Montana. Of the participants, there was 1 first-year student, 12 sophomore students, 5 juniors, and 2 seniors. In addition, with the students' consent, one of the parents was interviewed to gain an understanding of their role in the early start experience and how they viewed their students' experience. Sixteen

out of the 20 students provided consent for me to specifically interview their mother; out of the 16 mothers, 8 agreed to the interview. The research then explored the view of early start programs from the view point of a director of admissions at a four-year research university. Finally, with the students' consent, document analysis was conducted to analyze their college transcript and the transferability of their early start courses.

### Researcher Positionality

I first became aware of early start opportunities in the late 1990's while I was in high school. At that time, I completed dual credit courses at my high school, allowing me to start college with 24 college credits completed. Thus I was able to graduate with my bachelor's degree in three years. This achievement did not happen automatically. It took initiative on my part to sit down while I was in college and see how my early start credits applied toward my college degree. My interest in the early start subject and how informed participants were about the process started to grow. I am currently an academic advisor at a four year public university. I have worked on multiple occasions with high school students, parents, and high school counselors on early start options for students who want a jump start on college. Both my personal and professional world has led me to a road of research in early start.

### Significance of Study

The results from this research can benefit both high school educators and post-secondary education administrators. By providing an in-depth exploration of the early start experience, practitioners and administrators may gain a better understanding of student expectations and program processes. This study can also benefit researchers who specifically study the education pipeline by providing a better understanding of what the early start participants are experiencing when transitioning from high school to a post-secondary education institution. Researchers may use the results from this study to help improve program processes involving early start credits.

### Definition of Terms

*Advanced Placement (AP)* - A challenging course offered at the high school and taught by a high school teacher. At the end of the course, students may elect to take the AP exam, which is administered by the College Board. The student may only receive college credit for the course if they receive a certain score as pre-determined by the post-secondary institution.

*\*Dual credit course-* A course that a high school student takes either at a high school or a college and receives both high school and college credit for completing the course. Depending on whether the student completes the course at the high school or at the college, this course may be taught by a high school teacher or college professor.

*\*Dual enrollment-* A student is enrolled in a high school and a college at the same time.

*Early start programs*- Programs that provide high school students with the opportunity to earn college credit while in high school.

*International Baccalaureate (IB)* – A challenging course offered at the high school. At the end of the course, students complete the IB exam, which is then distributed around the world to other IB institutions for grading. The institution where this research was conducted required students to receive a score of 4 or higher on the highest level in order to receive college credit.

*Transfer credits* – College credits that a student earns from a program or an institution, different from the institution where they are currently enrolled. In order to have credits transfer from one institution to another the student needs to submit documents such as an official transcript or Advanced Placement score sheet from College Board to the institution that they are attending.

\*For the purpose of this study, dual credit and dual enrollment will be used interchangeably.

### Limitations and Delimitations

Every study has design weaknesses; there are things that I as a researcher do not have control over that will impact the results of this study. A limitation to this study was that the research was conducted at a four-year, public, research institution in the state of Montana. The results of my analysis of student transcripts were therefore governed by Montana University System transfer policies. I interviewed college students who were looking back at their motivations and experiences in high school so their reflections may

not be as accurate as asking high school students who are currently deciding to take AP or dual credit courses. Due to financial and time constraints, when I conducted my interviews with the parents, the interviews were conducted over the phone. The phone interviews may limit the depth of information that I was able to collect.

Delimitations are choices that I, as the researcher have made that limited the results of this study. One of the delimitations of this study is that I had purposefully chosen to interview students on one campus. By doing this, I was not able to compare the transfer experience of early start credits to other institutions. I chose to select participants from one institution so that I could compare their transfer experience, considering the institution variable was held constant. In addition, I started my data collection during the summer months, a time when college students are typically on break. I interviewed five students during the summer vacation which may influence the type of student that participated in the interview. However, the other 15 participants were recruited and interviewed during the fall term. An additional delimitation to this study was that I interviewed students who had been retained in college. Students who participated in an early start program but did not matriculate through college were not interviewed, as a result, I was not able to compare the experiences of the two populations.

### Summary

In this chapter I have introduced the research and myself as a researcher. The problem presented in this study is that early start programs were developed to provide high school students with a jump start on college credit. In order to determine the

effectiveness and transferability of early start programs, post-secondary education administrators and high school counselors need to have an in-depth understanding of the early start experience. The next chapter will provide an in-depth exploration on the education pipeline, history of AP and dual credit programs, early start student outcomes, and transfer issues involving early start programs. The Conceptual Model will also be described in more detail in the next chapter. Chapter 3 then provides a detailed explanation of the research methods, introduces the participants in the study, and explains the data analysis. Next, Chapter 4 presents the research results and themes that were developed in this study. Finally, Chapter 5 concludes the study and addresses the research questions introduced in the first chapter. Recommendations for practice and suggested future research are presented at the end of this study.

## LITERATURE THEMES

### Introduction

This research was a collective case study, where multiple cases of early start were described to provide an in-depth look into the early start experience. The case study examined former early start participants and looked at the experience through their eyes; specifically exploring their experience in transferring early start courses to a four-year research state university. For well over a century, educators have discussed issues related to the transition of students from secondary to post-secondary education in the United States. Beginning in the 1950's with the advent of the AP examinations, structured programs took shape that allowed high school students to get an early start on college level work. This chapter provides an introduction to the history, theory, and research on early start programs. This review of literature offers a foundation for understanding this collective case study, where multiple cases provide an in-depth look into the early start experience.

### Problem and Purpose

Early start programs were initially developed to provide high school students with a jump start on college credit. In order to determine the effectiveness and transferability of early start programs, post-secondary education administrators, secondary education educators, students, and parents need to have an in-depth understanding of the students' early start experience. The purpose of this collective case study was to provide an in-depth understanding of the early start experience for students; specifically looking at the

early start experience from the students' point of view, the parents' point of view, and the post-secondary education point of view. The early start experience refers to the students participation in an Advanced Placement program, dual credit program, or both an Advanced Placement and a dual credit program while the student was in high school.

### Research Questions

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4. What is the role of high school counselors in the early start experience?
5. How transferable are early start courses to a four-year research university?
  - a. If early start courses are transferring to a four-year research university, are those credits fulfilling a core requirement, major requirement, or an elective requirement?

Early start programs are designed to increase access to post-secondary education and strengthen the education pipeline between K-12 education and post-secondary education. The literature reviewed in this chapter first examines the history of early start programs; specifically exploring the history of AP and dual credit. This chapter then

addresses the impacts of early start programs on the K-12 and post-secondary education pipeline and in particular, addressing early start accessibility. Next, the role of parents, high school guidance counselors, and post-secondary education administrators in the early start experience are discussed. The chapter then reviews the transfer issues facing early start programs and student outcomes for early start participants. The literature review concludes with a brief overview of the conceptual model guiding the research. The literature review is designed to paint an overall picture of the history, constituent roles, student outcomes, and transfer issues that impact early start programs.

### History of Advanced Placement and Dual Credit

Partnerships between high schools and post-secondary education institutions date back to the 1880's when the Massachusetts Teachers' Association passed resolutions that led to the partnerships of the education system (Fincher-Ford, 1997). Then, "between 1892 and 1918, the National Education Association convened a series of meetings to formulate a plan for cooperation between the public schools and institutions of higher education" (Fincher-Ford, 1997, p. 3). The goal of these partnerships at the time was to evaluate the conditions of the secondary curriculum and create a national high school curriculum to align with post-secondary education admission requirements.

### Advanced Placement

It wasn't until the 1950's, when the AP program was offered by the College Board (Conley, 2005; Santoli, 2002). The AP programs began with the Fund for the Advancement of Education of the Ford Foundation, which funded two projects (Santoli,

2002). The first project, led by the headmaster of Andover Academy, John Kemper, “addressed the problem of academically able students repeating courses they had in high school during their introductory courses in college” (Santoli, 2002, p. 23). The second project, known as the Kenyon Plan, “brought together high school teachers, university professors, and representatives from the Educational Testing Service, who developed high school course outlines, syllabi, and tests based on the outlines, which were first administered to students in 1954” (Santoli, 2002, p. 24). The Advanced Placement program became known as such in 1955, when the College Board took over the project, with the first examinations taking place in 1956” (Santoli, 2002, p. 24). At the time when the AP program was first offered, it was one of the most accessible ways for high school students, who wanted college preparatory classes, to have a challenging academic curriculum (Conley, 2005).

Students who take an AP course have the option to take the AP exam at the end of the course. If a student hopes to receive college credit for their AP course, then they must complete the exam and receive the appropriate score, as determined by the post-secondary education institution, to receive college credit. The exams are based on a five point scale, where a five is the highest level that a student may score. Handwerk, Tognatta, and Coley (2008) explain, “A grade of 3 on an AP exam often qualifies a student to receive course credit or advanced placement from participating institutions, though the decision to award credit varies across institutions and subjects within institutions” (p. 7).

Even though the percent of schools offering the AP courses has increased in the past few decades, there is still a gap of students who take the courses versus those students who participate by taking the exam (Handwerk et al., 2008). For the 85% of students who attend schools that offer AP courses, there are only 2% of students who actually take an AP exam and earn a 3 or higher score; of the 2% taking the test the percent of African Americans and low-income students who take an exam is at or close to zero (Handwerk et al., 2008). This gap is important to understand. If AP is designed to provide students with a rigorous academic curriculum with the opportunity to receive college credit while in high school, then there are a low percentage of public high school students who are eligible to receive such credit (Handwerk et al., 2008). The literature review will take a more in-depth look at the accessibility of AP after examining the history of dual credit.

### Dual Credit

Historically, K-12 education and community colleges have had more in common than K-12 education and universities (Boswell, 2000). According to Boswell (2000), “In the early decades of the twentieth century, ‘junior’ colleges were organized in many states to provide grades 13 and 14 under the auspices and authority of local school districts” (p. 4). Boswell (2000) further explains that “it was not until the 1960s that states began moving governance of two-year college systems from state boards of education to post-secondary coordinating and governing boards” (p. 4).

The first dual credit partnership between a secondary and post-secondary institution took place in the early 1970’s with Syracuse University’s Project Advance

(Fincher-Ford, 1997). It wasn't until the 1980's when dual credit programs started to increase significantly (Fincher-Ford, 1997). Dual credit and dual enrollment programs vary in delivery and content, depending on the high school and post-secondary education institution course offerings. As a result of the lack in conformity among dual credit programs, schools are hesitant to take on the initiative to develop their own partnership program. Fincher-Ford (1997) explains, "many school districts have not implemented them, however, because of (a) a lack of information on how to get started and (b) uninformed skepticism among academic purists who believe that their canon will be compromised" (p. 5).

Regardless of whether communities have established dual credit programs between K-12 systems and post-secondary education institutions, there is an attraction and need for the programs. "The main attraction for high school students and their parents appears to be financial: if college credit can be earned while the student is still in high school, this may ultimately decrease the total cost of a college education" (Conley, 2005, p. 59). Hoffman (2005) highlights the need for dual enrollment programs to construct a seamless transition from K-12 education to post-secondary education. Both AP and dual credit are programs that may enable and strengthen the education pipeline between K-12 and post-secondary education.

### Education Pipeline

The availability of early start programs is dependent on a smooth, leak-free pipeline from secondary to post-secondary education. For the last 15 years the American

education system has been moving toward the goal of a seamless educational system, which would help to increase the number of traditional age college students who stay in the education pipeline through college (Hoffman, 2005). Hoffman (2005) explains that “one goal of a K-16 system is to better support low-income students and students of color who, for a variety of reasons, need more effective scaffolds to make transitions from one segment of the education system to another” (p. 4). To strengthen the K-16 education pipeline, Hoffman (2005) recommends many approaches, including, “strengthening high school curricula and coupling them with high-stakes assessments that put academic pressure on schools, teachers, and students to improve (e.g., including honors, AP, and IB [International Baccalaureate] courses in the curriculum; making college prep the ‘default’ curriculum)” (p. 4). Some education scholars suggest that all schools should offer AP or other college level opportunities for high school students (Tierney, Bailey, Constantine, Finkelstein, and Farmer Hurd, 2009). Research supports this suggestion, for low-income students who took the AP exam were more likely to enroll in a four-year college after high school (Myers, Brown, and Pavel, 2010). In their research which assessed a comprehensive precollege intervention and developmental program, Myers, Brown, and Pavel (2010), discovered five factors that increased the likelihood that low-income students would enroll in a four-year college. High school students were more likely to enroll in a four-year college if they “(a) had higher college aspirations; (b) took more AP exams; (C) took at least one IB class; (d) took more math classes; and (e) had higher levels of financing from parents, grants and scholarships, and a Pell grant” (Myers, Brown, & Pavel, 2010). Research has demonstrated that early start programs create

positive college outcomes for students, however, there needs to be communication between the multiple levels of education for the programs to be seamless.

Better communication and organization between K-12 education and post-secondary education is needed. Hugo (2001) recommends that "dual enrollment is one strategy for building closer links between high schools and colleges" (p. 72). He further suggests that dual enrollment "supports the establishment of a long-term dialogue that strengthens the ties between the K-16 sectors and leads to more partnerships and stronger collaborations" (Hugo, 2001, p. 72). There is a need to smooth the students' transition to college; specifically for first-generation students (Terenzini, Springer, Yaeger, Pascarella, & Nora, 1996). Pre-college programs, such as bridge programs have been successful in the students' transition to college (Terenzini, et al., 1996). Dual enrollment courses provide an effective transition strategy for students graduating high school and continuing on to college (Mechur Karp & Hughes, 2008). While participating in dual enrollment programs, students are presented with issues and problems that some first year students face, which assists them with transitioning into college. Both pre-college and summer bridge programs have assisted students in transitioning into college (Strayhorn, 2006).

Ideally, if there is a leak in the educational pipeline it needs to be repaired. However, with the educational pipeline in our nation there doesn't seem to be an easy fix. Boswell (2000) indicates that, "scholars suggest that American K-12 and higher education systems are among the world's least-linked education structures" (p. 4). Improving access to post-secondary education is one way to strengthen the pipeline.

According to Conley (2005), "high schools are designed to get students to graduate, and in the case of college-bound students, to make them eligible for admission to college—generally the public university in that state" (p. 3). High schools are not necessarily enabling high school students to succeed in college, as mentioned above; they are just making sure students are eligible for admission (Conley, 2005). Policy makers are noticing the gap between requirements needed to graduate high school and requirements needed to be admitted to college (Boswell, 2000). As an example, high school students are required to take one or more admission tests for college, such as the SAT or ACT. Then once students arrive to the university to register for their first semester of classes they are typically required to take another test, a placement exam, to measure where they are at with their math and writing skills. Boswell (2000) explains, "this system of uncoordinated tests and requirements can create significant barriers for students, particularly for poor and minority students who are most likely to come from high schools that do not do a good job of preparing students for college success" (p. 5). Strategies such as early outreach; informing students on how to prepare for college; developing standards, competencies, and assessments across the education levels; and improved data collection are recommended for policymakers and education leaders to meet their goals for educational improvement (Boswell, 2000).

College knowledge is another important factor that contributes to the educational pipeline. In addition to meeting requirements for college entrance, students need to have some foundational knowledge about post-secondary education in order to successfully transition. For example, they need to have an understanding of how to find information

on institutions; specifically knowing how to check institution admission requirements, learning on when they need to apply for admission, when they need to complete admission exams, and how to apply for financial aid. College knowledge enables students to make an informed decision about what colleges to apply for and when to apply.

### Access

Social, cultural, and economical factors all contribute to unequal access to education in our nation. Tierney, Corwin, and Colyar (2005) point out that there are structural and cultural constraints within the system that hinder access for some students; specifically minority and low-income students. Very few low-income students are taking AP exams (Handwerk, et al., 2008). In addition they discovered that "...substantial differences in overall median exam participation rates among racial/ethnic groups: Asian American 10.3%, White 5.3%, Hispanic 2.4%, and African American .5%" (Handwerk, et al., 2008, p. 17). So that more students, including underrepresented students, may benefit from AP classes and do well on the exam, Handwerk et al. (2008) recommend that "schools need to do more to broaden their programs and create an 'AP culture' within their schools" (p. 5). In regards to dual credit programs, Hugo (2001) highlights that "the dual enrollment program provides an opportunity for minority and first-generation students to learn about colleges and improve their study skills, and it gives them more information about the process of attending college" (p. 72). As highlighted, both AP and

dual credit programs could be ways to provide post-secondary education opportunities to all.

A step toward improving access is ensuring that all students have the same educational opportunities, regardless of socioeconomic factors. There is currently a disproportionate amount of low-income students compared to high income students who receive their bachelor's degree. In a study of 8<sup>th</sup> graders from 1988, 16% of low-income students attained a bachelor's degree, compared to their high-income peers where 65% of them received their bachelor's degree (Advisory Committee, 2006). In addition, in 2000, it was projected that only 20% of low-income 8<sup>th</sup> graders would receive their bachelor's degree by 2012, compared to 68% of high-income students (Advisory Committee, 2006). As highlighted by the report, family income limits the success of college-qualified high school graduates and decreases the pool of college-qualified high school graduates over time (Advisory Committee on Student Financial Assistance, 2006). When income limits college-qualified students from attending college, this also decreases the students' commitment to preparing and planning for college.

Research has shown that students who took dual enrollment courses were more likely to enroll in a four-year college compared to their peers who did not participate in the dual credit course (Mechur Karp & Hughes, 2008). Dual enrollment programs are a strategy for improving student access and persistence in post-secondary education (Mechur Karp & Hughes, 2008). In addition to bridging the gap between high school and college, Boswell (2000) feels that encouraging those high school students who are qualified to enroll in a college level course will make their senior year more productive

for students. Boswell (2000), in agreement with other researchers, feels that “dual-enrollment credits also help students progress faster through their college education, saving the state and themselves money, while freeing up opportunities for other students” (p. 10). In their research on credit based transition programs, Hughes et al. (2005) discovered that participants believed that the opportunity to earn free college credit was a benefit for students because it made the expenditures for post-secondary education less expensive.

For the education system to realize where gaps currently exist, research needs to be conducted on the existing system. According to Perna (2005) only 6 of the 50 states have data available describing the gaps in the level of academic preparation. As Hughes, et al., (2005) point out, “aligning high school graduation requirements with college entrance requirements is an important first step” (p. 4). Currently, literature supports that there is no institutional collaboration. For example, students who are in a dual credit program are required to contact their high school and sponsor of their dual credit course separately for a copy of their records (Hughes, et al., 2005). This process impacts students’ ability to receive high school credit for their college courses, because the student is responsible for sharing the information with the two institutions (Hughes, et al., 2005). There are policies in place to protect students for privacy issues. However, policies should be examined to see which ones continue to separate the expectation gap and which ones are closing the gap. Hughes, et al., (2005) recognize in their research that even in the strong dual credit partnerships, there is little collaboration with sharing data

and institutions do not have the resources required to efficiently collect and use data to research the effectiveness of their program.

Literature reflects that there are an unbalanced percentage of students who are academically prepared for college when they graduate high school. In addition the literature reflects that some students who graduate college-qualified are not enrolling in college after graduation. Perna (2005) highlights that students who take courses on a college preparatory track often experience more rigorous academic preparation. Information about college plans and dual credit programs should be communicated to students starting in middle school, so they may begin their college planning. A report from the Advisory Committee on Student Financial Assistance (2006) explains the transitional melt that took place in 1992 high school graduates who expected to finish college when they were in high school. The melt that the study refers to is the change in number of students who said they were going to attend college in high school compared to the number of students who actually enrolled in college. This demonstrated that there was a 23% melt of low-income students who took at least Algebra II that changed their mind about attending a four-year college; for high-income students there was a 9% melt (Advisory Committee, 2006). For students who took Trigonometry, there was a 13% melt for low-income students and a 5% melt for high-income students who changed their mind about attending a four-year college (Advisory Committee, 2006). The report also highlights that between 1992 and 2004 the percentage of college-qualified students increased from 52% to 66% of low-income students compared to an 86% jump to 90% of high-income students (Advisory Committee, 2006). Even though the percent of college-

qualified students increased from 1992 to 2004, a report from the Advisory Committee on Student Financial Assistance (2006) demonstrates that low- and moderate- income students who do not complete high school college-qualified compile the largest pool of potential bachelor degree candidates.

In order to create the college going culture, information needs to be available to students early in their education about college requirements and academic tracks. High school grades did not have a significant relationship on persistence for African American and Hispanic students, which led the research to suggest that increasing the availability of advance courses may have an influence (Carter, 2006). Currently, as the literature indicates, it is not the grades that impact whether a student is college-qualified, but it is the availability of advanced courses. Perna (2005) suggests that low-income students, African American, Hispanic, and other groups of students who are not typically academically prepared for college is because these populations tend to be placed in lower curricular tracks.

