CCC program offers college classes at a bargain rate

Paying for college — it’s something many families start to plan for, save for and worry about almost before their children are born.

At Wilsonville High School, where 78 percent of 2013 graduates said they planned to enter college this fall, the costs loom large.

Lyndi Tucker has just the program for families wanting to take a bite out of those costs. She is the college and career coordinator at WHS as well as the administrator — and a big fan — of the Advance College Credit program offered through Clackamas Community College. Under ACC, high school students in Clackamas County have the opportunity to earn college credit at a fraction of the cost CCC students pay, just $10 per credit instead of more than $90.

Dollars and time savings
Offered at more than 20 high schools in Clackamas County, ACC saved Wilsonville students a potential $144,207 in the 2011-12 school year, the latest period for which data currently is available. According to CCC, 172 Wilsonville students earned 1,962 credits. During that same period in West Linn, 219 students participated, earning a combined total of 2,249 credits and saving a potential total of $165,301. Sixty-five students from Lake Oswego High School took part in the program in 2011-12, earning a total of 556 credits and saving a potential total of $40,866. The biggest savings came at Canby and Oregon City high schools, where 384 and 415 students earned 3,595 and 4,507 credits, respectively, potentially saving $264,232 and $331,264.

“It is a fantastic way for students to hit the ground running with a college transcript in hand,” Tucker said. “I’ve been responsible for the program at WHS for five years and have experienced the growth and success firsthand.”

Her experience with ACC is personal as well as professional.

“MY daughter, Caitlyn, graduated in 2007 and because of AP test scores and ACC credits (she) entered UO with 39 credits,” Tucker said. “After her first term at UO, she had sophomore standing, which is very beneficial when it comes to choosing and registering for classes. That advantage aided her in finishing her bachelor’s in four years.”

The cost savings can be dramatic too. A yearlong ACC course translates to 12 college credits, costing $120. At CCC, tuition currently runs $84 plus $6.50 per credit, for a total of $90.50 per credit or $1,086 per yearlong course, according to Cheryl Tallman, ACC coordinator at CCC. The real savings for high school students are even greater, she said, because high-schoolers don’t pay for textbooks, housing and incidental fees college students pay.

College credits transfer
Credits earned through ACC are transferrable to community colleges and state schools in Oregon. Out-of-state and private colleges and universities may or may not accept them. The CCC website lists schools that are known to have accepted the credits in the past, without guaranteeing future acceptance. That list includes local schools like University of Portland, Linfield, Willamette and George Fox as well as out-of-state schools like Boston University, Gonzaga, Stanford and Whitworth.
Lyndi Tucker smiles as she looks at a chart showing steady increase in the number of Wilsonville students earning college credit through CCC each year.

favorably with AP courses that also offer the opportunity to earn college credit.

“More colleges will accept AP credit,” she said. Yet the AP program has some drawbacks.

Students who hope to earn AP credit must take an AP test, paying $87 per test. Earning credit depends upon the test score.

“There is no guarantee with AP, and you don’t know until July,” Tucker said. Additionally, AP credit posts to college transcripts as “AP credit,” while ACC credits post as regular college credit.

The ACC program offers one distinct advantage: Students apply for the program in November and again in April, with registration spanning a five-week period. That means students can wait to register until they are sure they are doing well in the class.

“We really do encourage students to carefully consider whether to register for the college credit and to only do so when they expect to do well in the course,” Tallman said.

“If you’re below a C, don’t take the class,” Tucker said.

Once students decide to enroll in the program, they apply to CCC and then receive a student ID and email address.

“CCC makes it so easy for us. There’s not a reason not to (participate),” she said.

**Teachers, courses screened**

Nine WHS teachers offered ACC classes last school year, including advanced French and Spanish, pre-calculus, an art studio, graphic arts and English literature and composition. Instructors at CCC approve both the teachers and their teaching plans.

“They submit their curriculum, their syllabus, examples of exams and they also submit their credentials, a resume and transcripts,” Tallman said. “Those are reviewed by the department of the course they’re covering. Are they assessing in a similar manner? Are the instruction hours and student learning objectives being met?”

“I think that the Advance College Credit through CCC is probably one of the most beneficial programs that we offer that students can take advantage of,” WHS Spanish teacher Brittany Armstrong said.

She has offered ACC classes at the high school for the last three years. Currently, she teaches Spanish 4, and her ACC students earn 200-level college credit.

Armstrong described a past student who had ACC credits and was able to avoid a number of classes that typically tie up college students’ schedules for the first two years.

“She had enough time to double major in four years,” Armstrong recalled. “She obviously saved a lot of money, and she was able to register earlier. ... She was able to get those core classes done earlier and focus more on her major.”

Working with CCC has not been difficult, and participating in the ACC program has not required much extra work on her part, Armstrong said.

“They provide us with pretty specific requirements for the syllabus,” she said. “A lot of that, I already had in some way or another; I just had to reorganize it to follow their guidelines.”

‘Gung ho’ for savings

At CCC’s cost of $90.50 per credit — credits cost more than twice that at four-year public universities and are even...
higher at private schools — the $10-per-credit ACC fee seems like a real bargain.

“Tucker said. “When I’m telling (students) the cost savings, that sometimes doesn’t click for them. If I can get to the parents, they are gung ho.”

“Within education there is a challenge to help students achieve degrees within appropriate timelines,” Tallman said. “This is one strategy to help students get there. Students and families are also seeing rising costs for education. This program can be viewed as another form of financial aid.”

She added that administrators at CCC have noticed a rising trend.

“Many more students are choosing to attend Clackamas for their first two years and then transfer to a college or university. Whether students come here or to a four-year school right after graduation, we’re all in the same boat of wanting to see students succeed,” she said.

To learn more about Clackamas Community College’s Advanced College Credit program, or to learn what courses are available at your local school, visit depts.clackamas.edu/acc or contact your high school.