

## DUAL ENROLLMENT

# A head start on college degree

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In one corner of Miami-Dade College's sprawling Kendall campus, Tiffany Pineda slips into class. *Attenzione!* It's time for Italian pronouns and grammar.

In jeans, a black tank top and red sneakers, she looks like a typical college student. But she's a 16-year-old high school junior.

Like Tiffany, a growing number of Miami-Dade and Broward high school students are taking college courses before graduation, a practice called dual enrollment that rewards them with tuition-free college credits.

For high schools, it gives students a way to accelerate. It can also help lift the schools' academic standing; in 2010, Florida started to factor dual enrollment into state-issued letter grades.

That has created a surge in dual enrollment through Florida International University, according to FIU Provost Douglas Wartzok — an eight-fold over the last three years.

Across Florida, the number of students who participated in dual enrollment rose 23 percent last year.

In Miami-Dade, students can participate in a number of ways.

- \* They can take a college class at their home school, taught by a Miami-Dade teacher who has been credentialed by FIU. FIU saw about 5,500 students enroll in classes at high schools last year.

- \* A university professor can come to the high school to teach.

- \* Students can take classes at a college campus.

- \* Students can apply for early admission and take their senior year at a university.

At Westland Hialeah Senior High, about 230 of the 1,950 students — nearly 12 percent — take classes through FIU. Another 94 go to Miami-Dade College for courses. Those programs not only helped Westland Hialeah lift its grade to an A from a B, said Principal Guillermo Muñoz, they also reflect a change in culture at the young school.

Dade schools and FIU share the expense of dual enrollment, which costs the public university about \$250,000, Wartzok said. "As the school system gets better, the community gets better, and that's good for everyone, including the university."

The demand of dual enrollment programs in Broward has grown so much that two high schools — Coconut Creek and South Broward in Hollywood — are starting programs in which teachers accredited by Broward College will teach at the schools.

The two new projects will try to mimic the success of McArthur High School in Hollywood, where students can enroll in the "Mustang Academy," a section of college-level courses. Several teachers at Cooper City High and Coral Springs High are also licensed to teach dual enrollment courses.

The Broward School District has also established the College Academy at Broward College, where more than 300 juniors and seniors report to the Davie campus instead of a traditional high school.

"We're developing some very strong partnerships," said Cynthia Park, director of advanced academic programs for Broward County Schools.

Park said that last year, about 2,000 students completed dual enrollment courses at Broward College and the Broward campuses of Florida Atlantic University and FIU.

"Most of them leave with their associate's degree, and it helps cut the cost of college in half," she said. "Financially, it's a good reason for many families."

Two Miami-Dade programs — the School for Advanced Studies at Miami-Dade College and the Academy for Advanced Studies at FIU — allow students to split their course load between college classes with university students and accelerated courses with other high schoolers.

“I like how I get to pick my own college classes. I get to pick classes I actually like — the freedom of it,” Tiffany said.

While Miami-Dade County Public Schools and Miami Dade College launched SAS in 1988, the program has grown in recent years.

Some 520 juniors and seniors study at its four campuses in Homestead, Kendall, North Miami-Dade and downtown Miami. The Kendall campus is the biggest, with 213 students. More than 800 people showed up at a recruitment event last fall at the Kendall campus — for 100 spots in the junior class. It draws students from public, private and parochial schools and home schoolers.

Several seniors in the SAS at the Kendall campus said they were looking for a challenge, like Ivan Cuartas who used to attend G. Holmes Braddock Senior High. “Now I’m getting humbled,” said Cuartas, 18, who wants to be a chemical engineer.

Does the focus on college classes in high school put too much pressure on students?

“It’s rigorous, but there’s a small learning community where they can not only help each other but get help from their teachers,” said Dennis Lindsay, a spokesman for SAS. “That alleviates some of the pressure.”

SAS counselors like Donna Bray at the Kendall campus also teach classes on skills like time management. In addition, juniors are paired up with seniors.

“With the right kind of support, a 15-, 16-, 17-year-old is ready for the pressure,” Lindsay said.

Miami Herald staff writers Laura Figueroa and Eric Eidelstein contributed to this report.