The key to ensuring that students are academically prepared is being able to offer college preparatory classes to all students, regardless of socioeconomic standing or ethnicity. First-generation students are more likely to come from low-income families, be of Hispanic origin, have weaker cognitive skills, lower degree aspirations, and be less involved with classmates and teachers in high school (Terenzini, et al., 1996). If the level of degree aspirations and involvement with teachers is lower than traditional peers, then programs and courses need to be in place to establish aspirations and provide opportunities for students to connect with their teachers; which may lead to increased

college-qualified students in this population. Cabrera and La Nasa (2001) explore other research which discusses college-qualified students and the impact of being college-qualified on attending college, research concluded that securing college-qualification is critical for a student's decision to enroll in a college program or not.

### Roles of Parents, Guidance Counselors, and Post-secondary Education Administrators

This qualitative research study provides an in-depth look at the roles of parents and a director of admissions at a four-year research institution on their individual views of early start. In order to provide a complete and comprehensive description of the various roles, this portion of the literature review will explore some of the research that has previously been conducted on these important roles.

Literature reflects that parents are one the main sources of information about college opportunities for students. Parental encouragement is the strongest factor that predicts a student's early educational plans (Cabrera & La Nasa, 2001). In addition, the more familiar parents are about college, the better their efforts to assist students in preparing for college (Cabrera & La Nasa, 2001). Within their study Cabrera and La Nasa (2001) discussed Adelman's (1999) research that demonstrated the importance of disseminating information to students, and especially their parents, early on in sixth, seventh, and eighth grade so they are aware of the courses needed to enroll and succeed in college.

Parents play a pivotal role in a student's education. Rowan-Kenyon, Bell, and Perna (2008) conducted a study on the contextual influences on parental involvement in

college going. In their research, they discovered that “parents shape college opportunity for their children, but involvement varies based on socioeconomic status” (Rowan-Kenyon et al., 2008, p. 571). In addition, it was discovered that “parental involvement is shaped by, and also shapes, the school context for college opportunity; and parental involvement is also shaped by the higher education context and the social, economic, and policy context” (Rowan-Kenyon et al., 2008, p. 571). Ensuring that students are aware of post-secondary education opportunities, regardless of socioeconomic status is a key component in creating a college going culture. By providing a comprehensive system early on in a student’s education, both parents and students may be informed of the pathways needed to take to participate in college going programs and courses. Berry (2003) suggests that students will plan to prepare and attend college if high school administrators, counselors, and teachers start talking to students and their parents early on in school; highlighting the importance of involving the parents in the initial college going discussion. Lohfink and Paulsen (2005) explain that counselors, both at the high school and college level, are encouraged to make a special effort “to provide first-generation students with the kinds of information and experiences that allow them to envision, perceive, or even observe real opportunities for success regardless of the type of institution or the size of institution they choose to attend” (p. 420). Currently, there is a lack of understanding who communicates what information to students and parents about college opportunities. Myers and Myers (2012) explain there are two levels of social capital where students and parents are informed of college opportunities. The first level includes parents and their own social network where they may learn about college

opportunities and then the students and their own separate social network where they may learn about college opportunities. Then, the second level is when the parents and the students come together and share social capital learned from their individual social networks (Myers & Myers, 2012). Their research suggests that student involvement is more important than parental involvement in the communication plan, recommending that programs include students in promotional and informational college materials to enhance the parent-student communication (Myers & Myers, 2012).

For a college going culture to be cultivated, there needs to be presence and involvement from guidance counselors and post-secondary education administrators. Wilson (2009) discovered in her research that “while college faculty and administrators believed that the collaboration between the school district and the university was sufficient; high school guidance counselors wanted more collaboration and more communication” (p. 216). In addition, “guidance counselors reported feeling uninformed about many issues affecting their students such as course selection, academic performance, and important university dates and deadlines” (Wilson, 2009, p. 216).

Lyons (2010) conducted a qualitative study to explore what the high school guidance counselor perceived as their role in the college planning process. The study revealed that counselors play a pivotal role, not only in college planning, but in many aspects of the lives of students (Lyons, 2010). The research also revealed that technology is limiting the information that high school counselors receive from post-secondary education institutions; for example, colleges are not mailing out catalogs as much requiring counselors to search the internet for resources (Lyons, 2010). Guidance

counselors already do not have enough time in their day to devote to college planning. When colleges expect them to dedicate more time to search the internet for college admission requirements and processes, it creates a barrier. If communication between post-secondary education institutions and K-12 is to improve, then technology cannot be the only means to communicate. There needs to be additional opportunities for counselors to be informed of college processes. Strengthened communication between the multiple educational levels in our society will then contribute to a clearer and more comprehensive message about college opportunities to parents and students.

The literature has explored the importance and effectiveness of offering early start programs to assist in transitions, access, and mobility for students going from high school to college. However, who are the key players in ensuring that students are informed of early start programs? Even though some literature demonstrates that counselors are not qualified or trained on college planning, counselors are key to assisting students with the planning process. Farmer-Hinton and Adams (2006) conducted research at Glenn Hills and the involvement of the high school counselors in the college planning process. Students at Glen Hills live in a community where it is not typical for students to attend college after high school. According to their research, Farmer-Hinton and Adams (2006) discovered, “the counselors’ role included developing norms in their college preparatory school through college talk, raising student expectations through visual and interpersonal communications, and creating new rituals and ceremonies for their college preparatory culture” (p. 109). Their research also explained that the counselors coordinate college tours, college prep classes, and supplemental classes such as university-based class

offerings (Farmer-Hinton & Adams, 2006). Additional research demonstrates that the level of dedication that counselors place on college planning depends on the organization of the school and the student-counselor ratio (Corwin, Venegas, Oliverez, & Colyer, 2004; McDonough, 1997).

In addition to open communication between the education levels, there needs to be a clear understanding of roles on each side of the spectrum. Students in dual credit programs need assistance with course selection (Wilson, 2009). Wilson (2009) recommends that, "college academic advisors and high school guidance counselors should work together to advise students to take classes that will allow them to explore career options but still meet transfer requirements of the institution to which they plan to matriculate" (Wilson, 2009, p. 250). Lyons (2010) also discovered that a recurring theme in her study was the importance of guidance counselors and students needed to be informed on how early start credits will transfer, prior to taking the course.

#### Early Start Credit Transfer Process

Boswell (2000) encourages that "State education and policy leaders should continue to support and encourage advanced placement and dual/concurrent enrollment at high schools and community colleges to promote more student transfer and encourage faster time to degree completion" (p. 15). What does the transfer process mean to students who participated in an early start program? Many early start programs state that the classes would transfer, but do students understand what that means? When studying the transferability of college credits while earned in high school, Lynch (1980) surveyed

16 two- and 106 four- year institutions and discovered a "relative ease for the transferability of college credits between institutions" (p. 8). It is important to note that the transferability term is defined by the institution. Lynch (1980) points out in his research that there is confusion between AP and how the credits fulfill requirements at an institution. In his research, Lynch (1980) discovered that for AP, some institutions just waive college requirements versus granting college credit that will apply toward graduation. It is important that students understand what it means to receive college credit for AP versus having a requirement waived for them.

Wilbur and Chapman (1978) explain that "Credit transfer among colleges and universities is a complex process characterized by considerable inconsistency and often seemingly capricious and illogical acceptance policies" (p.39). A credit earned through an early start program may have transferred, but if it transferred as elective credits did the student really need the electives to graduate? There is a difference between a class transferring to a post-secondary education institution and having that course transfer to fulfill a graduation requirement versus an elective. For example, not all degree programs require that students have elective credits to graduate. This would be the case in a degree program where the number of credits needed for general education requirements, major requirements, and minor requirements (if applicable) total up and equal the minimum amount of credits equal to graduate with that specific degree. Elective credits are typically only required when the number of credits needed in a general education package, major requirement, and minor area (if applicable) does not total up to equal the minimum amount of credits needed to graduate. Wilbur and Chapman (1978) suggest

that transfer credit cannot be guaranteed. They claim that "even where the credit has been accepted at an institution for years without question, new freshman advisers or a change in admissions officers can alter that situation. Such uncertainty in credit acceptance is due to a lack of clear policy at the institution" (Wilbur & Chapman, 1978, p. 40). In addition, they state that "at other colleges and universities transfer credit acceptance may depend on a student's high school record, on separate decisions by the appropriate academic department in the course content area, or on how badly the institution needs to attract new students" (Wilbur & Chapman, 1978, p. 40).

Wilbur (1982) points out that in evaluating an early start program, one of the questions that needs to be addressed is, "Is the credit students earn easily transferable to other colleges and universities?" (p. 5). Heath (2008) discovered in her research that examined the academic and social experiences of students who participated in a dual enrollment program that some of the students experienced challenges, such as grade level classification that impacted housing, major, scheduling, and eligibility with scholarships, when transferring to a university. Also, Hoffman (2005) discovered that "few states have guaranteed credit transfer policies that make credits portable within any public institution in the state" (p. 17). For future studies, Heath (2008) recommends that researchers explore the transfer shock and how it relates to students who participated in dual enrollment.

In order to start looking at whether early start credits will transfer to the college level, the current processes of how to transfer credits need to be examined and explained to early start participants. The transfer process and procedures need to be explained to

students, parents, and high school guidance counselors (Wilbur & Chapman, 1978). Early start participants are not familiar with transferring college level credit, especially as they are starting out as a freshman in college, because they have not even gone through the college registration process yet. Wilbur and Chapman (1978) instruct that “they [students, parents, high school guidance counselors] must be told where and how students should request a transcript, how much it costs, to whom it should be forwarded, and when during the school year students should request the transcript” (p. 42).

#### Outcomes for Early Start Participants

Research on the effectiveness of AP and dual credit programs have been conducted and evaluated to see the impacts these programs have on student outcomes. Scott et al. (2010) found “that students earning credit for course work through advanced placement outperformed students who earned credit through university administered departmental exams” (p. 29). Santoli (2002) points out that as a result of the increasing numbers of students taking AP courses, there is a perception that there is an advantage to taking AP. “Students benefit from high caliber and motivated teachers, can receive college credit for high school courses, and are better prepared for attending college” (Santoli, 2002, p. 32). Santoli (2002) supports the AP advantage by explaining, “students can save college tuition money with successful scores on AP exams and are not wasting time and money retaking a course they have already mastered” (p. 32). AP has positive outcomes on high school completion, college entry, and college completion for students who either enroll in an AP course or take the AP course and exam (Tierney, Bailey et al.,

2009). "Previous research has found the most predictive indicator of college readiness is the actual grade obtained on the AP examination, not simply taking the examination" (Handwerk, et al., 2008, p. 20). It has also been discovered that the type of course students take while in high school contribute to their likelihood of enrolling in a four-year college; for example low-income students who took more AP exams or took more math classes were more likely to enroll in a four-year college (Myers, Brown, & Pavel, 2010).

Research has also previously examined dual credit and the effectiveness of the program; refer to Table 1 for a list of research. In research, it has been shown that dual credit programs have positively influenced degree persistence (Mechur Karp & Hughes, 2008; Brian Pyong, 2009), contributed to a student's ability to experience college early on, and increased their confidence in their school work (Hughes, Mechur Karp, Fermin, & Bailey, 2005).

Table 1. Research on Dual Credit Program Outcomes

Subject Area of Research	Source of Recommendation
Student Outcomes	
Earn high school and college credit	Andrews (2004); Brian Pyong (2009)
GPA and credits earned	Welsh et al., (2005)
Student performance	Welsh et al., (2005)
More likely to earn a high school diploma	Mechur Karp & Hughes (2008)
More likely to enroll in a four-year college	Mechur Karp & Hughes (2008)
Decreases likelihood for remediation	Brian Pyong (2009)
More likely to earn higher grades in college	Mechur Karp & Hughes (2008); Heath (2008)
Increase in college persistence	Mechur Karp & Hughes (2008); Brian Pyong (2009)
Develop a sense of time management skills	Wilson (2009)

Other research has demonstrated that there are both positive and negative outcomes with early start programs. Nitzke (2002) evaluated a school-based dual credit

program that was partnered with a community college and compared college completion rates of those students who participated in the dual credit program to those students who did not participate in the dual credit program. Nitzke (2002) discovered that within the students that participated in dual credit, only 14.3% of that population graduated college compared to the 22.7% of students who did not participate in the dual credit program. In addition, Heath (2008) found that “even though dual enrollment students typically had higher GPAs at the community college, their GPAs were lower at the university” (p. 79). Brian Pyong (2009) also discovered in her research on the impact of dual enrollment on college performance and attainment, that dual enrollment does not reduce the time to degree.

### Conceptual Framework

This collective case study explored multiple views to gain a better understanding of the early start experience. Based on previous research, there is a current level of knowing the history of early start programs, a current level of understanding the education pipeline, and a current level of perception on outcomes that these programs produce. Based on this information, the conceptual framework explained below is used to explain the early start process. This collective case study provides additional and an in-depth understanding into the early start experience, this model is revisited in Chapter 5.

The first step in strengthening the current pipeline between K-12 education and post-secondary education is to understand the current role of high school counselors, one

of the key players in a student's transition from high school to college. What is the high school counselor's current role in the college planning process? According to the guidance framework in the mentoring theory, "students' decisions to attend college are influenced by providing essential information and specific guidance in navigating the process of college preparation" (Tierney, Corwin, & Colyar, 2005, p. 98). This theory highlights how the mentor (such as a high school counselor) may provide students with social and cultural capital by providing them the opportunity to connect with social entities and attend cultural events.

Social capital is a "productive relationship that leads to advantageous behaviors or outcomes within a social system" (Tierney, Corwin, & Colyar, 2005, p. 35). High school counselors may act as a relationship builder and connect students with mentors who have attended and graduated college, so that students may cultivate educational relationships. Cultural capital is "a set of cultural knowledge, skills, and abilities that are possessed and often inherited by certain groups in society, and suggested that families from lower socioeconomic backgrounds do not have the privileged opportunities that families from higher socioeconomic backgrounds possess" (Tierney, Corwin, & Colyar, 2005, p.15). By introducing students to college opportunities, such as early start programs, counselors are enabling students the opportunity to become culturally aware of diversity and cultural needs. It explains that, "the mentor may provide information about the process of preparing for college and may introduce the student to college-educated individuals or to contact persons at college campuses" (Tierney, Corwin, & Colyar, 2005, p.98). Does providing guidance with college preparation and decisions influence a student?

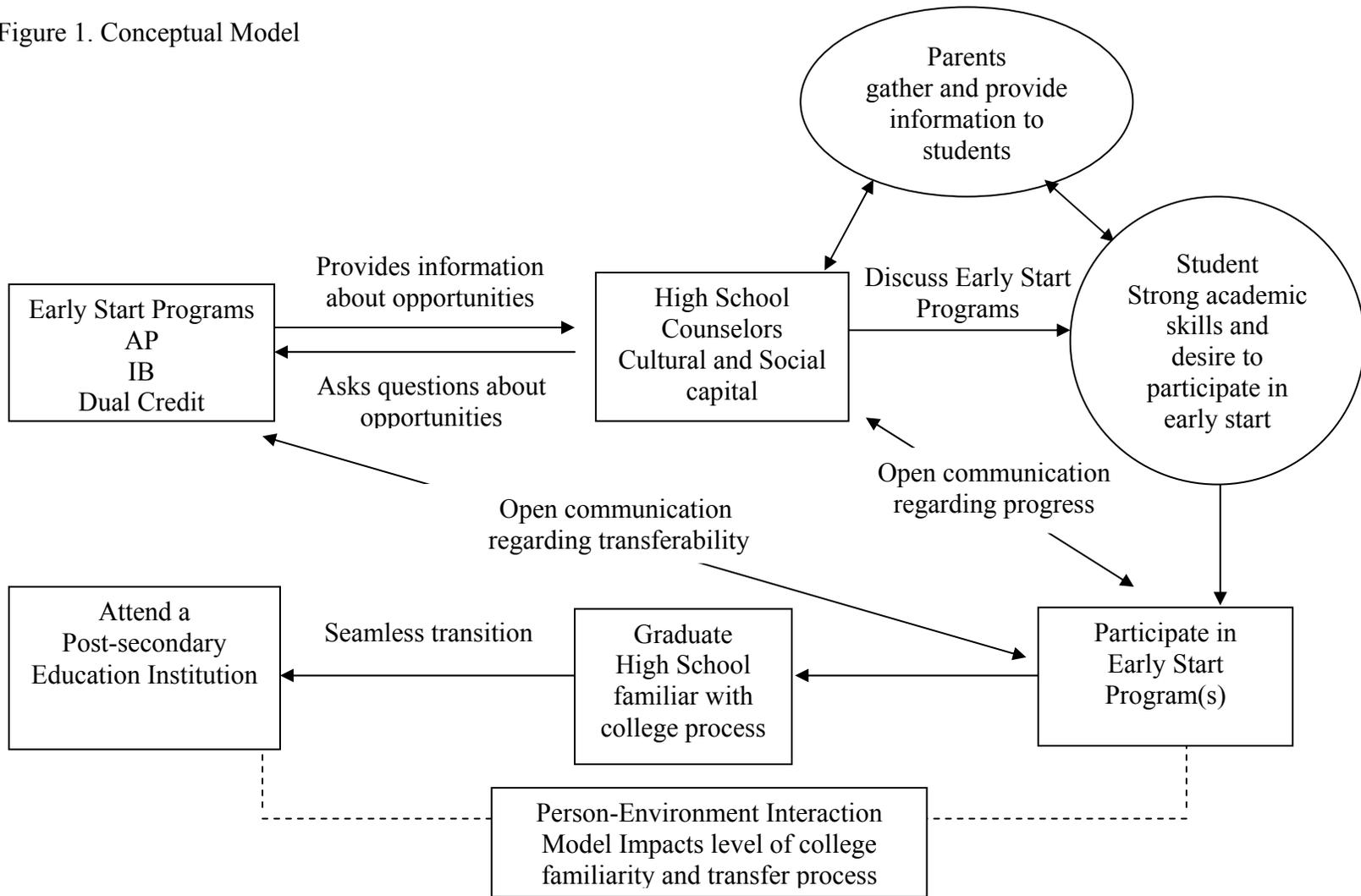
According to the National Educational Longitudinal Study database, "...information about college and guidance directed toward college options did predict college going within two years after high school graduation" (Tierney, Corwin, & Colyar, 2005, p.98).

Based on the Conceptual Model (see Figure 1), there needs to be open communication between early start programs and high school counselors. According to the guidance framework of the mentoring theory, counselors inform students of the early start college opportunities and may also connect them with an early start program. The student then decides to participate in the early start program. Upon high school graduation, the student would decide to attend a post-secondary education institution. As a result of the experience from the early start program, the student would have a working knowledge of college processes.

The level of how familiar a student is about the college process and transfer procedures is influenced based on the person-environment interaction model. The person-environment interaction theories "focus in detail on the environment and how it influences behavior through its interactions with characteristics of the individual" (Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005, p. 46). Pascarella and Terenzini (2005) explain that person-environment models "make no attempt to explain either the nature or specific processes of student development or growth...they attempt to identify some origins of behavior and provide frameworks for discussing student change and college effects" (p. 46). Based on this idea, the interaction between the institution and the early start participant will dictate the outcome of the experience. For example, if an institution provides step-by-step instructions to the student on how to transfer early start credit to

their institution and explain how those early start credits will transfer in to their degree program, then the student will leave the experience being well informed of the transfer process.

Figure 1. Conceptual Model



### Summary

The literature review painted an overall picture of the history, education pipeline, constituent roles, transfer issues, and student outcomes of early start programs. The history of K-12 and post-secondary education partnerships dates back to the 1880's. The formal AP program started in the 1950's and the first dual credit partnership began in the 1970's. Even though these programs have been around for decades, there are still questions unanswered and a lack of understanding the true early start experience for participants. This research fills what I perceive as a gap in the literature by providing an in-depth exploration of the early start experience from multiple angles; from the view of the early start participant, from the view of the participant's parent (with the students' consent), and from the view of a director of admissions at a four-year research institution. The next chapter discusses the research methods used in this study and introduces the participants. Chapter 4 explores the results of the study by explaining common themes that developed from the data. Finally, the study concludes by answering the research questions posed in the first chapter, and then it provides recommendations for practice and suggestions for future research.

## METHODOLOGY

### Introduction

This research was a collective case study, where multiple cases of early start were described to provide an in-depth look into the early start experience. The case study examined former early start participants and looked at the experience through their eyes; specifically exploring their experience in transferring early start courses to a four-year research state university. Through interviews and document analysis, this case study revealed an in-depth exploration into the early start experience; informing students, parents, and educators on the early start process.

### Problem and Purpose

Early start programs were initially developed to provide high school students with a jump start on college credit. In order to determine the effectiveness and transferability of early start programs, post-secondary education administrators, secondary education educators, students, and parents need to have an in-depth understanding of the students' early start experience. The purpose of this collective case study was to provide an in-depth understanding of the early start experience for students; specifically looking at the early start experience from the students' point of view, the parents' point of view, and the post-secondary education point of view. The early start experience refers to the students participation in an Advanced Placement program, dual credit program, or both an Advanced Placement and a dual credit program while the student was in high school.

