

Running Head: CONTINUATION SCHOOL

Continuation School
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Intern Project
School Counseling Specialization
Portland State University
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Professional Responsibility: This project has been reviewed by collegial professional peers and has been submitted before being evaluated by faculty members from Portland State University. I am the author and take full responsibility for the project's contents and quality. This work serves as a baseline for my professional school counselor skills and demonstrates what I have done to develop and/or assess my actions directed toward serving students and schools. In other words, this is snapshot or one indicator of my work at his stage of my career.

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Introduction

The transition from middle school to high school can be very difficult for many students. Especially, if those students have developed a pattern of limited academic success throughout their elementary and middle school years. In effort to help ease that transition for its most at-risk incoming 9th grade students, a new program was created at Buckaroo High School. The program was called, “Continuation School.” The following will review the program and its outcomes.

Literature Review

A profound problem among high schools today throughout the United States is the number of kids not graduating from high school that should be. Currents statistics generated by the Oregon Department of Education suggests that 1 in 5 students who enter high school next year will not graduate (ODE website). There are several settings in which students can attain a high school education. Schoenlein (2004), suggests that in order to maximize student success, educators in schools must focus on keeping as many kids in regular high school settings as possible. (Scheonlein, 2004). He also suggests that there is not one specific educational model that serves as the best tool to deter school dropout (Scheonlein, 2004). In addition, students thrive in different environments. That is, not all student’s will flourish under the same conditions (Raywind, 2001). Many students need tightly structured environments, while others need a looser, more experiential environment (Raywind, 2003). The bottom line is that unless students feel real value in what they are doing/learning, they are not likely to become engaged in the process (Raywind, 2001). Thus, if they are not fully engaged in the process, they are less likely to succeed. (Raywind, 2001).

Another key factor is the students' relationship with their teachers. Students from economically disadvantaged families cited negative relationships with teachers as a primary reason for dropping out (Black, 2003). Black (2003), also suggests that teachers who focus their attention primarily on those students who pose behavioral problems often perpetuate them. Rather, she suggests that those students often need to be "rescued not ridiculed." (Black, 2003).

Matros and Huesman (2002), found that race disparity is also a factor for determining who is likely to drop out of high school. Their finding suggests that Native American students are 20% more likely to drop out of high school than Caucasian students (Matros and Huesman, 2002).

As suggested in the introduction, the transition from middle school to high school is often difficult for students to make. It can be especially difficult for those students who did not do well socially and academically during their middle school years. In order to maximize retention rates, it is imperative that at-risk middle school students have a positive experience when transitioning to high school. A high school in Maine uses a freshman advisory program that strives to foster attachment, achievement and awareness to help with their transitioning students (Lampert, 2005). This program incorporates advisory teachers with student mentors to help guide their 9th graders. Overall, the program has decreased freshman failure rate by 15% over a three year period. In addition they have increased extra-curricular participation, with administration receiving little to no opposition from students about the program (Lampert, 2005).

Students such as those in Maine who feel connected to the school are more likely to succeed (Blum, 2005). Blum (2005), suggests that school connectedness encompasses related concepts such as student engagement and climate within his definition (Blum,

2005). Students who feel connected to their school share a sense of belonging, friendships with peers, feel that teachers care about them, and believe that education is important (Blum, 2005). These characteristics are all ones that contribute to lower dropout rates, and increased student success.

Method

Background

During the 2003-04 school year, Buckaroo High School identified thirty-two out of two hundred and sixty incoming 9th grade students as either not passing their second semester 8th grade Math, and/or Language Arts classes. This list of students, titled “Freshman Continuation,” included only those who failed during the school year and did not pass one or both of the courses during the 2003 summer session. Buckaroo High School elected to treat each of these students as they did with any other incoming 9th grader. They were assigned a completely non-specialized course schedule and given the same expectations as any other freshman.

Throughout the first semester of the 2003-04 school year, the Freshman Continuation school students earned on average 1.1 of a possible 3.5 credits. In addition, only 9 of the 32 students completed the year as students of Buckaroo High School. The students who did not complete the school year either quit on their own, were dropped by administration for nonattendance, transferred to alternative schools, or left for other disciplinary reasons. That computes into a retention rate of only 28.2% for that population of students. In addition to this subgroup of student struggling academically, they demonstrated significant behavior challenges for our teachers and administration. Needless to say, this population of students needed to be addressed through a different

approach in order to maximize their potential for success throughout their high school years.

