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I am Paula Nichols and currently serve as the Executive Director of the Division of Distance learning at Lamar University in Beaumont, Texas. Lamar has provided dual credit courses to area high schools for over twenty years. I have been responsible for dual credit programs since 1995.

Lamar University currently serves dual credit students through four delivery methods. Lamar continues to serve students in traditional face to face classes by sending university faculty to several schools in close proximity to the campus. LEAP (Lamar Early Access Program) is a dual credit program in partnership with school districts that have fully qualified teachers who teach for the university at the high school campus. These adjuncts work closely with a university faculty member to ensure that the syllabi, textbook, assignments, assessments and learning outcomes are the same as those of on-campus sections of the course.

Lamar University also provides dual credit through two electronic delivery methods. Through SETTEN (SouthEast Texas Technology Education Network), Lamar delivers dual credit courses to 14 high schools in Region 5. This program is our largest and served several hundred students in the 2009-2010 school year. Courses are taught on the university campus by university faculty and are connected via interactive video to high school sites. Classes have both university and dual credit students. Lamar has offered online dual credit courses for several years and in 2009-2010 participated in an online pilot through Texas Virtual School Network. This pilot is our smallest dual credit program serving 38 students in Spring 2010. In all of these delivery methods Lamar continues to primarily serve rural districts.

Through my administrative role and personal experience, I am a passionate advocate for the value of dual credit opportunities for high schools students. I was Valedictorian in a graduating class of 63 students and began college at the University of Texas in Austin. It was immediately apparent that the limited curriculum available in a small rural Texas high school put me at a definite

academic disadvantage when compared to students from large high schools that offered advanced courses. Lamar serves one geographically isolated high school (Sabine Pass) that typically has 10-12 seniors. Dual credit is essential to students from these schools in order to adequately prepare them for college success.

Dual credit is a critical element of the education of Texas' academically talented students. Participation in dual credit proves to first generation college students that college is a viable option for their future, improves college attendance and retention rates and decreases time to graduation for all students. As tuition rates continue to rise, it provides a significant savings to parents who finance a college education. It is imperative that these courses are true college level courses with the academic rigor and quality that prepares students to successfully complete a college degree.

As an educator working closely with dual credit programs for 15 years, I can identify several practices to assure rigor, quality and consistency in dual credit courses. These practices are an integral part of Lamar's programs and have produced success rates above 98% and students who out-perform their peers when they enter college.

To assure academic rigor it is essential that dual credit courses are part of the traditional academic structure of the institution and developed and administered just like any other university course.

At Lamar University faculty is selected from full time professors or fully qualified adjuncts. Most faculty teach other university courses in addition to dual credit. Faculty members are selected and approved by the academic department and the dean's office. The dean's office also authorizes the development of all dual credit courses. Courses are peer reviewed to assure that the syllabi, assignments, assessments and student learning outcomes are the same as in other core curriculum courses. Student performance is monitored through the dean's office and reported through regular university channels. In addition, dual credit courses undergo the same assessment that are used in all core curriculum courses.

Lamar also has standard practices to assure that all students receive high quality courses in any delivery method. All faculty are required to meet THECB (Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board) and SACS (Southern Association of Colleges and Schools) standards.

Course development of online courses has instructional design support and a variety of technology tools to assist the faculty in developing a quality educational experience for students. Faculty is provided with a learning management system, video production studio, and have access to a variety of multimedia and social networking tools. Courses are reviewed to assure the availability of student interaction with the content, the faculty and other students. The Quality Matters rubric, a national standard for assessing quality in electronically delivered courses, is used to review each course.

Students have a variety of student support services available to them. Technical support is available in extended hours or 24/7, an 800 number is provided for distance students and all university services (registration, financial aid, library etc) can be accessed electronically via the web. Academic support is provided in a variety of ways including an online writing lab, online tutoring and support from instructional associates.

Consistency across delivery methods and across programs is ensured by applying the same standards and methods of quality assurance to all courses. By requiring that each dual credit course follow the same policies and procedures for approval, development, delivery, assessment and evaluation, dual credit courses are assured of a level quality that is consistent with all other university courses.

Rigor, quality and consistency in these courses are vitally important to students' future success in college. Rural schools particularly need these courses to challenge their academically talented students and to better meet the needs of the 4 X 4 curriculum. Quality dual credit courses should be available to every Texas student who qualifies regardless of their geographic location or the economic status of their parents. Affordable access to dual credit is essential to providing an education workforce for Texas' economic future.