### Research Questions

1. How do students view the early start experience?
  - a. What were their expectations?
  - b. What actually happened?
2. How do students experience the process of transferring early start credits to a post-secondary education institution?
3. How do parents view the early start experience?
  - a. What were their expectations?
  - b. What actually happened?
4. What is the role of high school counselors in the early start experience?
5. How transferable are early start courses to a four-year research university?
  - a. If early start courses are transferring to a four-year research university, are those credits fulfilling a core requirement, major requirement, or an elective requirement?

### Researcher Positionality

My interest in this research stems from my personal and professional experiences. As a high school student in the late 1990s, I earned 24 college credits while in high school by participating in an early start program. As a result, I was able to graduate with my bachelors' degree in three years. In my experience as an early start participant in the 1990s, I was not familiar with the transfer process. I understood that I received college credit while in high school, but I was not sure how it applied toward my college degree

until I sat down in college and looked at my transcript. Completing my own evaluation of credits, I realized that many of my early start credits applied toward my college requirements.

For eight years, I have worked at Montana State University Billings, which is a four-year public state university in Montana. I do not work for the institution where this specific research was conducted. As an academic advisor at Montana State University Billings, one of the areas I advised for was the Montana State University Billings University Connections program. This was an early start program designed for Montana high school students who enrolled in college courses at Montana State University Billings while still in high school. As the main advisor for this program, I worked with high school counselors, high school students, and parents on a daily basis. Based on my own personal and professional experience with early start programs, I believe they create a great educational opportunity for students. I come from a professional background where I am familiar with transfer processes and terminology. This background influences my ability to define how credits transfer and when analyzing the academic transcripts in this study, I looked at them from an academic advisor perspective instead of a researcher perspective. For example, I looked to see what requirements the courses actually fulfilled as opposed to whether the credits transferred or not.

### Research Design

This research was a collective case study that provides an in-depth understanding of the early start experience. In a collective case study, also referred to as a multiple case

study, an issue is selected and the researcher examines multiple case studies to illustrate the issue (Creswell, 2007). The collective case study examined the early start experience for 20 college students who previously participated in an early start program and were attending college at a four-year research university. In order to provide an in-depth understanding, this study examined the students experience from multiple angles; from the students' point of view, from the point of view of one the students' parents (with student consent), and from the view of a director of admissions at a four-year research institution.

Using a criterion sampling strategy, I interviewed 20 students, at a four year research university, who had previously participated in an early start program in high school. The student population that I interviewed required that participants either participated in an Advanced Placement (AP) course and took at least one AP test at the end of the course or completed a dual credit class while in high school. To select my participants, I worked with some academic departments on the campus, who sent an email to their students on my behalf. The email explained my research to students and had students contact me by email if they fit my criteria; such as they participated in an early start program while in high school. The email also explained that students who were interviewed would receive a \$25 gift card. Once students emailed me and I confirmed they participated in an early start program, we arranged a time for a face-to-face interview. My first interview was on July 7<sup>th</sup>, 2011 and my last set of student interviews was on September 26<sup>th</sup>, 2011. Before the interview started, each participant received a consent form explaining the research and ensuring confidentiality.

Upon receiving approval from the student, I contacted one of the students' parents by phone and explained that I had their student's permission to visit with them about their early start experience. Out of the 20 students, 16 students gave me permission to contact one of their parents. Of the 16 parents that I had permission to contact, 8 mothers agreed to the phone interview. Once the mother agreed to the phone interview, I sent them an informed consent by email. All eight parents agreed to the informed consent and sent their permission back to me by email. We then arranged a time for the phone interview. The first phone interview took place on August 26<sup>th</sup>, 2011 and the last phone interview was on October 27<sup>th</sup>, 2011.

I originally planned to conduct phone interviews with high school counselors, with the students' approval. However, I discovered in my research that the students did not know or remember who their high school counselors were. In addition, I found that students mainly coordinated with their high school teachers not their high school counselors when participating in early start programs. For this reason I did not interview high school counselors for this study. I did, however, complete an earlier research study (Lyons, 2010) that focused on high school counselors experiences with early start programs.

My last interview for this research was a phone interview with a director of admissions at a four-year research institution. To schedule the phone interview with the director of admissions, I first explained my research over email. Then once the director approved the informed consent we scheduled a time for the phone interview. The phone interview took place on November 7<sup>th</sup>, 2011.

## Participants

I interviewed 20 students who previously participated in an early start program. To protect the participant identity, I have assigned a pseudonym to each participant. The descriptions below explain the background of the student participants' experience, along with a quote detailing why they participated in early start. These are followed by Table 2, which summarizes the participants year in college, what early start program they participated in, and the grade they started to participate in early start.

### Students Who Took AP or IB Courses

- *Amber* was in 10<sup>th</sup> grade when she started taking AP courses. She felt that she was the most influential person in her decision to participate in an early start program. She took the AP courses because she was looking for a challenge. “I think just the challenge...and also what I heard about which students were signing up cuz I found out that the students were the ones that I was hanging out with more the ones that were more inclined to the more serious study habits and stuff.”
- *Charlotte* was in 11<sup>th</sup> grade when she started taking AP courses. She felt that the most influential people in her decision to participate were her brother and her parents. Her goal for taking AP classes was to get a head start on college. “I wouldn't have to worry about it when I actually get into college...That was my main motivation for taking AP class and my main goal was just to be able to get ahead on college just have that much less when I actually get there and it fit in with my schedule fine and so I was just like I can do it. I can handle this.”

- *Danika* was in 11<sup>th</sup> grade when she started taking AP courses. The most influential people in her decision to participate was her instructor and her parents. She participated in an early start program because she wanted a challenge and for the college credit. “Once I was in AP I think I started out more because I was like wow I am getting college credit and I am getting a good start...Then when I got in there I felt like the class itself prepared me.”
- *Isabel* was in 11<sup>th</sup> grade when she took her first AP course. She felt that she was her most influential factor in her decision to participate. She took the AP courses because was looking for a challenge. “I knew my skills were way too strong to be in a normal English class and so rather than waste my time in a classroom going over things I already knew, I wanted a challenge.”
- *Nancy* was in 10<sup>th</sup> grade when she first started in the AP program. Nancy stated that she, herself, was the most influential person in her decision to take an AP class. Her goal for participating was because she wanted a challenge and to receive college credit. “College credit was a big one but...I have always done honors classes and stuff and so I just wanted something that was going to make me think a little harder.”
- *Peter* was in 11<sup>th</sup> grade when he took his first AP course. He felt that he was the most influential person in his decision to participate in an early start course. Peter took AP because he wanted the challenge and to get out of the ‘knuckle draggers’ and be in class with a more mature student group. “Just kind of get out of the knuckle draggers. I wanted to be in the more advanced like more mature student

group and... one of my teachers always told us that the first thing colleges look at is difficulty of courses taken so I kept that in my mind and took all 10 of our honors classes.”

- *Rena* was in 11<sup>th</sup> grade when she took her first AP course. She felt that her friends were the most influential factor for her decision to participate. She took the AP courses because she was also looking for a challenge. ‘I think initially I just I wanted to be in the smarter, harder class, but the more it went on, I wanted to be better at it and started caring about what I was learning.’”
- *Teressa* was in 11<sup>th</sup> grade when she first participated in an early start course. She felt that the early start coordinator was the most influential person in her decision to participate. Teressa’s goal for taking early start courses was to earn college credit. “My goal was just to get college credit out of it.”

#### Students Who Took Dual Credit

- *Bradley* took his first dual credit class while in 12<sup>th</sup> grade. He felt that he and his parents were the most influential factor in his reason to participate in early start. He took dual credit classes because he wanted to get a head start on college. “When I came here I was originally a math major so I just wanted to get a head start with math.”
- *Eileen* took her first dual credit class while in 11<sup>th</sup> grade. She felt that her biggest influential fact in participating was her friends. She took dual credit courses because she wanted to get away from high school and also get a head start on

college. “I think at first I wanted to get away from high school. Then it turned into how many credits can I get to transfer into college?”

- *Gabriella* was in 11<sup>th</sup> grade also when she first took a dual credit class. She felt that her brother was the largest influence in her decision to participate. Her goal for participating was to learn how to manage due dates and formal procedures. “Learning how to manage regular course load with due dates and such because I taught myself, so that wasn’t an issue so I had to learn that before I went to college.”
- *Jeffery* was in 12<sup>th</sup> grade when he took his first dual credit class. His brothers were the most influential factor in deciding to take a dual credit class. He participated in dual credit because he wanted to get a head start on college. “My goals were basically to get some core classes out of the way and...one big thing was I knew I was going to be paying for college myself and I am pretty sure they offered classes at half tuition for high school students so that was pretty big too because right when I was out of high school those classes were going to be twice as expensive so that was something I really liked.”
- *Lucas* was in 12<sup>th</sup> grade when he took his first dual credit class. His most influential person in his decision to participate were one of his parents. He took dual credit because he wanted to start college not at ground zero. “To start off my college experience not from ground zero but a slight stepping stone up.”
- *Melissa* was in 11<sup>th</sup> grade when she completed her first dual credit class. She felt that she, herself, was the most influential person in her decision to participate in

early start. Her goal for taking dual credit classes was to graduate with her associate degree. “I wanted to graduate with my associate’s degree so that did require the full time.”

- *Quinn* was in 11<sup>th</sup> grade as well when she took the first dual credit class. Her parents and grandparents were her most influential factors in her decision to participate. Quinn took dual credit classes because she wanted a challenge and for the cost effectiveness. “I just wanted to be challenged and get as many credits as I could because it was free.”

#### Students Who Took Both AP and Dual Credit

- *Florence* was in 10<sup>th</sup> grade when she first took an AP course and then in 12<sup>th</sup> grade when she completed dual credit. She felt that her teacher was the most influential person in her decision to participate in the AP course but she didn’t feel that there was really any one person who influenced her decision to take dual credit; except that the teacher of the course really pushed it. She took AP and dual credit courses because she wanted a challenge. “I think I just wanted to challenge myself because school has been pretty easy for me for most of the time.”
- *Heather* was in 11<sup>th</sup> grade when she first took an AP course and dual credit. She felt that she, herself, was the most influential person in her decision to take AP and dual credit. Her initial goal of participating in dual credit was that she wanted to earn an associate degree at the same time as earning her high school diploma. “Initially I did want to get my associates and then transfer but one of my friends

brothers did that and his credits didn't actually transfer to the college he went to so he had to start over so I bagged that idea and decided to take classes for that year."

- *Kelly* was in 10<sup>th</sup> grade when she took her first AP course and 11<sup>th</sup> grade when she enrolled in her first dual credit class. She felt that her instructor and parents were the most influential people in her decision to participate. She completed these courses because she wanted a head start on college. "To get college credit."
- *Olivia* was in 11<sup>th</sup> grade when she completed her first AP course and 12<sup>th</sup> grade when she completed her first dual credit class. She felt that she was the most influential person in her decision to participate in both AP and dual credit. She completed these courses because she also wanted a jump start on college. "To get college classes."
- *Samantha* was in 11<sup>th</sup> grade when she completed her first AP and dual credit class. She felt that her parents and competition with her brothers were the most influential factors in deciding to take these courses. She completed AP and dual credit because she wanted a head start on college. "Just transferring with college credits and having it on my transcript."

Table 2. Early Start Participants

<b>Pseudonym</b>	<b>Year in College</b>	<b>Participated in AP/IB, Dual Credit, or Both</b>	<b>High School Grade first enrolled</b>	<b>Familiarity with college processes</b>
Amber	Junior	AP/IB	10	Not at all
Charlotte	Senior	AP/IB	11	Not very familiar
Danika	Sophomore	AP/IB	11	Not at all
Isabel	Sophomore	AP/IB	11	Not at all

Table 2 Continued

Nancy	Junior	AP/IB	10	Not at all
Peter	Sophomore	AP/IB	11	Not at all
Renae	Sophomore	AP/IB	11	Not at all
Teressa	Sophomore	AP/IB	11	Not at all
Bradley	Sophomore	dual credit	12	Not at all
Eileen	Sophomore	dual credit	11	Not at all
Gabriella	Sophomore	dual credit	11	Not very familiar
Jeffery	Junior	dual credit	12	Not at all
Lucas	Sophomore	dual credit	12	Not at all
Melissa	Senior	dual credit	11	Not at all
Quinn	Sophomore	dual credit	11	Not at all
Florence	Sophomore	Both	10 for AP; 12 for Dual Credit	Not very familiar
Heather	Freshman	Both	11 for both AP and Dual Credit	Not at all
Kelly	Junior	Both	10 for AP; 11 for Dual Credit	Fairly familiar
Olivia	Sophomore	Both	11 for AP; 12 for Dual Credit	Not at all
Samantha	Junior	Both	11 for AP and Dual Credit	Not at all

As highlighted above, 1 student participated in International Bachelorette [IB], 7 students participated in Advanced Placement [AP], 7 students participated in dual credit, and 5 students participated in both AP and dual credit. The background of the IB student was not one of my initial preferred backgrounds; however, I felt that it would be beneficial to interview this student so that the IB experience was also represented in the early start experience research. Some of the student participants had siblings participate in an early start program before they did; 8 students had a sibling participate in an early start program before they did and 12 students did not have a sibling participate in an early start program before them. Of the 20 students, there were 16 female students and 4 male

students. All the students were traditional college aged students when they first started college. In addition, there were four first-generation students in this study.

There were multiple states represented in this research. Of the 20 students, 5 students completed the early start program in the state of Washington, 1 student from the state of Tennessee, 1 student from Pennsylvania, 1 student from New Jersey, 8 students from Montana, 1 student from Minnesota, 2 students from Idaho, and 1 student from Colorado. In addition, 19 of the students attended a public high school and 1 student was home schooled. The majors that students were pursuing are represented in Table 3 below.

Table 3. College Majors of Early Start Participants

<b>Major</b>	<b>Number students in major</b>
Business Management	1
Cell Biology and Neuro Science	1
Elementary Education	6
English Education	1
Exercise Science	1
General Science Broadfield Secondary Education	1
Graphic Design and Pre-Med Biology	1
History Education	2
Math and Technology Education	1
Math Teaching with Family Consumer Science	1
Music Education	2
Psychology and Sociology	1
Social Studies Secondary Education	1

With the students' permission, I interviewed one of the students' parents. Out of the 20 students, 16 of them provided me with permission to contact their mother to visit about the experience through their eyes. I contacted all 16 mothers by phone and visited with them about my research. Of the 16 mothers contacted, I had a 50% return rate and

was able to conduct phone interviews with 8 of the mothers. The educational background of the mothers interviewed included two mothers who had associate degrees, five mothers had bachelor's degrees, and one mother had some post-baccalaureate course work. To protect the confidentiality of the parents and students, the parents are labeled based on the gender, the year in college, and the type of early start program of their student. Some of the labels ended up being the same name because the students were the same year in college and completed the same early start program; those parents I differentiated by adding an A, B, or C, after the word Mother. The parents were labeled as follows: Mother of Freshman with both AP and Dual Credit, Mother of Senior with AP credits, Mother of Senior with Dual Credit, Mother A of Sophomore with AP Credits, Mother B of Sophomore with AP credits, Mother A of Sophomore with Dual Credit, Mother B of Sophomore with Dual Credit, and Mother C of Sophomore with Dual Credit.

The last participant interviewed for this study was a director of admissions at a four-year research university. The participant selection was based on the director's position at a four-year research university at the time of the study. I did not know the director of admissions prior to the interview. The director interviewed, had been working in higher education for more than 30 years and had experience in both private and public education. The director was the head of admissions at a public institution that offers undergraduate and graduate degrees. In the fall of 2011, the head count at the directors' institution was between 14,000 and 15,000 students.

### Data Collection

The methodology in this study utilized semi-structured interviews and document analysis. Prior to conducting the semi-structured interviews, I created questions that would guide the interview and ensure that the research questions were being addressed during the interview. When creating the questions, I labeled what research question I felt the interview question was addressing. In addition, I made sure to include less-personal questions at the beginning of the interview and then more personal questions toward the end; this way I was able to first build rapport with the interviewee and they would be more likely to open up about what did not go well and what they would suggest for future programs. After I created guiding questions for the interviews, I had them peer-reviewed by a doctoral candidate who works in higher education. With the peer review, I was able to determine the flow of the questions and ensure I was addressing the research questions posed in this study.

After the interview questions were developed, I conducted a pilot interview with a former dual credit student. The purpose of the early start experience pilot study was to provide insight into the research topic and the feasibility of the interview questions (Simkhada, P., Bhatta, P., & van Teijlingen, E., 2006). The aim for the pilot interview with a former early start student was to determine content validity and clarity of the questions. The pilot interview provided an opportunity to determine which questions needed to be added or reworded and to gain an insight on some of the possible themes that may develop during the main research study. A pilot interview was not performed with a parent. However, during the pilot interview with the former early start participant,

the student discussed the parent's involvement in the early start process. The information learned from the pilot interview provided recommendations for parent interview questions. The student indicated that their mother was most influential in their decision to participate in dual credit. The student's mother saw they were not having enough of a challenge with high school courses so thought that a dual credit program would be most valuable. Simkhada, Bhatta, & van Teijlingen (2006) explain, "Conducting a pilot study is a crucial element of a good study design, and it is very helpful to pilot a newly designed questionnaire" (p. 296). The results from the early start experience pilot study proved insightful and resourceful. By conducting a pilot interview with a former dual credit student, the clarity and importance of the interview questions were defined. In addition, the pilot interview provided an insight to potential themes that may have developed in the collective case study.

Once I received approval from the Institutional Review Board, I started to recruit participants for my research. To select my participants, I worked with academic departments, specifically the Department of Education and advisors for general education, at a four-year research university. I selected these two advising offices because the data collection began in the summer and students from these programs were more likely to be on campus than some other colleges. The departments I worked with sent an email to their students explaining my research and letting them know that if they were selected they would receive a \$25 gift card. The students were instructed to contact me by email or phone if they were interested in participating. All students contacted me by email. Once I confirmed that the student fit the criteria for my research we scheduled

a time for a face-to-face interview. Prior to each interview, participants signed an Informed Consent (See Appendix A). I conducted 20 semi-structured interviews with college students who previously participated in an early start program. Semi-structured interviews provided the research with an in-depth insight into the early start experience. By tailoring an interview to each participant, I gained coherence, depth, and topic density from each student (Weiss, 1994). The interview with the student examined the students' early start experience, the process of transferring early start credits to a post-secondary education institution; specifically looking at what worked well with the process and what did not work as well. The first interview took place on July 7<sup>th</sup>, 2011 and the last interview took place on September 26<sup>th</sup>, 2011. With the students' consent, the interview was recorded. All students provided consent to record the interviews. All interviews with the students followed the same protocol (see Appendix D). We first discussed their major in college, their parents' educational background, and whether they had any siblings participate in the program prior to their participation. I had the students paint a picture of their high school experience, such as the type of high school they attended, their involvement in high school, and the year they graduated high school. The student walked me through their decision making process on why they decided to attend college where they are at. The interview explored the early start experience; such as when the student first heard about the experience, how they heard about it, who was most influential in their decision to participate, what grade they were in when they first started, goals they had for participating, and how they decided which early start courses to take. The student then informed me of their level of familiarity with college processes before

they participated in early start, what steps they had to take to transfer the credits when they were complete, how their credits apply toward their college degree, and what information they felt would have been helpful to know looking back on the experience. The interviews were then transcribed during a time period of October 2011 to December 2011.

After interviewing each student, the student signed an institutional Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA) form if they agreed to give me a copy of their college transcript for document analysis. Out of the 20 students, 17 students gave me a copy of their transcript; 16 students were able to give me a copy the same day of the interview and 1 student emailed me a copy of the transcript at a later date. Of the three students that did not have me view their transcript, one student did not have credits transferred in yet because they were not familiar with the transfer process so I was not able to view the transcript, one student did not have their AP scores sent because they were majoring in music and did not think the courses would apply so she did not have a transcript with the early start courses posted on them, and the third student did not want to provide me with consent to view the transcript.

Before the student left the interview, they had the opportunity to give me permission to contact one of their parents for a phone interview. Of the 20 students, 16 students gave me permission to contact a parent, specifically their mother. I contacted all 16 mothers by phone and explained my research. I had a 50% return rate and was able to conduct a phone interview with 8 parents. Before the phone interview, I sent an Informed Consent form by email, which was the parents' chose of delivery method and

they then replied by email with their consent (see Appendix B). The first phone interview took place on August 26<sup>th</sup>, 2011 and the last phone interview was on October 27<sup>th</sup>, 2011. With the parents' consent, the interview was recorded; all parents agreed to have the interview recorded. The interview with the parent specifically examined the early start experience from their point of view; how familiar was the parent with the early start program, how familiar were they with transferring the course to the post-secondary level, and did they view early start opportunities as more of a high school benefit or college benefit? (See Appendix E). The interviews were then transcribed between a time period of October 2011 and December 2011.

When this research initially started, I planned to interview high school counselors with the approval from the student participants. The research revealed that students did not either remember who their high school counselor was or they did not feel the counselor played a role in the early start process. While interviewing the students, I decided not to interview high school counselors based on this finding.

