

11. Study on the Current Status of Education Programs Connecting Upper Secondary Schools and Universities in the United States – Focusing on the Acquisition and Utilization of Credits –

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1. Purpose of the study

In the United States, many upper secondary school students obtain university credits under the program called “dual enrollment.” According to the data by the U. S. Department of Education (2002-2003), the program had been adopted in a total of 11,700 public schools and 1,162,000 students were studying thereunder. No other data covering the whole nation have been available since then, but some state data indicate that the number of students participating in the dual enrollment program has been increasing.

The Advanced Placement (AP) program and the International Baccalaureate (IB) program are for upper secondary schools, but credits under these programs are sometimes approved as university credits at each university’s discretion. Therefore, these programs may also be incorporated in the dual credit program. As of the 2002-2003 school year the AP program had been adopted in 11,000 public schools (with 1,795,000 students enrolled), while the IB program had been adopted in 390 public schools (with of 165,000 students enrolled).

The AP program, IB program, and dual enrollment program are classified into the category of accelerated learning. It is said that 71% of the upper secondary schools in the United States are providing accelerated learning, and that in some states, 20% of the upper secondary school students obtain university credits before graduation. Programs that enable students to obtain university credits while in upper secondary school are reported to be effective for ensuring the connection between the two. It is about time to sum up the achievements and problems of these programs that have been rapidly expanding in the United States.

In Japan, school consolidation has accelerated due to a decrease in the school-age population. In the meantime, in response to the changes in society, unique schools, such as Super Science High Schools (SSH) and Super English Language High Schools (SELHi), are being established. As they approach a time when university vacancies will exceed the number of applicants, universities must now review their educational system to secure enough students, and provide remedial lessons to improve new students’ academic ability. Under these circumstances, liaison councils have been established between upper secondary schools and universities across Japan and some positive efforts have been made. By summing up and analyzing preceding programs in the United States, we may be able to glean some information useful for shaping the future course of upper secondary school education in Japan.

2. Viewpoints for the analysis

We analyzed the dual enrollment program and other programs that connect upper secondary schools and universities with a specific focus on the teachers, places where the programs are implemented, and content level and coverage. We looked at related expenses and support systems as well.

Teachers

- Whether teachers need a qualification (license)
- What sort of training programs are prepared
- Who teaches students, upper secondary school teachers or university instructors

Time and place of program implementation

- Whether the program is carried out within the ordinary curriculum, or as a set of extracurricular courses held after school or during summer vacation
- Whether the program is carried out on a university campus or at the upper secondary school

Content level and effectiveness (coverage)

- Whether the program is judged to meet the university level through tests (e.g. the AP program and the IB program)
- What the requirements are for being approved as university credits (e.g. a program under which only subjects ranked above a certain level are approved as university credits versus a program under which the enrollment in specific universities counts toward university credits)
- Whether there are any rules to restrict students' participation in the program by school year (in Kentucky, there is no restriction by grade-level)
- Whether there is any upper limit for university credits to be obtained at the upper secondary school (in Minnesota, upper secondary school students are allowed to obtain university credits for only the first two years.)
- Whether obtained university credits are effective across the United States or limited to certain areas (e.g. the Numbering System in Florida)

Expenses and support systems

- Whether a state provides financial support for the test or the program
- Who bears the expenses of operating the program (e.g. in Illinois, a policy change granting school fees under the ADA both at upper secondary schools and universities significantly increased the adoption of the program at upper secondary schools.)

Others

- There is a disparity in the availability of programs between urban areas and rural areas: examining to what extent such a disparity can be reduced through e-learning

- Whether there are any criteria for credits common across the United States

3. Results of the study

In Japan, efforts to seek collaboration and connection between upper secondary schools and universities have just begun. Some of these efforts are made under a limited framework of a one-on-one agreement between a specific upper secondary school and its partner university. Others are backed by the intention, on the part of the university, of ensuring the enrollment of excellent students. In other cases, details of the subjects and evaluation criteria are not disclosed or are not stated clearly.

In the United States, there are problems such as a wide disparity in the academic ability, low-quality subject content, and high drop-out rates in upper secondary schools. Universities also face difficulties, such as the upsurge of school expenses and the increase of students in need of remedial lessons as the university advancement rate rises.

