



Earning College Credit in Indiana Schools: Dual Credit, Advanced Placement, or Both?

Perspectives from the UCAN Program

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This brief is based on interviews with and surveys of school administrators, teachers, and counselors from schools in the Urban College Acceleration Network ([UCAN](#)¹). UCAN is a program at the Center of Excellence in Leadership of Learning ([CELL](#)²) at the University of Indianapolis. The network, which operated from 2022 to 2024, provided Indiana high schools with early-stage Early College programs with support from CELL and experienced mentor schools to achieve Early College endorsement. Staff from the [Early College Research Center](#),³ part of [SERVE](#)⁴ at UNC Greensboro, served as the external evaluators of the program and conducted the interviews and administered the surveys.



Throughout Indiana, high school students take college-level coursework through Advanced Placement (AP) and dual credit. Schools use both types of courses to help students accumulate college credit while in high school. An increasing number of Indiana high schools are also implementing the Early College model, which is designed to support students with barriers to higher education and help them earn substantial college credit in high school.

An important component of Early College is offering college-level coursework. The UCAN schools offer different combinations of dual credit and AP coursework for students to take during high school as part of Early College.

This brief:

- Provides context for current trends in AP and dual credit coursetaking for recent Indiana high school graduates;
- Summarizes perspectives from educators at UCAN schools on the relative advantages of and considerations for the different course types; and
- Includes information about efforts to blend the two course types at UCAN schools.

EARLY COLLEGE GLOSSARY

[Early College High School](#)⁵ – A high school or a program within a school that is designed to support students with barriers to higher education, allowing them to earn substantial college credit while in high school and inspiring them to pursue postsecondary opportunities.

[Core Principles](#)⁶ – A framework with eight domains that guide Early College program implementation in Indiana.

[Endorsement](#)⁷ – An endorsed Early College program has been evaluated by CELL and found to be executing the Core Principles at a high level.

[Dual Credit](#)⁸ – Courses in which high school students can simultaneously earn both high school and college credit. These courses are taught by credentialed high school teachers or college faculty at high schools, online, or on college campuses.

Overview of Advanced Placement and Dual Credit in Indiana

Dual credit in Indiana refers to courses in which students can earn high school and college credit simultaneously.⁸ Dual credit courses are offered by designated colleges and universities; students are enrolled simultaneously at their high school and in the college or university offering the dual credit course. Students can take dual credit courses in-person, taught by credentialed faculty at their high school; in-person, taught by college faculty (at their high school or a college campus); or through online enrollment. There are tuition costs associated with taking these courses at many institutions. However, the cost to the student is generally much lower than the cost for the general post-high school population. As of 2025, students can take Ivy Tech Community College courses from high school teachers at no tuition cost.⁹ Programs at Indiana University,¹⁰ Purdue University,¹¹ Vincennes University,¹² and Ball State University¹³ offer dual credit classes at the reduced rate of \$25 per credit hour (i.e. \$75 for a standard three-credit hour course). At Indiana University, the tuition is waived for all Indiana students taking dual credit classes that count toward the Indiana College Core (see below for more information on the ICC);¹⁴ the other schools waive tuition for students who qualify for free or reduced-price lunch.

The Advanced Placement program is a set of college-level courses and exams that students take in high school.^{15,16} Students taking AP courses can take an AP exam at the end of the course that is scored on a 1 to 5 scale; whether students earn college credit is dependent on the AP exam score a student earns. Typically, a score of 3 or higher earns a student some college credit; this is the policy at all public colleges in Indiana.¹⁷ However, the amount of credit and

whether a student is awarded elective credit or receives credit for a specific course requirement varies between institutions.¹⁸ Also, unlike dual credit courses, AP courses themselves are not associated with a specific college or university and share curriculum and assessments with AP courses outside of Indiana. There are no fees associated with taking AP courses themselves, but there is a \$99 cost for students for each AP exam they take unless they qualify for a fee reduction or waiver.¹⁹