Based on my years of experience in post-secondary education, I felt that this research would have more value if I started the case study by taking an in depth look at the students' experience, so looking at the experience from the students' point of view versus from the point of view of another post-secondary education representative. However, I did believe that having another post-secondary education representative point of view was very valuable and important for this study. As a result, my last interview was with a director of admissions at a four-year research institution. I specifically examined the early start experience from the director's point of view; what information

and processes did the institution have in place for students who were transferring in early start credits (Appendix F). After the director of admissions agreed to the Informed Consent (Appendix C) via email, we had a phone interview on November 7<sup>th</sup>, 2011. Per the interviewee's request, the interview was not recorded. As the researcher, I took in-depth notes during the interview so that I could later analyze the information.

### Data Analysis

After the interviews were completed, they were transcribed and analyzed to create clusters of meanings from each perspective. By creating clusters of meaning from the students' point of view, parent's point of view, and the director's point of view I was able to provide an in-depth understanding of each student's experience in the early start program. With the use of the Atlas.ti 6.2 software, I was able to analyze the student and parent interview transcriptions. With the assistance of this software, I was able to upload all the interview transcriptions. By doing this, I was then able to create codes, also referred to as common themes in this study. In creating codes, I could then go into each transcription and label quotations with the appropriate code. For example, one code that was developed with this program was a code regarding challenge. Then in the transcription, if there was a part of the interview that discussed how the student felt early start was a challenge, I could code that part of the interview with the challenge code. Once the transcription coding was complete, I was able to run a report of all the codes and export the information to a word document. This report then had the quote referring to that code and the participant that stated that specific information. Once I had all this

information, I was able to go through all the codes to see what themes in the research had developed. I coded student and parent transcriptions separately so that I was able to address the different research questions, what were the student views and then what were the parent's views, separately.

In addition to utilizing Atlas.ti6.2 software for coding the themes in the transcriptions, I also utilized Excel to store and sort information on participants. The information on the Excel sheet included data such as the participant's gender, major, year in college, program they participated in, when they started early start, and how familiar they were with college processes before participating. This information guided me to develop themes such as, if there was a certain grade level when students mostly started early start courses; if so, was it the same for AP and dual credit? I was also able to sort this information on what type of program each participant completed, so that I could report and analyze data based on their early start program or programs.

This study also utilized document analysis by evaluating college transcripts and determining, based on the institutions catalog requirements, how the early start credits transferred. I utilized another Excel worksheet for this step in the research. I went through each academic transcript that I had and then entered the type of class the student took; I had a column for dual credit classes and a column for AP classes. This way I could track if there was a trend for a certain class that students were taking for dual credit or AP. I utilized the university website where the students attended college, to review what courses their major specifically needed with what courses they completed in the early start program and what courses they completed once in college. I then documented

my findings in a word document to log the trends of what requirements the early start courses were fulfilling in college.

### Trustworthiness

I was able to address the validity and reliability of the data and my reported findings in a variety of ways. Prior to completing my first interview, I conducted a pilot interview with a college student who previously participated in an early start program. The questions for the interview were examined by a former dual credit participant, to ensure content validity. Content validity is “the extent to which the questions on the instrument...are representative of all the possible questions that a researcher could ask about the content” (Creswell, 2008, p. 172). The pilot interview examined the clarity and validity of the interview questions.

Based on my professional background and previous research with high school counselors, as the researcher, I am able to contribute substantive validation to this specific study. “Substantive validation means understanding one’s own understandings of the topic, understandings derived from other sources, and the documentation of this process in the written study” (Creswell, 2007, p. 206). In spring 2010, I conducted a phenomenological study with high school counselors and explored their views of the early start programs. With this previous research, I was able to gain an understanding of the topic from their point of view as well. “Understandings derived from previous research give substance to the inquiry” (Creswell, 2007, p. 206).

Triangulation was another method used to address the validity of this research. Triangulation was apparent in this research by conducting interviews with populations that have a different perspective on the experience, such as the students' perspective, parents' perspective, and director of admissions perspective. The document analysis conducted of the academic transcripts also provided for triangulation in this study. By interviewing different populations that would have different perspectives on the experience, I was able to address the authenticity of the study by making sure different voices were heard. In addition, I completed member checking with 10 of the student participants once the interviews were transcribed and analyzed. By doing this, I was able to confirm that what I learned from the interview was what the student was communicating; providing credibility to the study and making sure the results were an accurate reflection of what the participant was explaining.

To ensure reliability of this research, as mentioned above, I used the Atlas.ti6.2 software when coding the data from the interview transcriptions. While coding the data, I made sure that the codes were kept separate for student and parent interviews. This way I was able to present the views of the student participants and develop themes that occurred among the students and then present the views of the parent participants and develop themes that occurred in the parent interviews. During the interview stages, I documented possible themes that I thought were developing when I heard common responses from different participants. When it came time to code themes from the interview transcriptions, I also cross referenced that information with the notes that I took in the field while interviewing students.

Summary

This qualitative collective case study used semi-structured interviews to gather descriptive data from 20 former early start participants who were attending a four-year research institution. The research provided triangulation by interviewing one of the participants' parents, with the students' permission, to gain an understanding of the early start experience from their perspective. This study also gained an understanding of the early start transfer experience by interviewing a director of admissions at a four-year research institution. Document analysis was conducted by examining students' college transcript, with their permission, to analyze how the early start credits transferred in to the university. To provide content validity a pilot interview was conducted with former early start participants. The next chapter presents the findings from this qualitative study. In Chapter 5, I summarize the study, discuss the findings, provide recommendations, and suggest research ideas for future studies.

## RESULTS

### Introduction

This research provides an in depth exploration of the early start experience through a collective case study design. This chapter presents the findings from interviews with former early start participants, one of their parents (with the students' permission), and a director of admissions. The multiple perspectives provide a comprehensive account of the early start experience. In addition, an analysis of student transcripts explores the transfer of early start courses and analyzes how they apply toward college level requirements. The document analysis details the courses completed in early start programs and how those courses applied toward college degree requirements.

### Problem and Purpose

Early start programs were initially developed to provide high school students with a jump start on college credit. In order to determine the effectiveness and transferability of early start programs, post-secondary education administrators, secondary education educators, students, and parents need to have an in-depth understanding of the students' early start experience. The purpose of this collective case study was to provide an in-depth understanding of the early start experience for students; specifically looking at the early start experience from the students' point of view, the parents' point of view, and the post-secondary education point of view. The early start experience refers to the students' participation in an Advanced Placement program, dual credit program, or both an Advanced Placement and a dual credit program while the student was in high school.

### Research Questions

1. How do students view the early start experience?
  - a. What were their expectations?
  - b. What actually happened?
2. How do students experience the process of transferring early start credits to a post-secondary education institution?
3. How do parents view the early start experience?
  - a. What were their expectations?
  - b. What actually happened?
4. What is the role of high school counselors in the early start experience?
5. How transferable are early start courses to a four-year research university?
  - a. If early start courses are transferring to a four-year research university, are those credits fulfilling a core requirement, major requirement, or an elective requirement?

### Findings

This chapter analyzes the data by first exploring the students' point of view, the parent's point of view, and finally a director of admissions point of view. When relevant, I separate results for students who completed AP only, dual credit only, or both programs. It is important to note that even though the literature explores the importance of early start program availability for first-generation students, minority students, and students from a low-socioeconomic background; this study does not explore these

different backgrounds and its impact on the student perspective. However, of the participants, there were four first-generation students represented.

Different from what was previously projected, high school counselors were not interviewed in this study. It was quickly discovered that from the students' point of view, the counselors did not play a role in the experience to the extent that was previously hypothesized. In the students' perspective, the high school teachers played a larger role than counselors in visiting with students about early start courses. Students felt counselors were more for emotional guidance and assistance with schedule building. For example, students mentioned that they only went to visit with their counselor about 'high school drama'. However, for conversation about college classes, students felt the teachers played a larger role. When the counselors did play a role in the early start courses, their role was limited to just signing off on the paperwork or registering the student for the course.

Within each main heading in this chapter, I explored the themes that emerged during data analysis. Table 4 provides a summary of the main themes. For themes where it is important to distinguish among students who took AP, dual credit, or both programs, some summary numbers or percentages are included. Detailed descriptions of the themes, as well as quotations supporting the analysis, are also included in the sections that follow.

Table 4. Summary of Themes and Subthemes

<b>THEMES AND SUBTHEMES</b>
<b>STUDENTS' POINT OF VIEW</b>
<p>Students initiated the early start conversation with counselors</p> <p style="padding-left: 40px;">AP/IB 6 of 8 students initiated conversation</p> <p style="padding-left: 40px;">Dual Credit 4 of 7 students initiated conversation</p> <p style="padding-left: 40px;">Both 3 of 5 students initiated conversation</p> <p style="padding-left: 40px;">Total overall students 13 of 20 students initiated conversation</p>
<p>Students were their own influence</p> <p style="padding-left: 40px;">40% (8 of 20 students) felt they were their own influence</p>
<p>Students wanted to be challenged</p> <p style="padding-left: 40px;">12 of 20 students participated in early start for the challenge</p>
<p>AP Experience provided challenge</p> <p style="padding-left: 40px;">AP 5 of 7 students who took AP felt challenged</p> <p style="padding-left: 40px;">Both 4 of 5 students felt challenged</p>
<p>AP was more beneficial and challenging</p> <p style="padding-left: 40px;">4 of 5 students who took both felt AP was more beneficial and challenging</p>
<p>Students and the AP test</p> <p style="padding-left: 40px;">100% of students who took AP were informed about the AP test</p>
<p>Students were not influenced by the cost effectiveness of early start programs</p> <p style="padding-left: 40px;">6 of 20 students mentioned cost effectiveness was an influence*</p> <p style="padding-left: 40px;">*This was an influence only after someone told them it was cost effective</p>
<p>Course availability influenced course registration</p> <p style="padding-left: 40px;">AP/IB 4 of 8 based on availability</p> <p style="padding-left: 40px;">Dual Credit 3 of 7 based on availability</p> <p style="padding-left: 40px;">Both 4 of 5 based on availability</p> <p style="padding-left: 40px;">Total 11 of 20 based on course availability</p>
<p>Early start programs had an impact on college experience</p> <p style="padding-left: 40px;">AP/IB 6 of 8 felt experience had an impact on college</p> <p style="padding-left: 40px;">DC 6 of 7 felt experience had an impact on college</p> <p style="padding-left: 40px;">Both 4 of 5 felt experience had an impact on college</p> <p style="padding-left: 40px;">Total 16 felt experience had an impact on college</p>
<p>Students stated transfer process was not consistent</p>

Table 4 Continued

Students reported confusion on how early start courses apply
Students needed more information on transferability, earlier major and college decisions
Students had advice for future early start participants
<b>PARENTS' POINT OF VIEW</b>
Students informed parents about early start programs
Parents felt teachers were most influential
Parents believed students participated for the college credit
Parents main concern was confidence and time management
Parents were not involved in the early start process
Parents reported transfer process was confusing
Parents needed more information on early start programs and transferability
<b>DIRECTOR OF ADMISSIONS POINT OF VIEW</b>
Are students developmentally ready for early start courses?
Transfer information is located online; students need to initiate the conversation
Great challenge for students, but is society pushing too much?
Believes AP is more beneficial than dual credit

The chapter concludes with a document analysis of the students' transcripts. The document analysis examined transcripts that had credits transferred from both in-state and out-of state institutions. The transcripts were evaluated solely on the course that was completed with the college catalog that lists the degree requirements; in-state and out-of-state credits were analyzed using the same criteria. Table 5 provides a summary of the early start courses that students completed. Detailed descriptions of the document analysis are included in the sections that follow.

Table 5. Summary of Early Start Courses

<b>SUMMARY OF EARLY START COURSES</b>	
Subject Area	Number of Courses
Humanities	29
Non-General Education Courses	24
Writing and Communication	18
Social Sciences	17
Mathematics	11
Science	10
Diversity and Arts	8

### Students' Point of View

As an introduction to the student participants in this study and to begin the discussion of how students became involved in early start, Table 6 below highlights the participant, what program they participated in, when they first heard about early start, and the grade they first participated in early start. As the table highlights, eight students felt they first heard about early start programs by the time they were in middle school or 8<sup>th</sup> grade; five students first heard about early start while in 9<sup>th</sup> grade; three students first heard about early start in 11<sup>th</sup> grade; two students heard about early start in 10<sup>th</sup> grade; and two students felt they first heard about early start in elementary school. Thirteen of the 20 students first participated in an early start course in 11<sup>th</sup> grade. The table is followed by an in depth discussion of each of the student themes.

Table 6. Early Start Programs

Participant	Participated in AP/IB, Dual Credit, Both	First Heard About Early Start	Grade First Participated
Amber	AP/IB	9 <sup>th</sup> Grade	10 <sup>th</sup>
Charlotte	AP/IB	10 <sup>th</sup> Grade	11 <sup>th</sup>
Danika	AP/IB	Could not remember, first thought 10 <sup>th</sup> grade but then thought 7 <sup>th</sup> grade	11 <sup>th</sup>
Isabel	AP/IB	Middle School	11 <sup>th</sup>
Nancy	AP/IB	9 <sup>th</sup> Grade	10 <sup>th</sup>
Peter	AP/IB	First said 10 <sup>th</sup> grade but then remembered 8 <sup>th</sup> grade teachers talked about it	11 <sup>th</sup>
Renaë	AP/IB	Middle School	11 <sup>th</sup>
Teressa	AP/IB	Middle School (8 <sup>th</sup> Grade)	11 <sup>th</sup>
Florence	Both	9 <sup>th</sup> Grade	10 <sup>th</sup> - AP; 12 <sup>th</sup> - Dual Credit
Heather	Both	9 <sup>th</sup> Grade	11 <sup>th</sup> - for both AP and Dual Credit
Kelly	Both	9 <sup>th</sup> Grade for AP 11 <sup>th</sup> Grade for Dual Credit	10 <sup>th</sup> - AP; 11 <sup>th</sup> - Dual Credit
Olivia	Both	Middle School	11 <sup>th</sup> - AP; 12 <sup>th</sup> - Dual Credit
Samantha	Both	Elementary	11 <sup>th</sup> - AP and Dual Credit
Bradley	Dual Credit	11 <sup>th</sup> Grade	12 <sup>th</sup>
Eileen	Dual Credit	10 <sup>th</sup> Grade	11 <sup>th</sup>
Gabriella	Dual Credit	11 <sup>th</sup> Grade	11 <sup>th</sup>
Jeffery	Dual Credit	11 <sup>th</sup> Grade	12 <sup>th</sup>
Lucas	Dual Credit	8 <sup>th</sup> Grade	12 <sup>th</sup>
Melissa	Dual Credit	Elementary or Middle School	11 <sup>th</sup>
Quinn	Dual Credit	8 <sup>th</sup> Grade	11 <sup>th</sup>

#### Students Initiated the Early Start Conversation with Counselors

Six of eight students who completed AP courses indicated that they were the ones that initiated the AP conversation with a counselor or heard about the program through a

teacher. Charlotte expressed that the high school counselors did not actually visit with her about AP. She had to ask them if there was any way she could take AP and they said sure. Nancy felt that for her situation, she was the one who initiated the conversation with the counselors. Renae mentioned that there were mandatory meetings after you registered for AP courses, but that you just had to sign up for it on your own. She suggested that the mandatory meetings were so students could receive their summer homework and the instructor could tell you more about the class; then the student had time to change their schedule if they decided they did not want to take the course. Teresa, Peter, and Amber claimed that they heard about the early start program through their instructor. Amber felt that it was more effective when the teachers initiated the AP conversation, instead of counselors.

I think it's when teachers take that first step it's a lot more effective because I think kids respect the teachers and I know that we had a horrible counselor for my class and we did not listen to anything she said because we felt that she did not know what she was saying. But then when the teacher came forward and said I recommend that you do this and I think it's great and I know the teacher who is teaching it and she is really good and like it's so helpful. – Amber

Students who participated in dual credit programs also felt that they had to initiate the early start conversation with their counselor. Eileen had indicated that she went to visit with her counselor to see what her options were for college in general, and then found out about dual credit. Melissa explained how she brought it up to her counselor and he just signed off on it. Quinn experienced the communication gap between the educational systems, as the literature has demonstrated, and stated that her high school

was not supportive of dual credit and she was the one required to seek out the information.

High schools were really not totally for it. I had to be the one to make the appointments. The community college worked well with the students and had information sessions, but we had to seek it out. My high school did do an information session, but it was not super well-advertised, but they did offer that. - Quinn

The students who completed both AP and dual credit courses agreed that it took initiative on their part to visit with counselors about the experience and register for courses. Florence felt that dual enrollment was not pushed quite as much because it was a bigger logistical thing for schools to handle, when AP was easier to deal with because you do not have two different institutions to work with. Olivia mentioned that she had to see a counselor to sign up, but it was one of those things when she just had to walk in, have the form signed, and then they pushed her out the door because they had other things to do. One participant, Heather, explained how it was the counselors who visited with the students in a group setting about the early start experience. Then Kelly and Samantha gave the credit to their instructor for initiating the early start conversation. Samantha expressed that counselors helped with scheduling, but it was the teachers who initiated and pushed for students to participate.

I would say maybe with scheduling we had to get teachers to sign off on what classes we would go in to. So they would recommend it if they thought you would do well in AP, so I would not really formally, but if teachers knew your ability level they would say “why don’t you try this”.  
– Samantha

This study discovered that the parents’ educational background did not influence the students’ decision to initiate the early start conversation. Regardless if the parents

had no college experience, some college experience, or were college graduates, students were initiating the early start conversation. Table 7 outlines the parent's educational background, as told by the student participants in this study.

Table 7 Parents Educational Background

<b>Parents Educational Background</b>	
<b>No College Experience</b>	5 Mothers 7 Fathers
<b>Some College Experience</b>	3 Mothers 1 Father
<b>Two Year College Education</b>	4 Mothers 2 Fathers
<b>Four Year College Education</b>	7 Mothers 7 Fathers
<b>Post-Bac College Education</b>	1 Mother 3 Fathers

#### Students Were Their Own Influence

Overall, 40% (8 of 20 students) indicated that they were the most influential person in deciding to participate in an early start program. Even though the students who participated in dual credit also felt they, themselves, were influential in their decision to participate, the students in this group expressed that their family also influenced their decision. For the students who participated in AP or IB, half of the students thought that they, themselves, were the most influential person in their decision to take the course(s). Amber felt that it was not anyone really who influenced her or put the pressure on, it was really just her own interest. Isabel indicated that she was her own influence because she did not want to be in college for four years. Nancy did not want to “toot my own horn”,

but she believed she was her own influence. Peter felt that he and the kids around him were his influential factors in deciding to take AP.

It was probably myself and the kids around me ... I really took AP and advanced classes just to stay with my group of friends kind of everyone was applying to school more and it got me out of the annoying kids that were just partying all the time so. But that is a lot of the reason I took AP classes. – Peter

Another motivational factor that developed within the AP students, were the instructors. Teressa and Danika felt it was their instructor who was most influential in their decision to participate. Danika also expressed that she felt it was a mixture between her 7<sup>th</sup> grade teacher and her parents.

I don't know I think it was a mixture the 7<sup>th</sup> grade teacher that told us about it in the first place she was pretty influential just to start me thinking about it. I wanna say just like my mother talking about she took honors classes I kind of thought about that. My father...wanted me to take challenging classes I guess...People through high school and middle school that told me about it. - Danika

Students who participated in dual credit also felt that they, themselves, were influential factors in their decision to participate. Of the groups (students who took AP or IB, students who took dual credit, or students who took both AP and dual credit), the dual credit only population did mention parental influence more than the other two groups. Bradley and Melissa expressed that it was their own self who was influential, but had the support of their parents.

The students who participated in dual credit stated that their friends and family were most influential in their decision to take a dual credit course. Eileen indicated that she felt it was her two best friends who motivated her to participate. Gabriella thought her older brother was most influential because he told her that it would really help and the

entry level English classes in college were frustrating, so it would be good to take it before getting to college. Lucas claimed his mother was most influential because she explained to him that he could take those classes in high school and then get to college and pay to retake the courses, or, he could just pay for the courses at the high school level and then start off college with some credits already earned. Samantha gave credit to her parents and competition with her brothers as being the reason for taking the course. Quinn felt the support of her parents and grandparents were influential factors in her decision to participate in dual credit.

My parents were really supportive of it, just because I know that they really wanted to push me and I was really bored in all of my HS classes and hated all of them. I didn't feel like I fit in. My grandparents were really supportive as well. – Quinn

Students who completed both AP and dual credit were self-motivated and indicated it was their own decision to participate. Both Olivia and Heather believed they were self-motivated. Additionally, students in this group felt that there were sibling and instructor influence. Kelly claimed the instructor and her sister were motivational in her decision to take AP and dual credit. Then Florence reported that her influence to take the AP course was the instructor and for dual credit there was not really any one influential factor except that the teacher of the course pushed it.