Program Structure

Prior to the beginning of the 2004-05 school year, twenty-six incoming 9th grade students were identified to participate in “Continuation School.” The students were identified using the same criteria as the 2003-04 school year. They had either failed the second semester of Math, and/or Language Arts during their 8th grade year, and had not passed the class(es) during the 2004 summer session. (Students who met the previous criteria that qualified through Individual Education Plans (IEP’s) for modified curriculum, or resource room placements were excluded from the group.) Each student who was identified as eligible for the Continuation School program was mandated to the program if they wanted to attend Buckaroo High School.

As the Freshman Counselor, I along with one of our Assistant Principals designed each of the students’ schedules’ individually. The students were assigned to Continuation School classes either 3 or 4, out of 7 periods throughout the day. The variation depended on their writing/math levels. Continuation School classes consisted of Global Studies, Careers, Writing, and elective History class. Each class was taught by the same teacher, with the help of one Instructional Assistant for each class period. That meant ½ of the Continuation School students’ daily class schedule was with the same teacher and group of students. The Continuation School students were placed in mainstream classes for Health/PE, Science, and Math.

Program Goals

The primary goals for the Continuation School program were to decrease attrition rates, as well as increase overall credit earning. Secondary goals of the program were to improve overall attendance rates and decrease overall behavioral disruptions.

Program Plan

As suggested, the primary goals were to decrease the attrition rate, as well as increase overall credit earning. This meant that the learning environment had to lend itself to achieving those goals. Continuation School classes were scaled down academically to meet minimum Buckaroo High School requirements, in order to help keep students from feeling overwhelmed.

In addition, throughout the first several weeks of semester one the students were presented with a number of incentives unique to the Continuation School program. Initially, each student was given a Buckaroo High School t-shirt in an effort to bring a sense of pride and unity to the group. This set the tone for a system of positive reinforcement that carried throughout the semester. Students who demonstrated positive behavior, had acceptable attendance rates, and made adequate progress academically earned things such as candy bars and free movie rentals.

The method of incentive distribution varied. Some times an administrator or counselor would present things in class. Other times students were individually recognized for positive behavior and achievement. There was never a set schedule as to when the rewards were presented to the students, so it was a surprise each time it occurred.

At the completion of the first semester a 14 question confidential survey addressing attitudes toward the program, student success, and general attitudes about

school was administered. Prior to completing the survey, each student was required to have a parent sign a release approved by the HSRRC at Portland State University.

(Appendix A)

Results

Possibly the most powerful result of the Continuation School program, is the improvement of the student retention rate. As previously suggested, only nine out of thirty-two, or 28.2% of Freshman Continuation students from the 2003-04 school year completed the year at Buckaroo High School. In contrast, as of the first week in May, twenty-one out of twenty-six Continuation School students from the 2004-05 school year continue to be enrolled at Buckaroo High School. That calculates to be an 80.7% retention rate, an increase of 52.5%. (Appendix B)

Attendance rates, which are directly related to the retention rate also improved for this population of students over the course of the two school years. Unfortunately, between the 03/04 and 04/05 school years, the method of recording attendance was modified. This created inconsistencies when trying to calculate accurate individual attendance data between the two years. What can be said with accuracy about attendance rates is that only two out of twenty-six, or 9.2% of Continuation School students were dropped by Buckaroo High School for non-attendance as of the first week in May during the 2004-05 school year. (According to Oregon Revised Statutes, a student can be dropped from a school if they miss 10 or more consecutive days of school.) In contrast, ten out of 32, or 31.25% of Freshman Continuation students were dropped by Buckaroo High School during the 2003-04 school year for non-attendance. (Appendix C)

Not only did the retention and attendance rates of the Continuation School students improve, the 2004-05 students also earned on average .67 credits more than the

