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Dual credit initiative introduces high school students to university coursework

Twenty-seven high school students at Lethbridge Collegiate Institute are earning both high school and university credits through a dual credit initiative (DCI) with the University of Lethbridge that began in September.

Liberal Education 1000 is being taught by University of Lethbridge professors Dr. Bruce MacKay, co-ordinator of the Faculty of Arts and Science's Liberal Education program, Dr. Lance Grigg, a Faculty of Education professor who teaches critical thinking skills, and Aaron Stout, a social studies teacher at LCI. The course is a version of the same one that's been offered at the U of L for years.

The students — most are in Grade 11— get together for two lectures and three labs each week. In addition, the students receive several workshops with U of L librarian Nicole Eva to develop their information literacy skills and introduce them to doing library research. The course explores knowledge across disciplines, including the sciences, the social sciences, the humanities and fine arts. For the DCI, the question students are examining is 'What should we eat?'

"They are using tools, skills and attitudes associated with critical thinking to read articles in natural science, social science, humanities and arts to develop their own arguments and make their own reasoned judgments addressing that question," says Grigg.

"We ask the students to think about what we should eat from a scientific perspective and for health. We ask them to consider how we should feed the population on the planet, and whether industrial farming or local, organic farming is the best way to go," says MacKay. "Like the course on campus, the students are writing tests on the content of the material, they're doing a series of smaller exercises for grades that lead up to a final project. The final project is their answer to the question 'What should we eat?'"

The course came about after Alberta Education opened its doors to dual credit program proposals and approved the joint LCI-U of L submission. After two years of planning, the three-year pilot program launched in September. Since Alberta Education is subsidizing

the program, students don't pay tuition fees but they have full access to U of L facilities and resources.

Students have responded positively to the dual credit course and have shown themselves to be eager learners.

"One of the things I'm really happy with is the critical thinking. Just over the last few months, it's changed how I think about things. Before, I'd look at things and make decisions based on everyone around me. Now I can take a step back and look at things critically," says Daniel O'Connor, a Grade 11 student.

"We cover a lot of different topics. We just finished the science aspect and now we're doing social sciences," says Jhanvi Mehta, a Grade 11 student. "So it's nice to see how that all ties in with our overall question, which is 'What should we eat?'"

"I enjoyed learning about the different kind of arguments and the proper ways to argue. Plenty of politicians argue and you realize they're not always doing it the right way," says Aurora Gray, a Grade 12 student. "It makes you think about how to show your information and prove what you're saying."

The professors and Stout agree the course is going well and they're impressed with how the students are engaging with the material and asking pertinent questions.

"It's really exciting for me to see what high school students, when brought into a different context, can actually do," says Stout.

Another component of the course is a partnership with industry. WestJet is the official partner for the course. Stout says a WestJet representative will be presenting to the class as a way to illustrate how critical thinking skills apply in the world of business. In addition, Precon Manufacturing has indicated its willingness to show students the link between critical thinking and its industry.

The students will gain credit for a locally developed course at the high school level and three university credits. The LibEd 1000 course will wrap up in December and another dual credit course in systems and supply chain management will be taught next year, with Haul-All as the industry partner.

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