For AP it was I knew that the teacher was going to be really good going into so that probably swayed me the most and I definitely love the teacher I had and he taught me a lot like a lot of skills that would help me in college. For the dual enrollment I can't really say because this was the teacher I signed up for and basically all the classes with all the different teachers did it but she was the one who pushed it the most so it wasn't like anything intentional. – Florence

### Students Wanted To Be Challenged

Out of the participants, 12 of 20 students mentioned that they wanted to be challenged and that was why they chose to participate in early start; the biggest group of students indicating that they wanted a challenge were the students who completed AP or IB courses. Seven of the eight students who completed AP or IB stated that they wanted the challenge. Amber described that she took AP classes not for the college credit, but because she was bored with her regular high school classes. Danika realized that when she started AP she thought it was amazing that she could get college credit and a good start to college, but then when she got to the class she felt as though it really prepared her and challenged her so she just kept taking them. Isabel desired a challenge for she knew that her skills were too strong to be in a normal class, so pursued the challenging option. Renae initially wanted to be in the smarter, harder class; but she also found that the more the course went on the more she cared about what she was learning. Nancy believed that receiving college credit was a big reason to take the class, but she really yearned for something that would make her think harder.

College credit was a big one but I think I said before I have always done honors classes and stuff and so I just wanted something that was going to make me think a little harder. – Nancy

Three of the students who took dual credit wanted a challenge, so decided to participate in dual credit. Quinn mentioned that she wanted to be challenged and get as many college credits out of the way that she could because it was free. In addition, she stated how much she loved her dual credit courses at the college and how she was treated

like an adult. Based on what her friends said about AP, Melissa felt that dual credit classes were more demanding and less busy work than AP courses.

It was more of a challenge, well I don't know if I took AP classes I would probably have felt challenged too but I felt it was less busy work because a lot of my friends took AP classes and I saw what they had to do and thought I was getting the same experience with less work. Most of the teachers were really helpful because the program was very popular and my community there were a lot of other high school kids there too or siblings of friends because they choose the community college route and I was still active in my high school while doing the college credit you could choose part time or full time and I chose full time. - Melissa

Two of the students who took both AP and dual credit courses indicated that the reason for taking the courses were because they wanted a challenge. Both Florence and Heather reported that the rigorous courses were appealing to them. Florence mentioned that she just wanted to challenge herself because school had been easy for her. She felt that AP was a demanding course because it required more from her than a regular level class. Heather really wanted to be challenged so she saw the opportunity to get out of the high school classroom and go to the college for some classes would give her that opportunity.

Getting out of the high school classroom because my first 2 years they were kind of like just regular classes not a lot of opportunity for advanced classes so I felt I wasn't being challenged enough so I really wanted to be challenged so that was probably the main reason.- Heather

### AP Experience Provided Challenge

Students who only took AP classes claimed the courses provided the students with a challenge. They found that the students in their classes were more dedicated, they had to do more reading and writing, and were required to participate in class discussions.

Amber felt that the students who took AP courses were more serious about learning and it provided a more constructive environment. Charlotte indicated that the instructor made it very clear from the start that the students would be participating in a college course, so it was going to be tough and require a lot of work and papers. Danika agreed that the AP courses were tough academically, but did mention that her sophomore honors English course was the hardest class she took in high school; and that was the course that prepared her for AP. She specifically liked that she got to read more and have group discussions. Peter was also consistent with the group in his experience that the AP courses were tough and you were expected to do more work than in the non-AP sections. Renae felt the rigor of the course before the semester even started, for at her school, the AP class had mandatory summer readings and assignments.

Consistent with the above findings, the students who took both AP and dual credit discovered that the AP courses provided more structure and discussions. When discussing the AP experience, Florence felt that AP courses pushed structure and discipline, while providing an opportunity for students to participate in in-class discussions, teach students analytical skills, and good essay writing skills.

#### AP was More Beneficial and Challenging

In comparing AP classes and dual credit classes, the students that participated in both programs were asked about their thoughts in comparing the two programs; it was a common theme that the students felt the AP experience was more advantageous and challenging. Heather found that AP classes were more beneficial because they were more rigorous since they prepared her to take a common exam at the end of the year.

Whereas, with the dual credit classes that she took at the local community college, she believed they were incredibly easy and she wasn't challenged, which she felt was unfortunate. Heather also addressed the process of transferring AP credits was smoother than dual credit classes. She indicated that she knew the transferability of the AP courses right away because she just had to send a score to the institution.

Like Heather, Kelly also preferred AP courses over her dual credit experience. She explained that the first AP course she took was in 10<sup>th</sup> grade and it was the hardest course that she ever completed and it set the tone for the other courses. When comparing AP and dual credit, Kelly expressed that AP was a better program because it was more in depth and it provided more skills and ways to study. She commented that it did not just concentrate on the subject matter but also how to survive in college; whereas with the dual credit course they assumed you were already in college. Samantha also felt that the AP experience was more challenging and described her dual credit experience was just like any class where you automatically get credits when you are done. When discussing whether or not Heather believed the dual credit experience was worth it, she explained that it was not really worth it.

Not really. I've been telling people not to do [early start program] honestly...because you don't get the classes you want because it's so big and I think it would have been different if I could have done dual enrollment at a university instead of a community college. I think that would have been different but we didn't have that opportunity. Like I said I wanted to be challenged and it didn't challenge me and for me personally it wasn't the best thing and I kind of regret that the counselors pushed it because I could have been taking more rigorous honors and AP classes at my high school. – Heather

### Students and the AP Test

When asked if students knew about the AP test right away, 100% of students felt they were informed. Five of the students chose not to take all AP tests for all the AP courses completed. Their decision to take the test or not was based on how comfortable they were with the content, finances available, and whether the instructor really pushed it or not. At first, Peter was under the impression that AP was just a fancy word for honors. However, once Peter found out about the test he determined if he would take the test based on how confident he was about the content, because he had an agreement with his mother that based on finances he could only take one test and so he chose the test that he was most confident in. Peter mentioned that he felt he put in the same amount of effort into AP classes regardless if he was taking the test or not, because he wanted to make sure he had a good GPA since he was college bound. Charlotte was in an AP class where students had the option to take the AP test or not. Students could decide that if they received a B or better in the class then they could just keep that grade and have it posted on the local college transcripts. Danika explained that the instructor informed the class at the beginning that there was a test at the end of the course and throughout the class the instructor taught the students how to take the test, so when it came time to actually take the test the students felt prepared. Renae had an experience where the students knew about the AP test right away and the instructor did not really give the student the option to not take the test; the teacher kind of made it mandatory, according to Renae. Even though Nancy did take the tests, she did not feel that the tests accurately represented what the students actually knew about the content. Amber based her decision of whether she

would take the tests or not based on transferability, she did not take AP tests her senior year because she figured she would not need those credits for her college major.

The students who took both AP and dual credit were also informed about the test up front. Samantha indicated that she knew about the test right away. Florence mentioned the instructor told them in the beginning that there was a test at the end and explained the cost effectiveness of taking the test and getting college credit. Heather was one of the students who took all AP tests. Heather mentioned that one of the AP tests she took was US History, however, she did want to take that as dual credit at the college instead, but it was not available during the time schedule she needed so she chose to take the AP option instead.

Not all students had the option to take the AP test or not. Florence explained that the instructor required all students to take the test because it was such a good deal; unless the student had a really good reason why they couldn't take the test, all students took it. Florence's first AP instructor really enforced everyone to take the test the year before so it set the standard for them to take the AP tests for the other classes.

Olivia was one student who did not feel AP was challenging. She explained that the AP experience was not challenging and taught skills such as procrastination.

I don't know how to explain it for it depended on the class itself too for example it was kind of nice in English classes because when you took college prep you didn't really do much because you were an average student then in honors you were expected to do a lot of papers and lots of research then in AP if you got passed the honors they assumed you knew how to do that so I didn't really write any papers in high school. But if you talked to students who were in honors they wrote a paper every 2 or 3 weeks because they assumed you were ok because you passed that so you didn't have to do as much work in some sense. Calculus on the other hand

you just moved very fast but we just had an amazing teacher so it worked out. – Olivia

When Olivia responded that they learned how to procrastinate really well in AP classes, the question was followed by asking her whether she felt that AP really gave her skills to be successful in terms of time management, studying, and discussions. Olivia responded that she felt she was already decent at those things because she was always organized.

#### Students Were Not Influenced by the Cost Effectiveness of Early Start Programs

Six of the 20 students mentioned the cost effectiveness of early start programs, only after someone had informed them that it was a good program, financially. Even though the topic of cost effectiveness was discussed, it was not what students' based their decision on when deciding to participate. Charlotte knew about the program because of her brother and parents, and they mentioned that the courses would be cheaper than taking them in college. Isabel also recognized that the courses were both cost and time effective. She did not want to be in college for four years so thought she would rather pay a test fee and receive the college credits. Jeffery also heard about the courses being cost effective from siblings, but the cost effectiveness of the course was not the only deciding factor for his participation. He indicated that his brothers had said it would be cost effective but it would also provide a different learning environment than being in a big university classroom once he graduated high school. Lucas heard about the courses being cost effective from his mother, but he was not as concerned about the financial benefit of the program as he was the redundancy of taking the course at the high school

and college. Gabriella also felt that the classes were somewhat cost effective, but would have been more beneficial if she went to another college. Florence learned about the financial benefits from her teacher. She stated that her teacher told them at the beginning of the course that if they took the test and did well then they would have to pay for the credits, but for them it was \$10 per credit, so she would only have to pay \$30 and she could receive credit; pointing out to the class that this rate was cheaper than paying for a college class. Florence recognized even though the classes were cost effective at first, they may not be cost effective in the long run.

I think it would have been nice to probably have that knowledge and have someone say ok if you don't know what you want to do for college yet or you don't really know what track you want to put yourself on in that way I think it would be nice to know that... but it's just the cost really justifying what it probably came out as and in the end it has worked for me but I can see how it probably hasn't worked really well for other students. – Florence

#### Course Availability Influenced Course Registration

Eleven of 20 students based their course registration on what classes were available to them. This presents a dilemma because students were looking at availability of courses not transferability. This is an issue if the student wanted to get a jump start on college because how would they know they are taking courses that apply toward their college degree if they are not looking at transferability?

The students who completed AP or IB selected their courses based on their interest of the topic, their skill set, whether it would transfer, and/or because that was all that was offered at their school. The most common response for why they choose the classes they took, was because that was all that was offered at their high school.

Charlotte, Danika, Peter, and Nancy all chose their AP courses because that was all that was available to them.

I took most of them that were offered and a lot of it wasn't really my choice it was kind of what you needed to do to get through school so I took I signed up for the classes I needed to graduate, if there was an AP option I took it. – Nancy

Amber and Renae took the AP classes that they were interested in. Isabel chose her classes based on her skill set and what she was good at. Teresa enrolled in her class because she knew it would transfer to the university, based on her brother's experience of transferring the class.

Similar to the AP or IB course group, the most common response in the dual credit group for why a student completed certain courses was that the students chose the classes that were available to them. Bradley and Lucas indicated that the dual credit class they took was the only option available at the high school. Jeffery also stated that he completed courses were available to him because he was limited to what was offered in the schedule timeframe that would work for both high school and college schedule.

To make it work I was somewhat limited to what classes I could take as far as high school schedule to what classes I had to have that weren't offered at the college to. It's kind of limited so I only had each semester probably 2 maybe 3 classes to choose from within a certain time period so that was kind of the deciding factor of what was available at what time. – Jeffery

Other responses to why students completed specific dual credit courses was based on their interests, they wanted to get the course out of the way before college, the course fulfilled a high school graduation requirement, or the course fulfilled a college associate degree requirement. Gabriella chose her classes based on her interest and she wanted to

get her science out of the way before getting to college. Melissa completed classes based on her interests; she did not have a rhyme or reason. Eileen registered for classes at the college based on what she needed to graduate high school. Quinn chose her classes based on graduation requirements she needed to fulfill for an associate degree.

Similar to the other groups, for the students who completed both AP and dual credit courses, the most common response as to why the students chose the courses they did was based on what courses were available. Florence, Olivia, and Heather took classes based on what was available to them.

It was whatever was available. The college is pretty busy since it is the only community college that services the metro area so it was kind of whatever was open and didn't sound horrible. I didn't really get to take any classes that I thought were interesting or science. I wanted to take anatomy or chemistry but they weren't available so I ended up taking English and history classes. – Heather

#### Early Start Programs had an Impact on College Experience

During the interviews, each student was asked if they felt their early start classes had an impact on their college experience or developed skills needed in college. Sixteen of the 20 students agreed that the courses did prepare them for college and had an impact on their college experience. For those students who completed AP or IB, they learned how to write a good essay. Students who took dual credit or AP and dual credit learned how to manage their time. Regardless of which experience the student participated in, they gained confidence.

Charlotte, one of the students who completed AP, felt that the experience gave her more confidence in being able to participate in discussions and answer questions; it

helped to bring her out of her shell. Amber expressed that the experience helped her gain confidence and it taught her how to write effectively.

The writing has been huge, I think that is one of the reasons I have been so successful this far here. Yea I mean I think that is the most important skill going in to college. I think it gave me some more confidence in terms of participating in seminar style classes and definitely a lot of background knowledge to draw on. – Amber

Isabel had the same conclusion that the AP course helped her acquire skills in writing a good essay. In addition to teaching her how to write a good essay, Danika described how it helped prepare her for participating in discussions, critically read materials, and work in groups. Peter learned how to write a good essay during one of his AP classes. In addition, Peter felt that he gained competency on how to complete homework assignments and pull out important points from course materials. Renae also developed effective essay writing skills from the AP classes. In addition, she was introduced to a different grading model and developed good study skills. According to students who took AP or IB courses only, the common response on expertise acquired was they developed good essay writing skills.

Similar to the findings for students who participated in AP or IB, the students who participated in dual credit gained confidence. Bradley explained the courses gave him a little head start on what to expect but it also gave him confidence. Gabriella learned time management skills, was introduced to the syllabus, and developed professor relationship building traits while participating in early start. Quinn was prepared for what college classes were going to be like and developed time management skills. She learned how to be more independent for she experienced that no one was going to hold her hand

anymore; so she had to be more proactive. Melissa felt that time management was a skill learned, but also how to be professional in school. Melissa worked with Desire2Learn, an online platform for education, while participating in dual credit. The skills gained with the online class helped her learn how to navigate the site and be professional in an online class setting. Jeffery stated the dual credit class taught him responsibility and work ethic. General study habits were also acquired by early start participants. Lucas completed a dual credit course at the high school and then also at a local college and felt the biggest skill learned was how to study.

The findings for students who took both AP and dual credit were similar to the findings for the students above; it was evident that the early start courses have impacted their college experience. Florence was introduced to the college grading process, it provided her with an experience where she had to critically think, and taught her how to prioritize; all learning that was applicable to the college experience. Kelly took a language course as part of early start. While she expressed that some of the skills gained in this course are different than others since it was a language course, she did develop time management strategies. Samantha learned how to manage her time and ask for help. Heather felt her biggest skill acquired in early start was learning how to read the textbook.

#### Students Stated Transfer Process is not Consistent

The participants had different transfer experiences but common themes developed within this process. For example, students who completed the AP test felt that the

process of sending AP scores to institutions was seamless. Four students who needed to send transcripts for dual credit courses believed it was common sense or they assumed they would need to send the transcript. On the other hand, students were unsure on how to transfer their credits and initiated conversations with the institution on how to transfer the credits.

In the process of sending the AP scores, participants felt the process was smooth. Amber explained that the instructor informed them on the steps needed to have the scores sent somewhere. Renae simply said she filled out the slip before the test. Isabel did not know where she wanted to attend college so she had to follow up with College Board to have her scores sent somewhere else. Peter and Teressa also stated the process was seamless and they did not have to do anything to transfer the credits.

Once the scores were sent, there was mixed answers from students on who initiated the conversation with the university to see how their courses would transfer. Charlotte mentioned that she had to initiate the conversation. However, Danika sent the AP scores directly to the institution and then later received a letter from the college letting the student know how the credits transfer. When asked if students felt it was the responsibility of the high school or college to visit with them about the transfer process, Charlotte felt it was the college and Danika was not quite sure.

There was confusion from the students who completed dual credit courses on the transfer process. Jeffery worked with the college to have the dual credits transfer; he mentioned that the advisor at the community college where he took the dual credit classes assisted him with the transfer process. Eileen was one of the students who felt it was

common sense and knew she needed to request a transcript, so she just went to the transcript office to request a transcript be sent to where she was going to attend college. Bradley felt that there should be information on transferring and maybe the colleges could just give you a transcript; because he was used to high school when his grades were just posted on the wall. At the time of the interview, Bradley still had not requested his transcript because he was unclear of what steps he needed to take.

Gabriella and Melissa both visited with the college before their first semester of college, to visit with them about the transfer process. Gabriella mentioned that she looked at the admission application and then talked to an advisor at the institution she was transferring the credits to, just to make sure her credits would transfer. Melissa visited the college before she started attending and asked how her credits would transfer. I asked the students who took dual credit who they felt was responsible in assisting students through the transfer process. Melissa expressed that it was a shared responsibility between the high school and college.

Probably both I mean your high school counselors is supposed to help you get into college and choose the right colleges and your community college advisor is supposed to help you make sure everything is going to transfer ok and help you along with that process . – Melissa

Similar to the other groups, the students who completed both AP and dual credit had varying experiences when it came to the transfer process. Florence completed both AP and dual credit so was able to compare the transfer process for both programs. As highlighted below, the AP process was easy but the transferring of the dual credit class was more difficult. Florence received a letter from the institution that posted the dual credit class mid-summer reminding her they had a transcript, however, the actual process

of sending it to another institution was a challenging experience. Kelly and Olivia agreed with other participants that it seemed obvious and like common sense to be required to send a transcript of the dual credit classes, because they had to send a high school transcript as well. Heather was a student who at the time of the interview had not yet sent a transcript to the college. After learning from a family member about the transfer process, the student was able to send a transcript.

After visiting with students it was evident that there were assumptions that the courses would just transfer. When Samantha went to another college right out of high school, she had both the dual credit transcript and AP scores sent. However, when she transferred to the institution where this research took place, she did not have her AP scores sent for she thought the credits would not transfer. Heather just assumed her credits would transfer.

#### Students Reported Confusion on how Early Start Courses Apply

It varied from student to student on whether or not they knew how their AP and/or dual credit classes applied toward their college degree. There seemed to be a misconception or misunderstanding of how the credits apply toward their programs. Did the credits fulfill a requirement for college graduation, did the course just fulfill a pre-requisite requirement, did taking the course just mean the student could skip that specific course but then they needed to make up the credits in another area of their degree?

Students who completed AP indicated that their AP courses fulfilled core requirements. Amber expressed that since she changed her major, the AP courses

counted more toward her major requirements; which was nice because since she started her new major late now she only has four years instead of five years until she can graduate. Charlotte stated that the courses applied toward her core. Danika had a positive transfer experience and mentioned that she was exempt from writing, math, humanities, and social sciences. She stated that she only had to do her diversity and communication requirement, along with her natural science requirement. Isabel claimed she entered college with 14 credits so she had her entire first semester under her belt. She did not need to take writing, a social science, or a history course. Nancy indicated most of her classes applied toward some general requirements and stated she only needed to take two general education courses. Peter mentioned that he did not have to take writing in college, and that it was nice when he got to college that he got six credits for the course. He explained that if he wanted to graduate in four or four-and-a-half years, those credits would be helpful. Quinn's classes filled some pre-requisite requirements for her major. According to Renae, her classes covered her general education requirements. She discussed how she was able to start with higher level courses in certain areas, which was helpful for her.

The students who completed dual credit courses said most of their courses did not transfer and apply toward their degree. Eileen discussed how she still had to take four core classes once she started college. This was after completing two years of college courses at a college while participating in dual credit. Gabriella mentioned that most of her classes did not transfer. She did explained how her psychology course did at least help make another course she needed in college easier. She specified that her science

course and writing course fulfilled a general education requirement. Jeffery agreed that a couple of his classes did not really do him a whole lot of good. He said they covered some general education requirements but other than that the rest were electives. Lucas explained that since he changed his major, his classes do not really fulfill any requirements, except for fulfilling a math general education requirement.

Students appeared to have the misconception of how long it takes to graduate college with a bachelor's degree. Instead of looking at the transfer of credits from the mindset that they could possibly graduate college in less than four years, they looked at the transfer of credits of allowing them to not have as heavy as a workload and graduate in four years. Melissa's dual credit courses covered her general education requirements; however, she felt that meant that she did not have to take as heavy as a workload. In her perspective, she could take 12 credits a semester and still graduate in four years; this was a similar mindset that Peter from the AP group had as well.

Florence's AP courses fulfilled requirements for her major, however, that was not the case for her dual credit course. Heather mentioned that she looked at the transfer equivalency guide to see how her credits would transfer, and discovered they mainly fulfilled her general education requirements. Kelly stated that she was able to skip her writing literature courses. Olivia felt that all her credits were worth it, plus she was able to be considered a sophomore in terms of her college room assignment, based on how many credits she was transferring in.