2003-04 students during the first semester. At Buckaroo High School, students are eligible to earn 3.5 credits each semester if enrolled in a 7 course schedule. During the 2003-04 school year, the Freshman Continuation students earned an average of 1.1 credits. Of those, seventeen of the thirty-two, or 53.1% of those earned .5 credits or less. In contrast, the 2004-05 Continuation School students earned on average 1.77 credits during the first semester. Of those, only seven out of twenty-six, or 26.9% of students earned .5 credits or less. That equates to a 26.2% improvement. (Appendix D and E)

The final source of data was generated through a 14 question confidential 5 point Likert scale survey administered to the 2004-05 Continuation School students. This survey was designed to address attitudes toward school, the program, and school success. (Appendix F) Individuals were asked to anonymously answer each survey question as honestly as possible. Individual question results are as follows:

	<u>Mean</u>	<u>Median</u>	<u>Mode</u>
1.	3.1	3	4
2.	4	3	5
3.	3.1	3	3
4	3.6	3.5	5
5.	3.8	3.5	3
6.	3.2	3	3
7.	3	3	4
8.	4.1	3.5	4
9.	2.8	3.5	4
10.	3.6	3.5	4
11.	2.9	3	3
12.	4.7	4	5
13.	2.1	2.5	2
14.	4.5	4	5

Through non-scientific examination of the data collected, the Continuation School students from 2004-05 had fairly neutral attitudes toward several of the questions. These

include questions 1, 3, 6, 7, 9, and 11. The students' responses to question 2 suggests that students tend to think that school is pretty important, answering with a mean score of 4. Questions 4 and 5 were answered in similar fashion. Students tended to answer more strongly that Continuation School classes help them be successful, as well as they enjoy having classes with the same set of peers for several classes. Question 8's answers also suggested that the students think Continuation School classes are a good idea. They answered that question with a mean score of 4.1. The students answered question 10 with a mean score of 3.6, suggesting that they tend to like their teachers more than they dislike them. Question 12 addressed the desire to be successful in school. Overwhelmingly, the Continuation School students answered with a strong desire to be successful. Students also feel that there is only a small need to modify Continuation School classes. They answered question 13, which addressed that issue with a mean score of 2.1. Finally, the Continuation School students' answers to question 14 suggested very strongly that as group they plan to graduate from Buckaroo High School. They answered that question with a mean score 4.5, with 5 being the most popular response.

Discussion

The results of the Continuation School program suggest that retention rates, credits earned were both significantly improved from the previous year. In addition, the results suggest that there were fewer major behavioral problems, and improved attendance rates associated with this population of students. With that said, each of the programs' goals was met. In addition, student surveys support a sense of value in the Continuation School program and its philosophy directed toward eliciting the full potential from each of the students. As a result of the findings, Buckaroo High School has

decided to continue the Continuation School program for the incoming 9th grade students for the 2005-06 school year. Again, each student who meets the programs' criteria will be mandated to the program if they want to attend Buckaroo High School. In addition, the 2004-05 Continuation School students will continue a similar program through their 10th grade year in 2005-06. The plan will be to eventually fully integrate them into mainstream classes during their 11th and 12th grade years.

Though the results suggest that the Continuation School program was successful in attaining its goals, there are a number of limitations associated with the data collected. The most obvious limitation is that there were two different populations of students used between the two years in which data was collected. Thus, it is possible that some of the improvement in student success cannot be contributed to the Continuation School program, but rather the variation in students themselves. In addition, the survey was only administered to the 2004-05 students, so the 2003-04 students' attitudes toward school and school success were not adequately addressed.

Despite the programs' limitations, I would strongly support the idea that the Continuation School program has had a positive influence in the education of some of Buckaroo High School's most at-risk students. There was an obvious need for change in how Freshman Continuation students were being educated. I am confident that the Continuation School program was able to fulfill some that need, and will continue to do so in the future.

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Appendix A

Continuation School Letter of Informed Consent

As part of the requirements for completing the School Counseling Licensure program at Portland State University, I am required to complete an Action Research Project. My project involves helping to design and implement a program, as well as looking at its effectiveness. I have chosen to look at the effectiveness of the Continuation School program recently created at the High School. This program is designed to meet the needs of a population of students who have been underserved in previous years.