Educational environments and people's way of thinking in Japan and the United States differ significantly, and ideas on how to cope with the problem of ensuring the smooth connection between upper secondary schools and universities are naturally quite different. The United States has taken action much sooner. This may be because gifted and talented education is adopted from the early stages of children's education in the United States, and people are apt to think that students' capacity should be enhanced in a flexible manner suitable for each one of them and that students should be provided with the widest variety of options for education. People may feel less reluctant to provide excellent students with opportunities to attend university classes and let them obtain university credits while they are in upper secondary school. The following three points became clear as a result of our consideration of merits and demerits of various U.S. programs connecting upper secondary schools and universities.

- (1) There are various types of such programs and those corresponding to the dual enrollment program are called by different names depending on the state (e.g. concurrent enrollment, Running Start, Double Up, Post-Secondary Enrollment Options (PSEO), Senior Year Plus, and College Now). In some cases, program names vary with the place where they are carried out. Therefore, we need to clearly define the terms.
- (2) During the three years while we were working on this study, the Obama administration took over the Bush administration. However, also under the Obama administration, college and career readiness is stressed, requiring the enhancement of the educational content of upper secondary schools. The significance of community colleges has become recognized anew when considering the connection between upper secondary schools and universities. In the United States, where credit transfer is widely approved, community colleges often

serve as a bridge between upper secondary schools and four-year universities. Community colleges, which offer various vocational courses, are major partners in articulation programs of upper secondary schools. Upper secondary schools provide career and technical education so that students can get prepared for their future career, using content integrating the liberal arts and specialized skills. Upper secondary school students studying mainly specific career themes can also have the chance to go on to university.

- (3) Another big change in these three years is that an increasing number of upper secondary schools and colleges have begun to post a handbook or guidebook concerning their dual enrollment system or dual credit system on their website. This implies that these programs have steadily been growing. In addition, more and more upper secondary school students now obtain university credits online, as well as through conventional programs. One of the issues to cope with is how to ensure the quality of these courses (research on provision methods, course content, and evaluation methods).

The following are what we consider to be important in promoting the connection between upper secondary schools and universities in Japan, based on our survey on programs in the United States.

- (1) Persons in charge of liaison and coordination between upper secondary schools and universities

The meaning and rules of a program should be explained clearly not only to students but also teachers and students' guardians. It is necessary to prepare an environment where coordinators and counselors in charge of liaison and coordination between upper secondary schools and universities can devote themselves to their duties by being relieved of the burden of teaching classes. This requires manpower and a budget, but is indispensable for the smooth operation of the program. It is also necessary to clearly define the qualities required of coordinators and the details of their duties.

- (2) Establishment of criteria for teaching content

Teachers from both upper secondary schools and universities should hold sufficient discussions on what the content of courses on the university level should be and how to establish evaluation criteria. Decisions should be documented and should preferably be accessible to any party. This process requires an enormous amount of time and labor but will provide good training opportunities for participants to deepen their communication. In the United States, many colleges and universities join local school accreditation associations and receive checkups for ensuring that the quality of their courses maintains a university level. Furthermore, an increasing number of universities have acquired the accreditation from the National Alliance of Concurrent Enrollment Partnerships (NACEP),

which specifically carries out the accreditation of dual enrollment programs.

(3) Development of professional skills

Teachers should constantly be provided with training opportunities to enhance their quality. The enhancement of teacher quality is indispensable to the improvement of students' academic skills. Programs under which upper secondary school students go to community colleges, take university courses, and obtain university credits will help university instructors to understand what is taught at upper secondary schools. They will eventually be able to provide better guidance to students. Under programs to offer university-level courses at upper secondary schools, upper secondary school teachers can receive guidance from university instructors and will become able to teach university-level content. Programs connecting upper secondary schools and universities thus have the potential to enlarge training opportunities for teachers.

(4) Accumulation and analysis of data from program participants

Some suspect that university credits obtained at upper secondary schools are inferior to those obtained after enrolling university. Without any concrete data, we cannot counter such negative opinions. Accumulation and analysis of data is also important for improving program content. In this sense, we may be able to learn a lot from efforts by the state of Florida, where a student data accumulation system was adopted early on.

(5) Scope of where credits are accepted

University credits obtained at upper secondary schools should be accepted more widely at universities. If such credits are approved as university credits only at the university where a student took a class, the program connecting upper secondary schools and universities cannot function sufficiently and offers little advantage. The participation of a large number of universities will raise a need to discuss university-level program content among universities and will activate their communication.

4. Reports on this study

“Study on the Current Status of Education Programs Connecting Upper Secondary Schools and Universities in the United States – Focusing on the Acquisition and Utilization of Credits –” (March 2010) (<http://kaken.nii.ac.jp/ja/p/19530739>)