All my credits are worth it, I got out of writing classes I do not need to take any science classes and I skipped calc I and calc II plus I have a lot of elective credits so considered a year ahead of what I am. Which is really nice when it comes to things like scheduling or like last year I got my own

room because I was considered a sophomore instead of a freshman so that was super nice. – Olivia

### Students Needed More Information on Transferability, Earlier Major and College Decisions

Students who completed AP, dual credit, or AP and dual credit courses expressed the need for more information on the transferability of courses. They indicated it was important that students make earlier major and college decisions. One of the students who completed AP courses, Amber, explained it would have been nice if the schools had an hour long workshop about AP classes, similar to an assembly format. She advocated that it would be good if a college representative went into the freshman history classes and explained the benefits of AP and do some public relations for the program.

According to Amber, a lot of kids were unaware how AP was beneficial, and instead the kids saw it as classes that just the nerds take. She described that the assembly would make AP a little more accessible to kids whose parents weren't necessarily going to push that type of education. Amber asserted that the credit transfer was one of the areas that colleges did not really focus on their websites, and yet she believed it was a big factor when kids are applying to college. She thought it would be helpful if the universities, such as their websites, were more informative about transferring. For example, universities need to inform students if they accept AP, what the minimum score is needed to receive credit, and if the colleges looked at AP courses in terms of their application to attend. Amber suggested that institutions include this information in their mailings and literature as well.

Danika heard that some classes do not transfer for students, so she thought maybe having someone talk to students about AP would be beneficial. Such as, having college representatives go to the high schools and visit about AP; and if a student has AP, letting them know what it fulfills. She mentioned that she was really surprised when she got a letter from the university over the summer saying that her AP courses transferred. She suggested someone should visit with the students about the credit hours, what it means and how they transfer.

Nancy expressed that it would have been nice to know more about practicing for the AP test. She had a couple of classes that did provide practice opportunities, but she felt it would have been good to practice for the test throughout the year, as opposed to the two weeks before the exam. Peter communicated that more information about the class structure of an AP course before taking it would be helpful. For example, he explained with his high school classes, most of them were 20 minutes of lecture and 30 minutes to do your homework. However, with the AP course being similar to a college course, they lectured the whole time and homework was supposed to be completed on your own time. This took some getting used to for Peter and encouraged that it would be helpful for kids to know ahead of time.

Renaë suggested that having an idea of the grading scale would have been beneficial because when everyone received their first paper back in her AP course, they were all shocked and not prepared for it. Renaë recommended that there be more explanation on how the credits transfer.

I think also for some people that weren't going into social studies they did have a good experience and I think it did cover their general requirements,

but I was definitely glad I didn't take AP calc or science classes because they would not have done a whole lot for me here... I think any of them could definitely transfer into general requirements, but sometimes it is nice to know that "oh this could also cover part of your other degree classes" other than core. - Renae

Gabriella, one of the students who completed dual credit courses, wished she would have known what she was going to major in before she signed up for classes, this way she could have been more informed of which ones would apply toward her major. She recognized that was maybe her error in not looking into it but she did not think many 16 year olds actually do look into it. She expressed that students typically do not know where they are going yet and the requirements change depending on the school. Melissa also wished that they would have stressed more to students that if they knew what they wanted to do then to choose classes that would apply toward their major.

Jeffery mentioned that the college he was at had a set standard of what classes counted for what requirement. He felt that if he and his counselor at the community college looked a little deeper into what classes transferred that would have helped because then he would have taken a couple different classes that would have transferred as more harder classes. Jeffery advised that if there were forms of what classes were required for a certain degree, and if electives were required, that would have been helpful. He mentioned that he had earned some credits from the experience, but at a certain point he did not need any more electives and yet that was all that was offered. Lucas explained that in terms of transferring credit, it would have been good to know that some transferred in as elective credits. He stressed the importance for students to know whether the institution counts a transfer GPA into the overall GPA.

Quinn wished her high school would have been more proactive and helped her more. She felt that it would have been beneficial to have a dual credit counselor who knew information about high school due dates. She believed the institution where she was attending college treated her as a special circumstance, because they did not seem to know how to work with dual credit students. She explained that all the people she talked to were confused on how she was a freshman with junior status.

The students who completed both AP and dual credit courses had similar feelings as the other students, there needed to be more information on transferring the credits and knowing more about what to major in. According to Heather, it would have been advantageous if someone at the institution she was attending now would have told her she needed to transfer her credits or have her submit her transcript before she registered for classes. Samantha knew what she wanted to do, but had she known that United States history would have fulfilled a requirement for her major in college, than she would have taken that as opposed to world history. She said that she choose world history because of her interest in the subject, not knowing which one would be more beneficial for her college degree. Olivia agreed with other participants and wished she had made an earlier decision of what she wanted to do and where she wanted to attend college.

#### Students Had Advice for Future Early Start Participants

When participants were asked what advice they would give prospective early start students, participants responded with advice on time management, protecting your GPA, and location on a dual credit course. Jeffery, a student who completed dual credit, suggested that staying organized and on top of things was very important. He said he

would just tell them to be organized and use your resources because that was the biggest thing that he had come to realize. Lucas advised that an early start class at the high school was easier, in terms of protecting the high school GPA.

Well in terms of protecting your GPA taking the class at the high school is a million times easier because I just breezed right through it the whole entire year. The one at the college was definitely a different experience because I had to commute a half hour to school every morning for an entire summer and the fact the course was accelerated because the summer quarter is only 10 weeks or something that was a little different. Then in terms of taking it at the college, the classes were longer I think it was an hour and 15 minutes instead of 59 or 60 that we had in high school plus the lab. It was more time involved I guess was one thing. – Lucas

Melissa encouraged that a student would get a better experience by taking a dual credit class on campus versus at the high school or online. She felt that if a student wanted to get that college credit, they should get that college experience too. She expressed that the experience at the college was different because she heard so many points of view and met so many different types of people, personalities, ages, and ethnicities.

Florence, one of the students who took both AP and dual credit, would advise a future early start student to take a variety of AP classes. She understood based on her experience, that lots of AP courses fulfilled the same general education requirement, so she would hope that future students know to make sure they are taking courses that fulfill different requirements.

The thing that is good about AP is that you get the credit but it's also if you don't know what you want to do and you take all these same classes and you get to college, so if I decided I wanted to be an engineering major, these wouldn't help me at all. So that would be \$80 per test, and \$240 for 3 tests that I really didn't need. But for me they worked, I think it's better

if you have an idea of what you are doing to take those classes. I think it would have been a little better to take a class like AP biology and get rid of that core and have that variety and get rid of things easier. – Florence

### Parents' Point of View

The parent interviews explored how the parents first heard about the opportunities, who initiated the conversation about the program, how were the parents informed of the program, their level of familiarity with the program, who they believed was most influential in their students decision to participate, thoughts on why their student participated, what type of discussions took place with their student when they found out about the program, their level of involvement in the program, thoughts on the credit transferring processes, and what they felt would've been helpful to know. Based on the interviews, I discovered that these students informed their parents about early start programs and initiated that conversation with them. While 8 of 20 students expressed they were the most influential factor in their decision to participate, parents felt that a high school teacher was the most influential person. Parents believed students were participating in early start programs to receive college credit; while the students indicated they were really interested in the challenge. When visiting with students about the early start programs, the topic of discussion for many parents with their student included a discussion about time management and confidence. Parents felt that they were not involved in the early start process of selecting courses and registering. Similar to the student responses, the transfer process of transferring early start credits was unclear.

Parents wished there was more information about the early start program in general and on the transfer process; such as how the credits and grade point average (GPA) transfer.

#### Students Informed Parents about Early Start Programs

Before visiting with the parents on how familiar they were with the specific program their student participated in, we discussed how familiar, in general, the parent was with early start programs overall. Based on the interviews with the mothers, half of them were only informed about the early start opportunities because of their student, two of the parents knew about early start program in general because they participated in early start when they were in high school, and two parents were familiar with it because they had another child participate in the program.

When visiting about the specific early start program that their student participated in, four of the parents were informed from their student when they brought home information, two of the parents were apprised of the program through parent teacher conferences and information sessions, one parent could not remember how they learned about the specific program, and one parent heard about the dual credit program when her oldest child started going to college. Regardless of how the parents were informed of the specific program, five of the eight parents indicated that it was the student who initiated the early start conversation with them.

#### Parents Felt Teachers were Most Influential

Unlike the students, the parents felt that the teachers were the most influential person in their decision to participate in the early start programs. Based on the student

interviews, 8 of 20 students indicated that their own self was the main influential factor in participating. Six of the eight parents stated that a teacher was the most influential person in the students' decision to participate. One parent believed that the counselor was most influential and one parent felt the student, themselves, was the most influential person.

She had a positive experience with a certain teacher that lead to her liking the topic better which therefore lead her to taking or that teacher saying you'd be a good candidate for AP math. She knows math and loved her math teacher and would go out of her way to try harder to do well because of that teacher's influence on her. – Mother of Senior with AP credits

Parents Believed Students  
Participated for the College Credit

Unlike the student responses, parents felt that students were taking early start classes mainly to receive college credit. Based on the student interviews, 12 of 20 students indicated they were taking the courses for the challenge. Four of the eight parents felt their students were taking the early start classes because they wanted to get the college credit and have that jump start on college. Three of the parents felt that their student completed classes because they wanted a challenge and one parent felt their student took the course because they were interested in the topic.

I think because she wanted to just have that edge when she went to college and already having the college credits and I don't really think she even knew that it would fulfill her math requirement or her degree. I am not sure that she really knew that but it's just to get ahead because you know you have that advancement over other people I think that is why she did it. – Mother of Freshman with both AP and dual credit

Parents Main Concern was  
Confidence and Time Management

Once students initiated the conversation with parents about the early start programs, there were then informal discussions between the parent and the student about the opportunity. Half of the parents, so two parents who had students take AP courses and two parents who had students take dual credit courses, indicated that they discussed time management with their students. They wanted to make sure the student would be able to manage their time with college courses and handle the work load. Parents were also concerned whether their student had the confidence needed to take college level courses. Specifically, a mother of a student who took dual credit courses explained that their discussion with the student revolved around confidence for the parent was concerned whether the student was developmentally ready to be at a college taking courses. Only one parent, a mother of a dual credit student, explained that the main topic of discussion about the early start program included the cost effectiveness of it. Another mother of a student who completed AP courses indicated that they mentioned the cost effectiveness of the program, but that was not the main topic of discussion. One parent, a mother of a student who completed both AP and dual credit courses, did not really discuss anything with their student because the student had all the information prepared and they were just so excited to learn that they could receive college credit for the courses. In addition, one parent of a student who completed AP courses did not really have discussions with their student because they did not have any concerns that their student would not do well. One parent of a student who completed dual credit,

questioned whether the early start program would negatively impact the high school experience and cause their student to miss out on special high school memories.

First thing that comes to my mind was my concern was that she would miss out and miss her friends because she had a very tight circle of friends and miss out on the, where I considered the less pressured day to day activities in high school as opposed to college. That was my first my impression and concern. I don't think I was really concerned that she wouldn't be able to do the class work because she had explained to me right away that it was not high school classes given at the college it was college classes given at the college. I don't recall whether she said she had to test for them but she did tell me that she had checked them out and she felt she could handle them. My feeling was that when she brought the information to me she had already researched this and I was so used to her style which was never flying by the seat of her pants it was always so well prepared that she laid things out.- Mother of Senior with dual credit

#### Parents Were Not Involved in the Early Start Process

Parents felt that they were not involved in the early start process such as selecting what courses to take and steps needed to register for those courses. Six of the eight parents indicated that they did not play a role in the early start process; their involvement was limited to just paying for the class(es). One of the parents of a student who completed dual credit claimed that they were involved in the course selection process because they required their student to take classes at the college that played to the student's strengths and the courses their student struggled in were taken at the high school.

#### Parents Reported Transfer Process was Confusing

Similar to the student responses, there seemed to be confusion among parents about the transferring of early start credits to a four-year research university. Only two of

the eight parents indicated that they felt the transfer process was seamless, one parent was of a student with dual credit and one parent was of a student with AP credit. Two parents mentioned that they did not assist students in this process, their student did all the work on their own so they were not sure what steps they took and whether it was a challenging process. The other parents however, expressed that there were challenges with transferring the credits and they assisted their student in the process. A mother of a senior with AP credits recognized that there were challenges with how credits transferred, so it was not always possible to knock off required college credits for a degree.

So academically, yes it challenges you more, so it is still good but if your main goal was to thinking you're going to knock off some college credit then it's kinda of a disappointment maybe. – Mother of Senior with AP credits

Mother A of a sophomore with AP credits explained they assisted their student in looking up how AP credits transferred by referring to the College Board website. This parent mentioned that it was confusing because institutions required different scores so they had to figure out what scores each institution would accept. Mother A of a sophomore with dual credit commented that they asked college representatives on how to transfer the early start credits as her daughter was applying to different schools. This parent mentioned that colleges, themselves, were confused about the transfer process of early start credits. According to the same mother, colleges were not familiar with the early start program so it was often difficult for them to get accurate or complete information about how the credits would actually transfer. Another parent, mother of a senior with dual credit, also expressed that there were struggles in the transfer process. The parent explained that it took a lot of work and exchange with the institution for the

student to find out how their credits transferred. The mother stated that the student was already in school when the institution finally told her how they would accept her credits.

#### Parents Needed More Information on Early Start Programs and Transferability

When visiting with parents about what would have been helpful to know, half of the parents indicated that there should be more information about the early start programs and transferability of the courses; specifically information about how the credits and GPA transfer to an institution. Two of the eight parents felt that nothing else would have been helpful to know, because they believed it was up to the student to be informed. One parent wished they would have been more proactive in asking questions and understanding the credit process. Another parent, a mother of a dual credit student, reported that colleges need to be more informed of early start programs.

I think the piece that was most frustrating for her and us was that a lot of colleges were not familiar with this high school post-secondary experience where they have these college credits and have been taking college classes that was the piece that was a little bit frustrating. So one of the questions for her is, is she a transfer student because she is transferring from a community college or is she legitimately a freshman but then how do you account for these credits coming in? – Mother A of Sophomore with dual credit

#### Director of Admissions Point of View

A director of admissions at a four-year research university was asked to describe the process a student takes to transfer in early start classes to their institution. The director explained that the students were required to send a transcript to the institution and that for dual credit students, those students were treated like any freshman. The

director expressed concerns on whether students were developmentally ready for an early start experience and to graduate college early. According to the director, students initiated the transfer conversation with the institution. The director believed that early start programs provided a great challenge for students, but at the same time wondered if society was pushing students too much to rush through life. Based on personal experiences, the director felt that AP was a more beneficial early start program than dual credit. For students in dual credit, the director felt there should be dual responsibility between the high school and the college with a check and balance system, in regards to being responsible for the students in the program.

#### Are Students Developmentally Ready for Early Start Courses?

The director reported that the institution believed former early start participants should not be treated like a transfer student due to developmental reasons. The director's view of whether these students were developmentally ready for college courses, in terms of social and academic maturity, was consistent with the parents view. The director explained that even though the students were transferring in college credit, they were still only 18 years old, so developmentally was this advantageous for the student. The director wondered if a student who graduated college at 20 years old because they transferred in early start credits, were developmentally mature to enter the professional world. The director was passionate in believing that college was an experience, both in terms of credits and life. Explaining that college was more of an experience both in and outside the classroom, the director felt college provides students with life opportunities

where students may mature and learn while preparing to enter the professional world. As a result, the director was not sure if this type of experience, early start courses, served the students well in terms of being developed socially and academically.

Transfer Information is Located Online;  
Students Need to Initiate the Conversation

According to the director, students know how their early start courses transfer and fulfill college requirements because the articulations, such as the AP articulations, were available online. The director indicated that someone from the university does not always visit with the early start students about transferring in their credits; they only visit with them if a student asks. In response to one of the parents concerns about why a GPA did not transfer, just the credits, I asked the director for more information on this process. In response, the director was not familiar with the process of transferring a GPA.

Great Challenge for Students,  
but is Society Pushing too Much?

The director expressed that a positive outcome with early start programs was that it provided a great challenge to the students. According to the director, the program was great for kids to be enriched and challenged, for these programs were valuable for students who needed the challenge. However, a negative outcome, from the director's perspective, was that society was pushing kids to get things done and have them take hard classes; but this track may not always be in the best interest of the student. Students should enjoy high school and slow down, for the student may be better off going the traditional route and enjoy high school life before college. The director perceived that

families pushed the early start program because it saved money, but the student may not want to get out of college earlier. An important outcome, from the director's point of view, was that early start programs should be more for enrichment and less for societal purposes; society does not need to make kids grow up too fast, the students do not need to be in a hurry.

Believes AP is More Beneficial  
than Dual Credit

Based on personal bias, the director explained that dual credit was not beneficial when a student was 17 years old attending at a college or when the dual credit class was at the high school because it was not a realistic introduction to college. The director stated that AP was more beneficial because the students were still able to be a high school student so they were not rushed through and pushed through life. The director described times when they served on scholarship committees in the past and when selecting student scholarship recipients, the committee did not choose students based on whether they had completed AP and dual credit classes. Instead they based their decisions on interesting things that students had completed when in high school, such as volunteering. Although the benefits of AP courses to college outcomes was not specifically addressed, the director believed the positive outcome of early start was for students to be challenged and enriched.

Document Analysis

The document analysis specifically analyzed the academic transcripts that students gave me permission to evaluate. As the researcher, I was not assessing the advising that took place in course registration. I examined the early start courses students completed and compared them with degree requirements listed in the university catalog. Table 8 below highlights the type of dual credit courses and AP courses completed by students and the frequency that those courses appeared on the transcripts; the information in the table is not a conclusive list of the participants in this study, it is a list from transcripts provided to me by the participants.

Table 8. Early Start Courses

<b>AP and IB classes</b>	<b>Frequency</b>
Humanities (American History I and II, Introduction to Literature, Western Civilization I and II)	22
College Writing (Writing I and II)	8
Social Science (US Government)	5
Math (Calculus I and II, Introduction to Statistics)	6
Diversity (Human Geography)	1
Science (Chemistry and Physics)	2
<b>Total</b>	<b>44</b>
<b>Dual Credit Classes</b>	<b>Frequency</b>
Courses that do not fulfill a General Education Requirement (Activity Classes, Aids Education, Service Learning, Business Law, Capstone, Sociology of Family, Voice, Abnormal Psychology, Health Education, British Literature, College Writing II, Human Relations, American Sign Language, Introduction to Business, Art for Elementary Education, Early Childhood Development)	24

Table 8 Continued

Social Sciences (Introduction to Psychology, Introduction to Sociology, Government, Introduction to Economics, Human Development)	12
Sciences (Chemistry, Biology, Environmental Science, Oceanography)	8
College Writing (College Writing I)	7
Humanities (History, Philosophy, Introduction to Literature, Western Civilization)	7
Math (Statistics, Calculus I and II, Math for Elementary Education II)	5
Diversity (Spanish, German, Human Geography, Anthropology)	4
Communication	3
Fine Arts (Studio Arts, Visual Art)	3
<b>Total</b>	<b>73</b>

\*In this count I referred to the transcript that did not include the college credits, just early start credits, so this number will be different than overall numbers below

The transcripts were analyzed based on the students' major that they indicated they were pursuing at the time of the interview. Of the students, 17 of them gave me a copy of their transcript to analyze. One of the transcripts only showed their transfer work, but not their academic work once they were in college, so I was not able to evaluate the transcript and determine if the students' early start courses applied toward a certain major. The analysis of the other 16 transcripts is outlined in the table below. When referring to elective requirements below, I am using the term elective as credits that are not fulfilling a general education requirement or major requirement, including major elective credits. As a note, not all degrees require general electives to graduate. For example, if a degree required 30 credits of general education courses and then 90 credits of major requirements (including major elective requirements), that would equal

120 credits. If the minimum amount of credits to graduate was 120 credits, then this major example would show that general elective credits were not needed to graduate with the degree. Table 9 in Appendix G provides a detailed analysis of how courses on each transcript transferred to the institution. Looking across the 16 transcripts, there were a total of 114 early start classes in this analysis. Of the 114 classes, 59 courses fulfilled a general education requirement; 43 courses fulfilled an elective requirement; and 12 courses fulfilled a major requirement. Out of the 16 transcripts that were analyzed, 9 of the transcripts showed that students who had completed a general education course, later took a course in that same general education category once in college. Of those 9 transcripts, 4 transcripts had multiple general education categories where students took classes in early start and in college that fulfilled the same category. In addition, out of those 9 transcripts where students took courses that fulfilled the same category, both in early start and in college, there were 5 transcripts where the general education course that was then taken again in college was not an additional course needed for their indicated major. An anomaly that was noticed in the analysis, was that there were two students who completed college level math courses for early start and then when they were in college they had to take additional math general education course for their major; for both instances the additional math that they completed once in college was a level lower than the college math course completed in early start. In summary, the document analysis suggests that, in general, early start courses transfer. The more precise question, however, is how the courses transfer? Out of 114 courses examined in this analysis, 43

courses fulfilled elective requirements. As previously, mentioned not all degrees require electives to graduate.