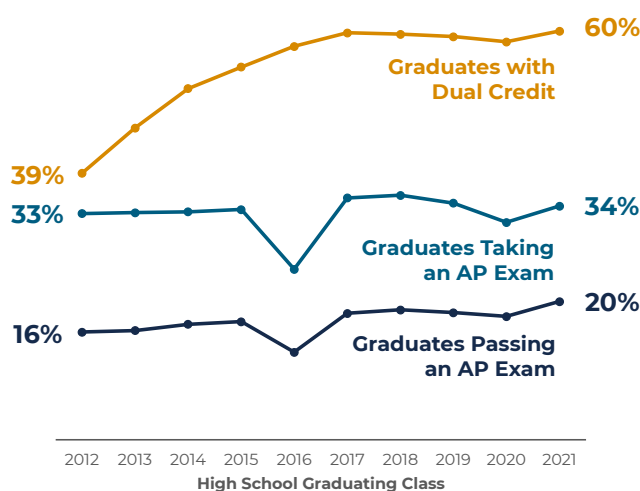
Students can take a variety of college-level courses in high school that are not aligned to a specific credential. However, the state offers students the opportunity to earn a transferrable certificate of 30 hours of general education credit called the Indiana College Core (ICC).²⁰ Public higher education institutions in Indiana are required to accept the ICC as transfer credit; some private institutions in the state also accept the ICC credits. The ICC requires at least one course in each of six competency areas: quantitative reasoning, speaking and listening, written communication, and humanistic/artistic, scientific, and social/behavioral ways of knowing. Students are required to earn at least 15 of the 30 ICC credit hours through dual credit at their high school's primary partner institution.²¹ Students can also earn credits toward the ICC through AP exam scores of three or higher in subjects that align with the ICC competencies if their high school offers that option.²²

Data on Graduates with Dual Credit and Credit from AP Exams

Indiana's Commission for Higher Education releases data annually regarding high school graduates and their first-year postsecondary performance by demographic characteristics and participation in various high school programs.²³ The most recent data are for the high school graduating class of 2021. For this cohort of students, 60% earned dual credit from

an Indiana public college during high school. At the same time, 34% of high school graduates took an AP exam, but only 20% of graduates qualified to earn college credit by scoring 3 or higher on an AP exam. In other words, only 59% of AP exam takers in the graduating class qualified to receive college credit for their scores.

High School Graduates Earn College Credit From Both AP and Dual Credit



Source: Indiana Commission for Higher Education

As shown in the figure above, high school students take advantage of both dual credit and AP (and, in many cases, students graduate with both dual credit and college credit from AP exams). The proportion of graduates earning dual credit rose steadily from 39% of the Class of 2012 to 60% of the Class of 2017. The rate has remained stable at around 60% for the last five cohorts represented in the Commission's data. For the Classes of 2012 to 2021, the rate of graduates taking an AP exam has increased slightly from 33% to 34%, and the rate of graduates passing an AP exam has increased from 16% to 20%.

Students' interest in earning college credit through one or both programs is also reflected in the number of students preparing to transfer to postsecondary education. In 2022, over 2,400 students earned the ICC, allowing them to enroll at an Indiana college or

university with 30+ hours of college credit. AP is a widely-used program throughout Indiana high schools; three higher education institutions in the state—Purdue, IU-Bloomington, and Notre Dame—rank among the top 100 colleges and universities in the United States for the number of AP scores received.²⁴

Perspectives from UCAN

We gained perspectives on dual credit and AP courses from teachers and staff in urban Indiana high schools through the UCAN program. This brief summarizes our findings regarding the perceived benefits of dual credit and AP. We also look briefly at strategies schools are using to offer both types of courses and explore the perceived benefits of and challenges to blending the two in a single class.

PERCEIVED ADVANTAGES AND CONSIDERATIONS FOR DUAL CREDIT AND ADVANCED PLACEMENT

Through interviews conducted for the UCAN evaluation, we asked administrators, counselors, and teachers about their perspectives on AP and dual credit classes. UCAN supported schools in developing their Early College programs, with an emphasis on offering the coursework needed for students to earn the Indiana College Core (ICC). The primary themes we heard regarding the advantages of and concerns about each type of course are summarized in the table below. The most consistent perception from educators at UCAN schools was that AP courses guaranteed more rigor, while dual credit classes give students a better chance of earning college credit.

