SYRACUSE UNIVERSITY’S PROJECT ADVANCE:
CONNECTING HIGH SCHOOL AND COLLEGE

Syracuse University’s Project Advance (SUPA) seeks to keep high school seniors engaged and actively preparing for college-level work by offering credit-bearing college courses to seniors in their high schools. The program began in 1973, after local high schools approached Syracuse about offering college courses to high school seniors.

Rather than allowing high school students to take college-level courses on a college campus—another common approach—the idea is to train high school teachers to teach college-level content, and then “validate” the courses as equivalent in content and quality to a course taught by a college faculty member.

Graduating high school seniors receive college credit from Syracuse University, even if they do not matriculate at Syracuse. Tuition for SUPA courses is kept low, costing about 25 percent of what a similar course would cost for a part-time student at Syracuse. If a student enrolls at another college, that college decides whether to accept the credits.

Teachers undergo a rigorous screening process to be qualified to teach for SUPA. Teachers must hold master’s degrees or equivalent experience and have five years of teaching under their belt, and they must be recommended by their principal and department chairperson. Teachers then attend workshops taught by Syracuse faculty and are named adjunct instructors for Syracuse.

Today, SUPA’s annual reach spans 134 high schools, more than 500 high school teachers, and over 6,000 students in New York, New Jersey, Maine, Massachusetts, and Michigan. Since its inception, more than 100,000 high school students have participated in SUPA. Courses are taught in 15 subject areas, ranging from writing to chemistry to religion and forensic science. The idea of Project Advance has also been copied at many other colleges; the SUPA team has helped establish similar programs at institutions ranging from Indiana University to Hokkaido University in Japan.

SUPA provides a number of benefits, with high percentages of college freshmen who completed courses through Project Advance reporting that they agreed or strongly agreed that the program helped them in areas ranging from developing better study habits (76%).

to becoming more adept at independent learning (74%) (please see Figure 1). For the class of 2002, 83 percent of students received credit for their Project Advance courses (6.8 percent of those students were attending Syracuse), and another 10 percent received some recognition for their courses. Eighty-two percent of Project Advance’s class of 1994 graduated from college within four years, faster than the national average. Project Advance also suggests that its benefits include engaging high school seniors in rigorous courses to avoid what is often referred to as the “senior slump”; giving students the potential to reduce their college graduation requirements or accelerate their studies at a discounted rate; and strengthening the ties between high schools and colleges.

Figure 1: “College freshm[e]n who completed SU courses through Project Advance agreed or strongly agreed that as a result they:

- Developed better study habits – 76%
- Learned to manage time more effectively – 73%
- Had more realistic expectations of college work – 84%
- Developed a more realistic view of their academic strengths and weaknesses – 79%
- Became more willing to accept academic challenges – 80%
- Became more adept at learning independently – 74%
- Were exposed to higher academic requirements – 87%
- Expressed themselves better in writing – 60%
- Became better informed in their choice of college majors – 40%”

—Source: Bill Newell, May 2004

“Syracuse University’s Project Advance has pioneered the awarding of university credit for courses taken in the high school and taught by high school teachers, but supervised by the university for the content of the curriculum and the quality of the instruction. This model has spread to hundreds of colleges and universities, many of them community colleges, that give full college credit, appearing on the college or university transcript like any other credits, for courses that were taken by students prior to high school graduation and taught in the high school by high school teachers.”—The Learning Productivity Network, Spring 1997

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