### Summary

This chapter explored the different points of view from the students' perspective, the parent's perspective, and a director of admissions perspective. In addition, through document analysis, academic transcripts were evaluated. This study has discovered that students participated in early start programs because they wanted to be challenged. This research revealed that students were influenced by their high school teacher more than their high school counselors; it was reported that students believed high school counselors did not play an influential role in the process. Parents supported their students in the experience; however, they were not involved in the course selection and registration process. Based on the data, it is evident that more information needs to be available to students and parents about the transfer process. The director of admissions indicated that AP courses would be more beneficial for students instead of dual credit courses. Chapter 5 interprets the findings from this chapter and answers the five research questions originally posed. It compares the results with the literature to see if there are consistencies or new discoveries. In addition, the next chapter provides recommendations based on the findings and suggests future research involving early start programs.

## CONCLUSIONS

### Research Design

This research explored the early start experience, through the analysis of a case study. “A case study is an in-depth exploration of a bounded system (e.g. an activity, event, process, or individuals) based on extensive data collection” (Creswell, 2008). This research was a collective case study, where multiple cases of early start were described to provide an in-depth look into the early start experience. The case study examined 20 former early start participants and looked at the experience through their eyes; specifically exploring their transfer experience in transferring the early start course to a four-year research state university. Of the 20 students that were interviewed, 8 students completed AP or IB courses, 7 students completed dual credit, and 5 students completed both AP and dual credit courses. In addition, for each case where student consent was provided, the study explored the parents’ role in the early start experience and how they viewed their students’ experience. Out of the 20 students interviewed, 16 students gave permission to interview one of their parents; out of the 16 parents, 8 mothers agreed and participated in the interview. The research then explored the view of early start programs from the view point of a director of admissions at a four-year research state university. For each case, with student consent, there was document analysis to analyze the students’ college transcript and the transferability of the early start course(s); there were 17 transcripts used in the document analysis.

The research discovered that the prospect of being challenged in an early start course was the reason students participated in the program. Students experienced confusion and challenges while transferring the early start courses to a research university. In addition, the students learned about early start opportunities from their high school teachers rather than high school counselors. The parents of early start participants, along with a director of admissions at a four year research university, had concerns on whether high school students were developmentally ready to participate in a college course, while in high school. Through interviews and document analysis, this case study reveals an in-depth exploration into the early start experience; informing students, parents, and educators on the early start process.

### Problem and Purpose

Early start programs were initially developed to provide high school students with a jump start on college credit. In order to determine the effectiveness and transferability of early start programs, post-secondary education administrators, secondary education educators, students, and parents need to have an in-depth understanding of the students' early start experience. The purpose of this collective case study was to provide an in-depth understanding of the early start experience for students; specifically looking at the early start experience from the students' point of view, the parents' point of view, and the post-secondary education point of view. The early start experience refers to the students participation in an Advanced Placement program, dual credit program, or both an Advanced Placement and a dual credit program while the student was in high school.

### Research Questions

1. How do students view the early start experience?
  - a. What were their expectations?
  - b. What actually happened?
2. How do students experience the process of transferring early start credits to a post-secondary education institution?
3. How do parents view the early start experience?
  - a. What were their expectations?
  - b. What actually happened?
4. What is the role of high school counselors in the early start experience?
5. How transferable are early start courses to a four-year research university?
  - a. If early start courses are transferring to a four-year research university, are those credits fulfilling a core requirement, major requirement, or an elective requirement?

This chapter interprets the findings from Chapter 4 and answers the five research questions originally posed. Next, it compares the results with the literature to see if there are consistencies or new discoveries. It then provides recommendations based on the findings and suggests possible future research involving early start programs.

Addressing the Research QuestionsResearch Question 1: How do Students  
View the Early Start Experience?

Regardless of the program that the students participated in, whether it was AP or IB, dual credit, or AP and dual credit, students reported that they were responsible for initiating the early start conversation with their high school counselor. In addition, 8 of 20 students stated that they were the most influential person in their decision to participate in an early start experience; the students who completed dual credit only classes expressed more than the other two groups that there was also family influences on their decision to participate. Other influential factors that students reported include: parent (7 students), teacher (4 students), peer (3 students), sibling (3 students), and grandparents (1 student). A finding inconsistent with the literature is that students did not feel that high school counselors were an influential factor in their decision to participate in an early start program. This study supports the literature and demonstrates that college planning discussions take place between students and their parents.

Twelve out of 20 students mentioned that their main reason for participating in early start was for the challenge. For the students who took both AP and dual credit courses, their expectation that the dual credit courses would provide a challenge was not fulfilled, for they felt the AP classes provided more of a challenge. Additional goals for participating in early start included: to get away from high school, to try the college class structure, and to graduate high school with both a high school diploma and associate degree. When students discussed the cost effectiveness of courses, it was only mentioned

because someone else told them it would be financially beneficial. The expectation that courses were cost effective was not always fulfilled for students because not all the credits fulfilled a requirement needed to graduate with their college degree. Students chose which early start courses to take based on course availability, not necessarily transferability.

Students indicated that AP helped to improve their high school experience, provided them with serious learning, and kept them out of trouble. All students seemed informed from the first day that they needed to take a test at the end of the semester to receive college credit. For students who completed both AP and dual credit courses, they indicated that the AP courses were more beneficial and challenging than their dual credit courses; this response was the same for students who took dual credit courses at the high school and students who took the dual credit at the college.

Dual credit students who completed the course at the high school felt that the course at the high school was easier because they knew the teacher. For these courses, they signed up for the class at the high school. The students who completed dual credit at the college had to fill out paperwork at the high school but then worked with the college to register. It was discovered that high school counselors were the gatekeepers of dual credit paperwork.

Students reported that early start courses had an impact on their college experience. These impacts included students gained confidence, improved writing skills, learned to work in groups, participated in class discussions, introduced to different grading models, acquired study skills, obtained time management skills, developed

professor relationship skills, attained professionalism, gained familiarity with online classes. For students who took AP or IB courses, the most common skill acquired was how to write a good essay. Becoming an effective writer was the most common skill acquired for students who completed AP or IB courses. Managing time was the most common skill for students who took dual credit or AP and dual credit classes. Regardless of the program, students gained confidence while participating in early start. The student outcomes for former early start participants in this study are similar to student outcomes discovered in previous research regarding early start programs; specifically the outcome of developing a sense of time management skills.

#### Research Question 2: How do Students Experience the Process of Transferring Early Start Credits?

In addressing research question 2, it was discovered that the transfer process is not consistent for early start participants. Students are not familiar with college processes before participating in early start; 16 students indicated they were not at all familiar with college processes. At the time of the study, there were two students who did not have their transcripts sent to the college because they were not familiar with the transfer process. For students who participated in AP or IB courses, transferring credits seemed seamless but there were inconsistencies on how students were informed about how the credits would apply toward their college degree. There was confusion from the students who completed dual credit courses on the process of how to transfer credits and they felt there should be more information available to students on the transfer experience. For students who completed both AP and dual credit courses, the process of transferring the

AP credits seemed to be less complex than transferring the dual credit classes. The interviews revealed that students have incorrect assumptions on how their early start courses transfer. For example, if a student assumes that an AP course would not fulfill the requirement for college they would not send the scores. These are assumptions that the students have made themselves. In addition, it was not uncommon for an early start student to have to initiate the conversation with the college when trying to learn how the courses applied toward their college degree.

There seemed to be a misconception or misunderstanding of how the credits apply toward their college degrees. Did the credits fulfill a requirement for college graduation, did the course just fulfill a pre-requisite requirement, or did taking the course just mean the student could skip that specific course but then they needed to make up the credits in another area of their degree? At the time of the interview, two students had not sent their transcripts to have the credits evaluated. Students who had their transcripts evaluated believed their credits applied toward their general education requirements. Based on the document analysis, 59 courses fulfilled general education requirements, 43 courses fulfilled elective requirements, and 12 courses fulfilled major requirements.

### Research Question 3: How do Parents View the Early Start Experience?

It was discovered that half of the parents learned about the early start program that their student participated in directly from the student. It was difficult to define what the parents expectations were because they played more of a supporter role than an initiator role. Unlike the students' point of view, the parents felt the most influential person in

their students' decision to participate in early start was a teacher. Also, contrary to what the students' thought, parents believed that the main reason for a student to participate in early start was for the college credit.

The parents' main concern for their son or daughter to participate in early start was whether the student had enough confidence and if they would be able to manage their time. During informal discussions, parents visited with their child about their time management skills and whether the student could handle the college work load. Only one parent mentioned that the main topic of discussion was the cost effectiveness of the program; other parents discussed this with their child but it was not the main topic of discussion. In addition, parents revealed that they were not involved in the early start process; six of the eight parents indicated that they were not involved in the process of selecting courses and registering.

The transfer process was unclear to parents. Even though parents reported that they were not involved in the course selection and registration process, six of the eight parents assisted their student with transferring the credits. Of the eight parents, two parents did not assist their student in transferring the work, two parents felt it was a seamless process, and the other four parents felt there were some challenges with this process. Parents realized that not all classes transferred so the parent and student realized that it was not always possible to get college credit out of the way. Another parent recognized that all institutions required different minimum AP scores so it was confusing to know what institutions required what score. There was confusion on how and when students found out how their early credits applied toward their college degree;

emphasizing that there were lots of phone calls to admission offices on the process. In addition, parents recognized that institutions were not familiar in working with students who transferred in early start credits; for example, do they classify the student as a freshman or a junior even if the student is 18 years old?

Research Question 4: What is the Role of High School Counselors in the Early Start Experience?

In addressing research question number 4, what is the role of high school counselors in the early start experience; it quickly became evident that the students did not feel that counselors played a role in the early start experience. When visiting with students about permission to conduct a phone interview with their parent and a high school counselor, many students didn't even know or remember who their counselor was. In addition, when visiting with students about who initiated the early start conversation and who was most influential in their decision to participate, students mentioned that they worked more with their teachers than they did with high school counselors. Based on the students' point of view, the role the counselors played, if any, was that they were the gatekeepers to the dual credit papers that students needed to fill out if they were doing dual credit at a college campus.

Research Question 5: How Transferable are Early Start Courses to a Four-Year Research University?

To address the fifth research question, how transferable are early start courses to a four-year research university, a phone interview was conducted with a director of admissions at a four year research institution and a document analysis was conducted

with the student transcripts who provided me with permission to analyze their transcripts. The director indicated that students who received dual credit were treated as freshman students and the institution believed that the students should not be treated like a transfer student, for developmental reasons. In regards to the transfer process and how students found out how their credits apply, the director indicated that students knew because articulations, such as AP articulations, were available online. The director also indicated that someone from the university does not always visit with the students about transferring in their credits; they only visit with them if someone asks. The document analysis revealed that a majority of the courses completed were fulfilling either general education or elective requirements. Out of 114 early start courses, 59 courses fulfilled a general education requirement, 43 courses fulfilled elective requirements; and 12 courses fulfilled a major requirement. The common early start courses that students were transferring in were College Writing I (most common), American History, Introduction to Psychology, United States Government, Introduction to Literature, activity classes, College Writing II, and Chemistry.

### Comparisons with the Literature

As found in the literature review, policy makers noticed the gap between requirements needed to graduate high school and requirements needed to be admitted to college (Boswell, 2000). As an example, high school students are required to take one or more admission tests for college, such as the SAT or ACT. Then, once students arrive to the university to register for their first semester of classes they are typically required to

take another test, a placement exam, to measure where they are at with their math and writing skills. Boswell (2000) explains, "this system of uncoordinated tests and requirements can create significant barriers for students, particularly for poor and minority students who are most likely to come from high schools that do not do a good job of preparing students for college success" (p. 5). This research has shown that required placement tests create a barrier for students. For example, a dual credit student completed more than a year's worth of college credit before they started college. However, when they went to apply to colleges, colleges placed more weight on admission tests than the fact the student successfully completed more than a year's worth of college credits.

The literature review reports that there is no institutional collaboration. For example, students who are in a dual credit program are required to contact their high school and sponsor of their dual credit course separately for a copy of their records (Hughes, et al., 2005). This process impacts the students' ability to receive high school credit for their college courses, because the student is responsible for sharing the information with the two institutions (Hughes, et al., 2005). This research found that it depended on the program as to the level of collaboration between the high school and the college. However, the programs that had specific early start coordinators designed to assist students through the early start program seemed beneficial to the students. This provided a person for students to contact and visit with about both high school and college requirements.

Wilbur (1982) points out that in evaluating an early start program, one of the questions that needs to be addressed is, "Is the credit students earn easily transferable to other colleges and universities?" (p. 5). Heath (2008) discovered in her research that some students experienced challenges when transferring to a university. This study confirmed that students experienced challenges when transferring credits. Not only did students experience challenges in the process of transferring credits, but they discovered that not all their early start classes applied toward the college degree that they are pursuing.

The literature reports that if students hear about college opportunities they will plan for their college career. Berry (2003) suggests that students will plan to prepare and attend college if high school administrators, counselors, and teachers start talking to students and their parents early on in school. In this study, students mentioned many times that they wish they knew where they were going to attend college and what they were going to major in, so they could plan what classes to take that would transfer into that specific program at that specific school. This study supports the position that students need to hear about college going opportunities and the specific programs available to them early on; in addition they should know where they want to attend college prior to participating in early start.

Based on the results of this study, I, the researcher, made several revisions to the original Conceptual Model (see Figure 2). These revisions were 1) Colleges and universities start recruiting students before 10<sup>th</sup> grade, 2) Teachers play a pivotal role in the social and cultural capital experience, so they were added in the block with High

School Counselors, 3) Parents need to receive information on early start so discussions may take place with students about confidence and time management, 4) Students want to have an academic challenge so this trait was added to the student circle of academic traits and desires, and 5) Students declare their major and college interest was added in the diagram where students participate in early start.

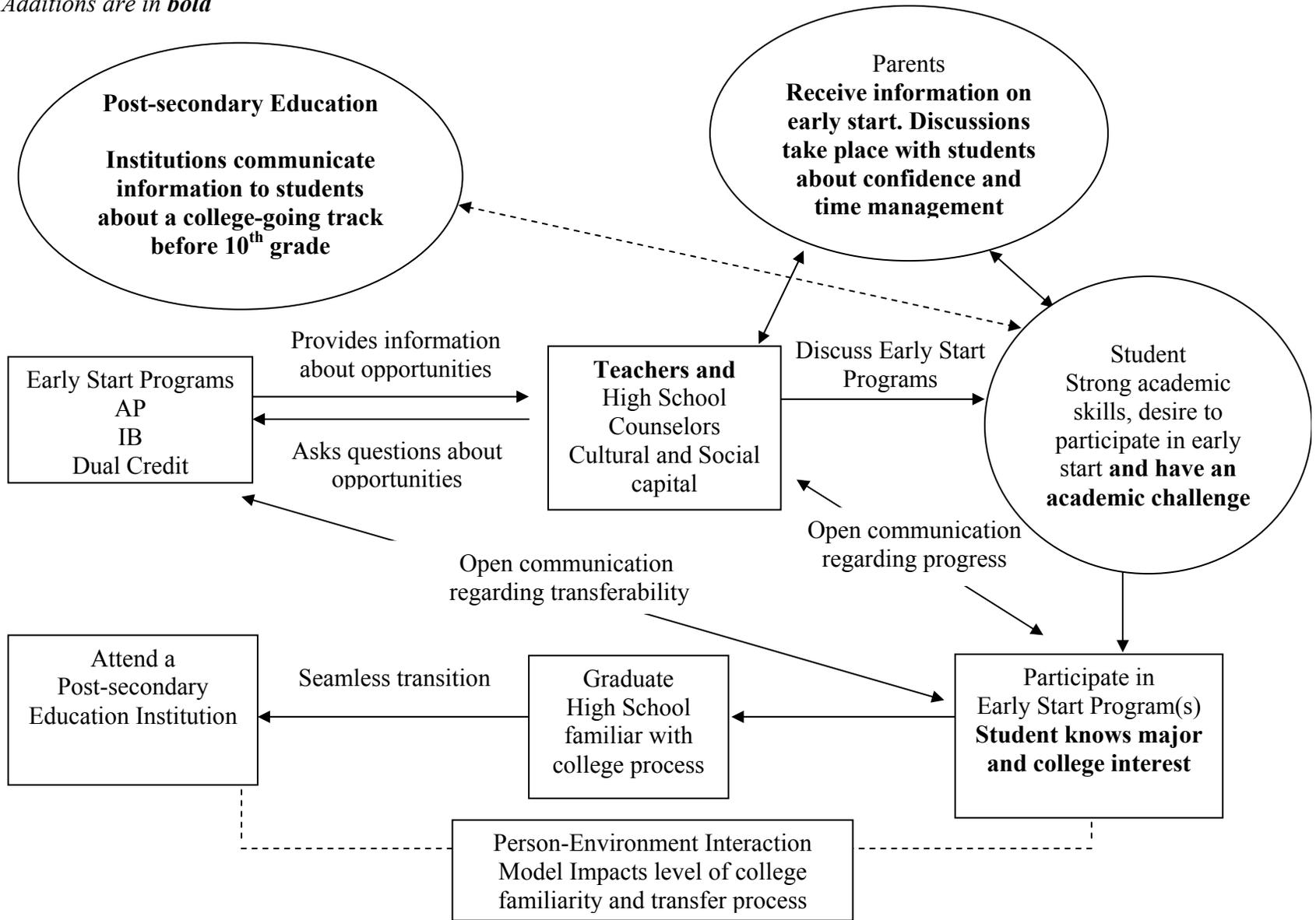
The revisions to the model encompass information discovered in this study. Recognizing the director of admissions believed society was placing too much pressure on students to start college earlier and felt students may not be developmentally ready for the early college programs, it is important students are informed of college and major options. If students are informed of college and major options in 9<sup>th</sup> grade, this would enable them to take classes that the college and major specifically require; aiding in the early start transfer process. Understanding that students change their minds about their major and where they would attend college, the importance of making sure students are informed of majors and colleges before early start programs is a difficult endeavor. The key is to ensuring that students are informed of major options so they have an educated idea of why they are taking early start courses, instead of basing course selection on what courses are available.

As the research showed, teachers play a pivotal role in the early start experience. There needs to be open communication between early start programs, high school counselors, and high school teachers. Contrary to what the literature has indicated, this research has demonstrated that teachers play a larger role than high school counselors in informing students of the early start experience.

This research discovered that parents play a role in the early start process, but their role is limited to informal discussions with their student about confidence and time management; the student is the one really informing parents of the early start program. To make sure students are enrolling in early start courses because they are academically prepared, instead of being forced by societal factors, information to parents and students from early start programs should address key discussion points for parents to have with their high school students such as the importance of being socially mature for a college level course. Consistent with the literature, this study supports that students and parents should both be informed of college opportunities. Having information available to both the student and parent provides them with a platform for a productive discussion about college opportunities

The literature review reported that the level of how familiar a student is about the college process and transfer procedures will be influenced based on the person-environment interaction model. Based on this model, the interaction between the institution and the early start participant will dictate the outcome of the experience. I believe this is a valid part of the conceptual model below. However, further research needs to be conducted to examine at what point in the early start process transfer information would be most effective and informative for students; this research demonstrated that students are unclear of the transfer process, even though they participated in an early start program.

Figure 2. Updated Conceptual Model  
*Additions are in bold*



### Recommendations for Practice

Based on the research and data analysis, there are two over-arching groups of recommendations. The first over-arching group is individual based and is founded on advice that former early start participants would give to future early start participants; this group also includes a section of recommendations for students who complete both AP and dual credit. The second over-arching group is based on an educational context and provides recommendations to educators.

#### Recommendations for Students

Based on the former early start participant perspective, students recommend:

1. Schools offer workshops ahead of time on the early start experience.
2. College representative attend classes at the high school where they could talk about benefits of AP.
3. Colleges and universities have information on how credits transfer on their website.
4. Colleges and universities provide definitions of credit hours.
5. High school counselors are more informed of programs and how to transfer the credits.
6. Students need more information on how to send a transcript.
7. Students need to be more informed on how credits transfer, such as definition of electives and transfer GPA (parents also indicated that this was needed).

8. Students wished they made an earlier decision of their college major and where they want to attend college.

Based on the research and data analysis, it is recommended that when students are completing AP and dual credit courses they need to:

1. Make sure that they are not taking courses that will fulfill the same college requirement.
2. Be informed and understand that the course selection process is not just based on what classes interest them, but yet college degrees require specific requirements, depending on the program.
3. Be informed that just because an early start course is available to them to take it does not necessarily transfer to fulfill a college degree requirement.
4. Have an understanding of what transferring credits mean so that they may make an informed decision when selecting early start courses.

### Recommendations for Educators

As a result of student recommendations and data analysis, the following are recommendations for educators:

1. Higher education may consider working closer with teachers instead of just high school counselors when developing dual credit opportunities. Even though high school counselors can consider being more involved, high school teachers were one of the biggest influences when students decided to participate in early start; and sometimes the students did not even need to work with a high school counselor. Secondary education and post-secondary

education need to re-examine their communication plan; high school counselors should not be the only gate keeper. In this communication between secondary education and post-secondary education, there needs to be discussions regarding the transferability of early start courses and looking at early start course content.