COMBINING DUAL CREDIT AND AP CREDITS THROUGH MIXING OR BLENDING COURSES

Dual credit and AP are not mutually exclusive options within high schools. Students may choose to

	DUAL CREDIT	ADVANCED PLACEMENT
ADVANTAGES	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Credits earned transfer to public colleges throughout Indiana • Students earn college credit by passing the course • Teaching and assessment can be more flexible, subject to partner institution approval 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Curriculum is nationally consistent and perceived as rigorous, built through partnerships between the College Board and higher education institutions • Exam scores can earn college credits outside of Indiana if a student seeks to attend an out-of-state college • Standardized test scores allow for national benchmarking of rigor
CONSIDERATIONS	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Course content and delivery may vary across institutions • The dominant delivery mode is high school teachers, who need a master's degree in content (or master's plus 18 graduate hours) for most institutions 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Students need a score of 3 or higher on the AP exam to earn college credit • Instructors have no say in determining college credit (credit awarded by AP exam)

take exclusively AP classes, exclusively dual credit classes, or, if both are offered, a combination of the two to earn college credit in high school. We refer to the latter as “mixing” when students take a combination of AP courses and dual credit courses to earn their ICC.

For example, a student may combine 21 credit hours from dual credit courses with scores of three or higher on the AP Calculus exam (equivalent to four college credit hours) and the AP US History exam (equivalent to six college credit hours) to exceed the required 30 hours for the ICC. Through a planning tool on the Indiana College Core Website,²⁵ students can explore the options available for mixing dual credit and AP courses at their high school. Offering both dual credit and AP courses and allowing students to take a mix of both to earn their ICC remains the primary way most Indiana schools offer both types of courses to students.

Some schools in the UCAN program began to explore a different approach to offering both AP and dual credit options through blending courses. That is, schools blended the contents of *individual courses* of each type in the same subject to have AP and dual credit in the same classroom. These pilot efforts were designed to increase the number of dual credit courses offered with the existing resource and schedule constraints and capture the relative advantages of both AP and dual credit. Staff from UCAN schools reported that Ivy Tech allows for the blending of some courses by teaching college-approved syllabi aligned to the AP curriculum, in which students can earn college credit with a passing grade *or* by taking the AP exam. However, other partner institutions in the program did not allow for such blending.

Educators from three UCAN schools described ways in which they were blending dual credit and AP

courses. At all three schools, educators said that how the two types of courses are integrated depends on the instructor and the subject. At one school, courses were blended by offering the two curricula in parallel. For example, students took Rhetoric and Argument (IVY 215) in the same classroom as AP English Language. The instructor for this course said that students use two different textbooks and the blending of the AP curriculum with the focus of the texts and essays from IVY 215 allowed the students to benefit from both approaches. An administrator from another UCAN school said that students in the AP Calculus course followed the AP curriculum with a few modifications approved by Ivy Tech for students to earn college credit. Students in this class can opt to take the course only for dual credit, only for high school credit plus the option to take the AP exam, or for dual credit and the option to take the AP exam. An administrator at that school noted, however, that offering courses simultaneously for both dual credit and AP did not make sense for all subjects; for example, curricula for dual credit and AP art courses were too different to allow for blending. The following sections summarize educators' perspectives on the relative advantages and disadvantages of their initial attempts to blend dual credit courses.

PERCEIVED ADVANTAGES OF BLENDING

One advantage to blending has to do with overcoming a perceived “competition” between AP and dual credit. An administrator shared, “Before, we were a strong AP school...So when [UCAN] came about, [teachers] got scared. They were like, 'What's going to happen to AP if now we're doing dual credit?'...You can do both. An AP teacher in an AP class can offer dual credit as long as the crosswalk allows it.” Another perceived advantage is that students have more choice and a “safety net” for earning college credit, particularly in schools not

large enough to have both dual credit and AP courses in all subject areas. One UCAN counselor, describing students' choices about earning college credit in blended classes, said, “They can do both. Some students say, ‘I don't care about the dual credit,’ and they just take the AP exam. Some say, ‘I don't care about the AP exam, and I'm just going to do the dual credit.’ But I'd say most students do both.”