2. Information sessions could be available to students at the high school about early start programs. These information sessions can consider the participation of current and/or former early start participants and college representatives. For example, a group of current and former early start students visit with 8<sup>th</sup> and 9<sup>th</sup> graders before those students start high school. This way a student may hear about early start programs from other students who are in the process.
3. Admission counselors may want to consider bringing information about AP and transfer information during their recruiting visits to high schools. The AP information handed out to students needs to list the AP tests that the institution accepts, minimum score needed, and what class that course is equivalent to at the college. In addition, transfer information is needed on how to transfer, such as paperwork needed and how to request a transcript to be sent. Information on the specific degrees offered at that institution and the courses needed for the degrees would be informative, this way students may see what would be required for a degree program they are interested in.

4. Information about early start programs may be sent to the parents; both from the high school and the college. The literature would explain what to expect with early start programs; if the program is cost effective and why; the process of transferring credits to a college. It would be helpful if the information addressed how and what the parent may communicate with post-secondary education institutions about their child.
5. Colleges may want to consider recruiting their students during 9<sup>th</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup> grade, not only 11<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> grade. Early start students need to know where they are going and their major so they may pick early start classes to take while in high school; this would also help to improve the transferability of courses. This may not be realistic in the sense that students often change their major and their mind on where they want to attend college; however, based on the student perspective many of the students indicated that they wished they knew what they were going to major in and where they would attend. If students receive information earlier and have an earlier awareness of major idea and college options, it may alleviate some of the transferability issues.
6. Colleges could house a dual enrollment person who works for both the local high school and college. This person would know information about AP, dual credit, high school graduation requirements, college graduation requirements, and transferring credits to other colleges. It is important that this person have a presence in the high schools, but their office location should be at a college. I recommend that this person not only assist prospective and current early start

students, but also former early start students who are starting out as a college student at the college they work at. This person would serve as the first stop for former early start students entering the university as a college student.

7. Colleges create an orientation designed specifically for former early start students. Institutions of higher education need to recognize that students may have some college experience before they start their first semester of college. Even though these students have college credit, they are still the same age as traditional aged freshman. Developmentally, in terms of age maturity and academic maturity, there is information about the transition to being a college student that they need to be informed of.
8. Colleges and universities could consider creating a website for students who specifically have early start credit or are thinking about participating in early start. The information for both AP and dual credit needs to be in the same location on the website; often times students who have AP credit may also have dual credit. It is important the website discusses the transferability of courses, the transfer process, and what it means to transfer in or not transfer in a GPA.

### Further Research

Based on the information discovered from this research, I would recommend the following items for further research. Students attempted online courses as part of their dual credit experience, but they did not complete the course because they were struggling

with the online format. I would recommend that an in-depth study be conducted on dual credit classes being offered online and how that experience helps to support or not support the students' college experience.

This study revealed that parents and the director of admissions had concerns about whether students were developmentally ready for college courses in high school. In addition, the parents had questions on how colleges should classify early start students once they are in college, should they be considered as a freshman or as a transfer student. I recommend that further research be conducted to see if early start students who participate in early start courses be considered transfer or freshman in terms of academic maturity and college opportunities?

Previous research has demonstrated that high school counselors play a role in the early start experience. However, this research has highlighted that the students felt the instructors actually play a larger role than the high school counselors in the early start experience. I propose that further research be conducted on the teachers influence on the early start experience and specifically take an in-depth look at comparing and contrasting the roles the teachers play and the high school counselors play.

Finally, I would recommend that a study be conducted on a cohort of students when they begin an early start program and follow them through their high school and then beginning college years. I understand that studies such as this has been conducted, however, I suggest that this study takes place in a program where students have been introduced to post-secondary education majors and institutions, where they may have an idea of what they would like to major in and where they would like to attend once they

graduate high school. This study would examine their major and high school goals when they first begin the early start experience, it would follow them through the course selection process to see if they are actually selecting classes based on their educational goal, and then examine how those courses transfer to college once they graduate high school. This way the education community would be able to see how likely students stay with a major and college choice when they have an idea of what they want to do or where they want to attend in 10<sup>th</sup> grade. The study could explore if course selection was based on educational goals as opposed to interests and course availability. Finally, it would be able to evaluate the transfer process for a student who declares their major and where they want to attend college prior to enrolling in an early start program.

### Summary

This chapter provided a summary of the data, compared the information to the literature, suggested recommendations, and discussed studies for further research. This research, overall, painted a picture of the early start experience from the view of former student participants, their parents, and a director of admissions. In summary, 19 out of 20 students were not familiar with college processes such as transferring credits before they started an early start program. The parents were concerned whether their students had the confidence and time management skills to take a college level course while in high school; as well as, the director of admissions felt that there were developmental issues with students taking college level courses while in high school. Both the parents and the students experienced difficulties and confusion while transferring the early start credits to

a college. Out of 114 courses analyzed, 43 classes transferred in as elective credits once the student was in college. This research has demonstrated that students are participating in early start because they want that challenge while in high school. The students are taking it upon themselves to initiate the early start conversation with their parents. Contrary to what was previously believed students felt their high school teachers played more of a role in the early start experience than their high school counselor. This research hopefully started a platform for future studies to take an in-depth look at the early start experience and the programs effect on educational performance, its influence on the education pipeline, and most of all its impact on students.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX A

STUDENT INFORMED CONSENT

**Montana State University**  
**Informed Consent Form**  
**Case Study: Early Start Experience**

The study in which you will be participating examines the early start experience from the view of the former early start participant, the participants parent (with the students consent), the participants former high school counselor (with the students consent), and the director of admissions at a four-year research institution.

If you agree to participate in this study you will be asked to participate in a 45 to 60 minute interview regarding your experience as a former early start participant. I will ask you questions about your experience as a student, your reasons for participating in early start, and your experience in transferring early start credits to college. The interview will be recorded and transcribed. Only the researcher, Becky Lyons, will have access to the recording of the interview. These tapes will be erased once the researcher graduates from the doctoral program in higher education at Montana State University Bozeman. I may also contact you at a future date to clarify questions or to provide insight into my interpretation of the data.

**Your participation in this research is voluntary.** You are free to stop participating at any time, or to decline to answer any specific questions. You may ask me about the research procedures and I will answer your questions to the best of my ability. **Your participation in this research study is confidential.** Following our initial conversations, I will identify you using a code number. I will be the only person with access to the key linking your name with this code number. Results of this study will be reported using pseudonyms. If I believe that information from this interview could result in you being uniquely identifiable, I will decline to disclose this information. In addition, I will be asking permission to conduct a phone interview with a parent and your former high school counselor, to gain a better understanding of their view of the early start experience. If you agree to allow me to contact a parent and your former high school counselor, I will ask that you fill out the additional information below.

Another part of this research is document analysis, where the researcher, Becky Lyons, would analyze your college transcript and evaluate how your early start credits apply toward your college degree. If you agree to allow, Becky Lyons, to analyze your transcript you will be required to fill out a Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act Release Form, so that she may have your permission to access your transcript(s).

If you have any questions regarding this research project you can contact Becky Lyons (607-329-8510). Any additional questions about the rights of human subjects can be answered by Dr. Betsy Palmer (406-994-7573), the advisor for this study, or by the chair of the MSU Human Subjects Committee, Dr. Mark Quinn, (406) 994-6783.

**I agree to participate in a research study of the early start experience. I understand the information given to me, and I have received answers to any questions I may have had about the research procedures. I understand and agree to the conditions of this study as described. I understand that my participation in this research is voluntary and that I may withdraw from this study at any time by notifying Becky Lyons.**

Participant Signature \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Interviewer Signature \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

**I also agree to allow the researcher, Becky Lyons, to contact a parent and former high school counselor to visit with them about my early start experience. I understand that with my permission, Becky Lyons will conduct a phone interview with a parent and my former high school counselor. During this interview, my high school experience and early start classes will be discussed. By signing below, I provide Becky Lyons with permission to contact a parent and a former high school counselor.**

Participant Signature \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Name and phone number of parent approved to contact: \_\_\_\_\_

Name of high school and high school counselor approved to contact: \_\_\_\_\_ -

\_\_\_\_\_

APPENDIX B

PARENT INFORMED CONSENT

**Montana State University  
Informed Consent Form  
Case Study: Early Start Experience**

The study in which you will be participating examines the early start experience from the view of the former early start participant, the participants parent (with the students consent), the participants former high school counselor (with the students consent), and the director of admissions at a four-year research institution.

The researcher, Becky Lyons, has received permission from (students name) to interview you and visit about (students name) experience in an early start program. If you agree to participate in this study you will be asked to participate in a 30 to 45 minute phone interview regarding your experience as the parent of a former early start participant. I will ask you questions about your students experience in early start, their reasons for participating in early start (from your perspective), and their experience in transferring early start credits to college (from your perspective). The interview will be recorded and transcribed. Only the researcher, Becky Lyons, will have access to the recording of the interview. These tapes will be erased once the researcher graduates from the doctoral program in higher education at Montana State University Bozeman. I may also contact you at a future date to clarify questions or to provide insight into my interpretation of the data.

**Your participation in this research is voluntary.** You are free to stop participating at any time, or to decline to answer any specific questions. You may ask me about the research procedures and I will answer your questions to the best of my ability. **Your participation in this research study is confidential.** Following our initial conversations, I will identify you using a code number. I will be the only person with access to the key linking your name with this code number. Results of this study will be reported using pseudonyms. If I believe that information from this interview could result in you being uniquely identifiable, I will decline to disclose this information.

If you have any questions regarding this research project you can contact Becky Lyons (607-329-8510). Any additional questions about the rights of human subjects can be answered by Dr. Betsy Palmer (406-994-7573), the advisor for this study, or by the chair of the MSU Human Subjects Committee, Dr. Mark Quinn, (406) 994-6783.

**I agree to participate in a research study of the early start experience. I understand the information given to me, and I have received answers to any questions I may have had about the research procedures. I understand and agree to the conditions of this study as described. I understand that my participation in this research is voluntary and that I may withdraw from this study at any time by notifying Becky Lyons.**

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Participant Signature \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Interviewer Signature \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

APPENDIX C

ADMISSIONS DIRECTOR INFORMED CONSENT

**Montana State University  
Informed Consent Form  
Case Study: Early Start Experience**

The study in which you will be participating examines the early start experience from the view of the former early start participant, the participants parent (with the students consent), the participants former high school counselor (with the students consent), and the director of admissions at a four-year research institution.

If you agree to participate in this study you will be asked to participate in a 45 to 60 minute interview regarding your experience in early start programs, as Director of Admissions at a four-year research institution. I will ask you questions about your knowledge of early start and the process of transferring early start credits to college (from your perspective). The interview will be recorded and transcribed. Only the researcher, Becky Lyons, will have access to the recording of the interview. These tapes will be erased once the researcher graduates from the doctoral program in higher education at Montana State University Bozeman. I may also contact you at a future date to clarify questions or to provide insight into my interpretation of the data.

**Your participation in this research is voluntary.** You are free to stop participating at any time, or to decline to answer any specific questions. You may ask me about the research procedures and I will answer your questions to the best of my ability. **Your participation in this research study is confidential. However, you will be referred to as the Director of Admissions at a four-year research institution in Montana, so anonymity cannot be guaranteed.** Following our initial conversations, I will identify you by referring to your title as the Director of Admissions.

If you have any questions regarding this research project you can contact Becky Lyons (607-329-8510). Any additional questions about the rights of human subjects can be answered by Dr. Betsy Palmer (406-994-7573), the advisor for this study, or by the chair of the MSU Human Subjects Committee, Dr. Mark Quinn, (406) 994-6783.

**I agree to participate in a research study of the early start experience. I understand the information given to me, and I have received answers to any questions I may have had about the research procedures. I understand and agree to the conditions of this study as described. I understand that my participation in this research is voluntary and that I may withdraw from this study at any time by notifying Becky Lyons.**

\_\_\_\_\_  
Participant Signature

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_  
Interviewer Signature

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

APPENDIX D

STUDENT INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

**Early Start Experience Semi-Structured Interview – Student Dual Credit**

**Name:**

**Major:**

**Gender:**

**High school attended while participating in dual credit:**

**Parents educational background:**

**Any siblings participated in dual credit before you did:**

**Date:**

1. Please explain the type of high school that you attended.
2. What year did you graduate from high school?
3. How did you decide to attend here (probe if student went anywhere else and how many other institutions they applied to)?
4. When did you first hear about dual credit opportunities?
5. How did you hear about dual credit?
6. If student heard about dual credit from high school counselor – ask – who initiated conversation?
7. Who was most influential in your decision to participate in dual credit?
8. What grade did you first enroll in a dual credit course?
9. Please describe your dual credit experience (be sure to touch on location/mode of class i.e. at high school at college campus or online).
10. What goals did you have for taking a dual credit course (probe for purpose of taking class)?

11. How did you decide which dual credit class(es) to take (touch on if there were options available or only one course to choose from)?
12. When you first took a dual credit course how familiar were you with the college process such as grading and the transfer process?
13. When you completed the dual credit class(es) what steps did you take to transfer the credits to here?
14. How do your dual credit class(es) apply toward your college degree?
15. What processes or information would've helped you as a dual credit student to transfer your classes here?
16. Do I have your permission to contact your parent(s) and high school counselor to visit with them about the dual credit experience?
  - a. If yes:
    - i. Parents name and contact information (which parent would the student like me to visit with?)
    - ii.
    - iii. High school Counselors name and high school
    - iv.

**Early Start Experience Semi-Structured Interview –  
Student Advanced Placement**

**Name:**

**Major:**

**Gender:**

**High school attended while participating in Advanced Placement:**

**Parents educational background:**

**Any siblings participated in AP before you did:**

**Date:**

1. Please explain the type of high school that you attended.
2. What year did you graduate from high school?
3. How did you decide to attend here (probe if student went anywhere else and how many other institutions they applied to)?
4. When did you first hear about AP opportunities?
5. How did you hear about AP?
6. If student heard about AP from high school counselor – ask – who initiated conversation?
7. Who was most influential in your decision to participate in AP?
8. What grade did you first enroll in an AP course?
9. Please describe your AP experience.
10. What goals did you have for taking an AP course (probe for purpose of taking class)?

11. How did you decide which AP class(es) to take (touch on if there were options available or only one course to choose from)?
12. When you first took an AP course how familiar were you with the college process such as grading and the transfer process?
13. When you completed the AP class(es) what steps did you take to transfer the credits here?
14. How do your AP class(es) apply toward your college degree?
15. What processes or information would've helped you as an AP student to transfer your classes here?
16. Do I have your permission to contact your parent(s) and high school counselor to visit with them about the AP experience?
  - a. If yes:
    - i. Parents name and contact information (which parent would the student like me to visit with?)
    - ii.
    - iii. High school Counselors name and high school
    - iv.

APPENDIX E

PARENT INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

**Early Start Experience Phone Semi-Structured Interview -  
Parent****Name:****Parent to which student:****Gender:****Parents educational background:****Date:**

*Explain that I had interviewed their student for my research. The student provided me consent to interview one of their parents about the students early start experience.*

*Depending on the students early start experience where [early start] is indicated, I will refer to either AP or dual credit.*

1. When did you first hear about [early start] programs?
2. How did you hear about [early start] programs?
3. How familiar were you with [early start] programs before your student participated in it?
4. Between you and your student, who initiated the [early start] conversation?
5. Who do you think was most influential in your students' decision to take an [early start] class?
6. What discussions took place between you and your student when your student decided to take an [early start] class?
7. What grade did your student take their first early start college course?
8. What do you feel was their purpose for taking an early start class?

9. How involved were you in your students decision in selecting what early start course to take?
  
10. When your student completed the early start class(es) what steps do you feel they had to take to have that course transfer to college?
  
11. As a parent, what steps do you think it would have been beneficial to have in place to ease the transfer process of the credit from high school to college?

APPENDIX F

ADMISSIONS DIRECTOR INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

**Early Start Experience Semi-Structured Interview –  
Director of Admissions**

**Name:**

**Gender:**

**Years of experience:**

**Date:**

*Explain that for the interview I will refer to AP and Dual Credit courses as early start classes.*

1. Please describe your level of awareness of early start programs.
2. Please describe the process a student takes to transfer in early start classes.
3. How does a student know how early start classes apply toward their college major?
4. Please describe the positive and negative outcomes that you perceive are associated with early start programs.
5. What do you feel is the most important aspect/purpose/outcome of early start programs?
6. In your perspective, what type of early start program is most beneficial for a high school student?

APPENDIX G

ACADEMIC TRANSCRIPT DATA ANALYSIS

Table 9. Academic Transcript Data Analysis

Type of early start course	# of this course type completed	Requirement fulfilled	If General Education, how many courses in category needed?	Did student take a course in same category in college?	If yes, additional course a major requirement?
<b>Transcript 1</b>					
Math	3	1 Course fulfills General Education; 2 courses fulfill major requirements	1	No	
Writing	2	1 course fulfills General Education; 1 course is an elective	1	No	
Humanities	3	1 Course fulfills General Education; 2 courses fulfill major requirements	1	No	
Arts	1	General Education	1	No	
Social Science	1	General Education	1	No	
Business	1	Elective		No	
Electives as posted on the transcript	1	Elective			
<b>Transcript 2</b>					
Writing	2	1 course fulfills General Education; 1 course is an elective	1	No	
Science	1	General Education	1	Yes	No

Social Science	1	General Education	1	No	
<b>Transcript 3</b>					
Humanities	2	1 course fulfills General Education; 1 course is an elective	1	No	
Social Science	1	General Education	1	No	
Writing	1	General Education	1	No	
<b>Transcript 4</b>					
Communication	1	General Education	1	No	
Diversity	1	General Education	1	Yes	Yes
Arts	1	General Education	1	No	
Humanities	2	1 course fulfills General Education; 1 course is an elective	1	No	
Writing	1	General Education	1	No	
Social Science	2	1 course fulfills General Education; 1 course is an elective	1	No	
Math	2	1 course fulfills General Education; 1 course is an elective	1	Yes	Yes Student completed a higher level math course in early start but took a lower level math course once in college
Science	3	2 courses fulfill General Education; 1 course is an elective	2	Yes	No

Advanced Human Development	1	1 course fulfills Major Requirement			
Electives as posted on the transcript	8	Electives			
<b>Transcript 5</b>					
Science	1	General Education	1	Yes	No
Diversity	1	General Education	1	Yes	Yes/No 2 of the 3 extra courses did fulfill major requirement
Social Sciences	2	1 course fulfills General Education; 1 course is an elective	1	Yes	Yes
Writing	1	General Education	1	No	
Communication	1	General Education	1	No	
Humanities	2	1 course fulfills General Education; 1 course is an elective	1	No	
Math	1	General Education	1	Yes	Yes Student completed a higher level math course in early start but took a lower level math course in college to fulfill a major requirement.
Art	1	General Education	1	No	

Electives as posted on the transcript	7	Electives			
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**Transcript 6**

Writing	1	General Education	1	No	
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**Transcript 7**

Humanities	5	1 course fulfills General Education; 4 courses fulfill electives	1	Yes	Yes
Writing	1	General Education	1	No	
Social Science	1	General Education	1	Yes	Yes
Diversity	1	General Education	1	Yes	Yes

**Transcript 8**

Humanities	3	1 course fulfills General Education; 2 courses fulfill electives	1	No	
Writing	1	General Education	1	No	
Diversity	1	General Education	1	No	

**Transcript 9**

Social Science	1	General Education	1	Yes	Yes
Writing	1	General Education	1	No	

**Transcript 10**

Humanities	3	1 course fulfills General Education; 2 courses fulfill electives	1	No	
Social Science	1	General Education	1	No	

Math	1	General Education	1	No	
Writing	1	General Education	1	No	

**Transcript 11**

Humanities	1	General Education	1	No	
Social Science	1	General Education	1	No	

**Transcript 12**

Science	3	1 course fulfills General Education; 2 courses fulfill electives	1	No	
Math	2	1 course fulfills General Education; 1 course fulfills major requirement	1	Yes	Yes
Writing	1	General Education	1	No	

**Transcript 13**

Science	1	General Education	1	No	
Math	2	1 course fulfills General Education; 1 course fulfills electives	1	Yes	Yes

**Transcript 14**

Humanities	1	General Education	1	No	
Writing	1	General Education	1	No	

**Transcript 15**

Science	1	General Education	1	Yes	No
Communication	1	General Education	1	No	
Humanities	2	1 course fulfills General Education; 1	1	No	

		course fulfills electives			
Social Sciences	5	1 course fulfills General Education; 2 courses fulfill major requirements; 2 courses are electives	1	No	
Diversity	1	General Education	1	Yes	Yes
Writing	2	1 course fulfills General Education; 1 course fulfills electives	1	No	
Electives as posted on the transcript	2	Electives			
<b>Transcript 16</b>					
Humanities	5	1 course fulfills General Education; 4 courses fulfill major requirements	1	No	
Writing	1	General Education	1	Yes	No
<b>Total Courses:</b>					
		59 courses fulfill General Education requirements			
		43 course fulfill Elective requirements			
	<b>114</b>	12 courses fulfill major requirements			