PERCEIVED DISADVANTAGES OF BLENDING

Although the blending of courses gives students a choice about how they earn college credit, instructors from the three schools who are blending dual credit and AP noted that it was difficult to teach both types of courses in the same way. Offering the two course types in the same classroom requires extra work and planning for teachers, which may not be feasible in all schools. Staff from UCAN schools also described wanting to keep the options separate so that they could allow for more student differentiation. A teacher teaching a blended course said, “I think that [dual credit and AP] are two inherently different types of classes for two inherently different kinds of students, but we don't have a big enough school or a big enough population to need two classes.”

Conclusion

Understanding the relative advantages of dual credit and AP continues to be an important consideration for schools expanding access to college-level coursework. The evaluation of UCAN illuminated some perspectives on the two course types but did not provide a definitive view on which type of course was best for students or whether they should be mixed or blended. The UCAN schools noted that it was “too early to tell” in terms of the effectiveness of blending.

We recommend the following for state education leaders and policymakers:

1

Document the different strategies and settings in which schools are approaching blending dual credit and AP courses.

2

Obtain feedback from schools across your state that are integrating AP and dual credit courses to determine which aspects are working well and which ones are not.

3

Gather additional evidence to support whether the blending of courses is an effective strategy and, if so, identify best practices for doing so.



For more information about the UCAN evaluation, please contact Eric Grebing at egrebing@serve.org. To learn more about the Early College Research Center and for more resources about Early College, see EarlyCollegeResearch.uncg.edu.

Endnotes

- ¹ <https://cell.uindy.edu/our-work/early-college-high-school/ucan-project>
- ² <https://cell.uindy.edu>
- ³ <https://earlycollegeresearch.uncg.edu>
- ⁴ <https://serve.uncg.edu>
- ⁵ <https://cell.uindy.edu/our-work/early-college-high-school>
- ⁶ <https://cell.uindy.edu/our-work/early-college-high-school/#core-principles>
- ⁷ <https://cell.uindy.edu/our-work/early-college-high-school/cell-early-college-endorsement>
- ⁸ <https://www.in.gov/doe/students/dual-credit>
- ⁹ <https://www.ivytech.edu/programs/special-programs-for-students/high-school-programs/dual-credit>
- ¹⁰ <https://studenthandbook.acp.iu.edu/billing-information/index.html>
- ¹¹ <https://www.admissions.purdue.edu/transferecredit/dualcredit.php>
- ¹² <https://www.vinu.edu/dual-credit/index.html>
- ¹³ <https://www.bsu.edu/academics/collegesanddepartments/dual-credit/costs>
- ¹⁴ Indiana University also waives tuition for Indiana high school students taking dual credit classes that are on the [CTE Priority Dual Credit list](https://transferin.net/transfer-resources/transfer-databases/cte-priority-dual-credit). (<https://transferin.net/transfer-resources/transfer-databases/cte-priority-dual-credit>)
- ¹⁵ <https://www.in.gov/doe/students/advanced-placement-ap>
- ¹⁶ <https://apstudents.collegeboard.org/what-is-ap>
- ¹⁷ <https://learnmoreindiana.org/college-discovery/dual-credit>
- ¹⁸ <https://apstudents.collegeboard.org/getting-credit-placement/search-policies>
- ¹⁹ <https://apstudents.collegeboard.org/exam-policies-guidelines/exam-fees>. The \$99 per exam cost applies to AP exams taken in 2025. Students demonstrating significant financial need may be eligible for additional fee reductions or waivers through their schools.
- ²⁰ <https://transferin.net/ways-to-earn-credit/statewide-transfer-general-education-core-stgec>
- ²¹ <https://mycollegecore.org/plan>
- ²² Students may also earn transferable college credit through International Baccalaureate (IB) programs. Because none of the UCAN schools offered IB courses, they are not discussed here.
- ²³ Indiana Commission for Higher Education (2024). *College-going dashboard*. <https://www.in.gov/che/college-readiness-reports>
- ²⁴ <https://apcentral.collegeboard.org/media/pdf/top-colleges-and-universities-receiving-the-most-ap-scores-2024.pdf>
- ²⁵ <https://mycollegecore.org/plan>

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