In signing this letter, I give my son/daughter permission to compete the survey administered in the Continuation School program. I understand that the survey will address my child’s current attitude toward school, learning, and the Continuation School program in general. In addition, I understand that the information will remain anonymous and confidential, and will in no way be used for any other purpose other than evaluating the effectiveness of the program.

If you have any questions, or concerns about the Action Research project, please contact me:

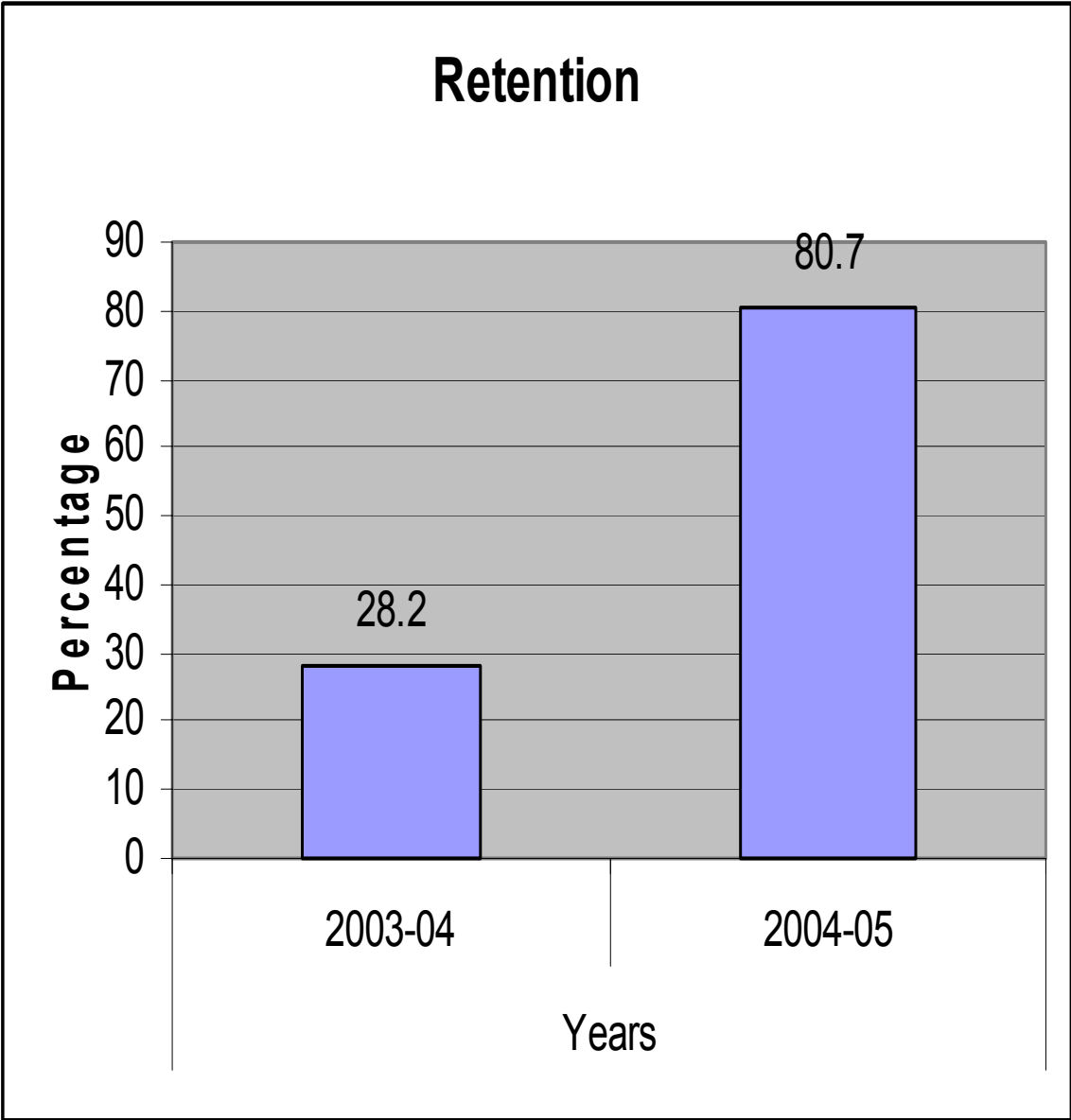
Chris Bettineski
555-5555

Student

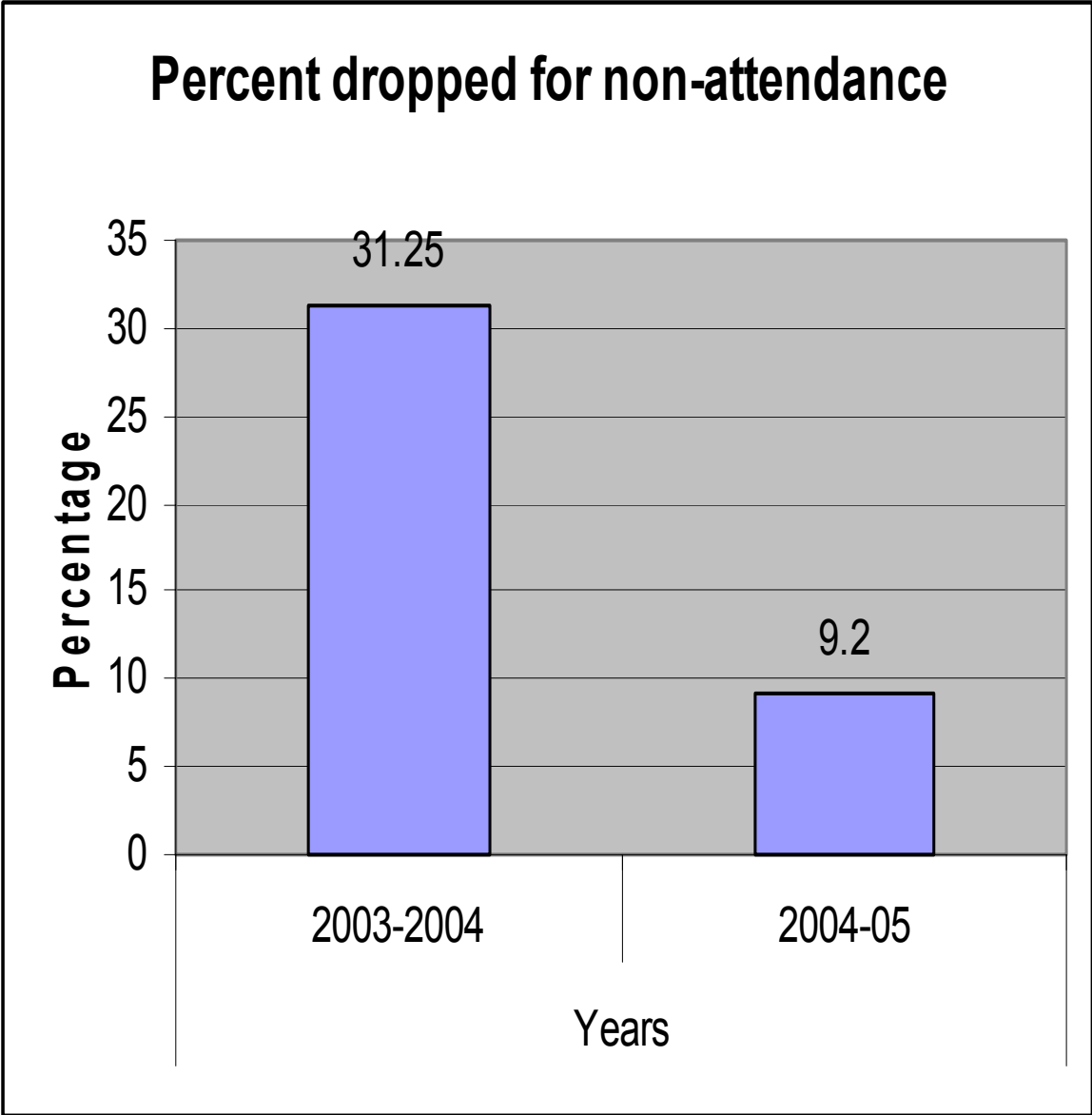
Parent/Guardian Signature

Date

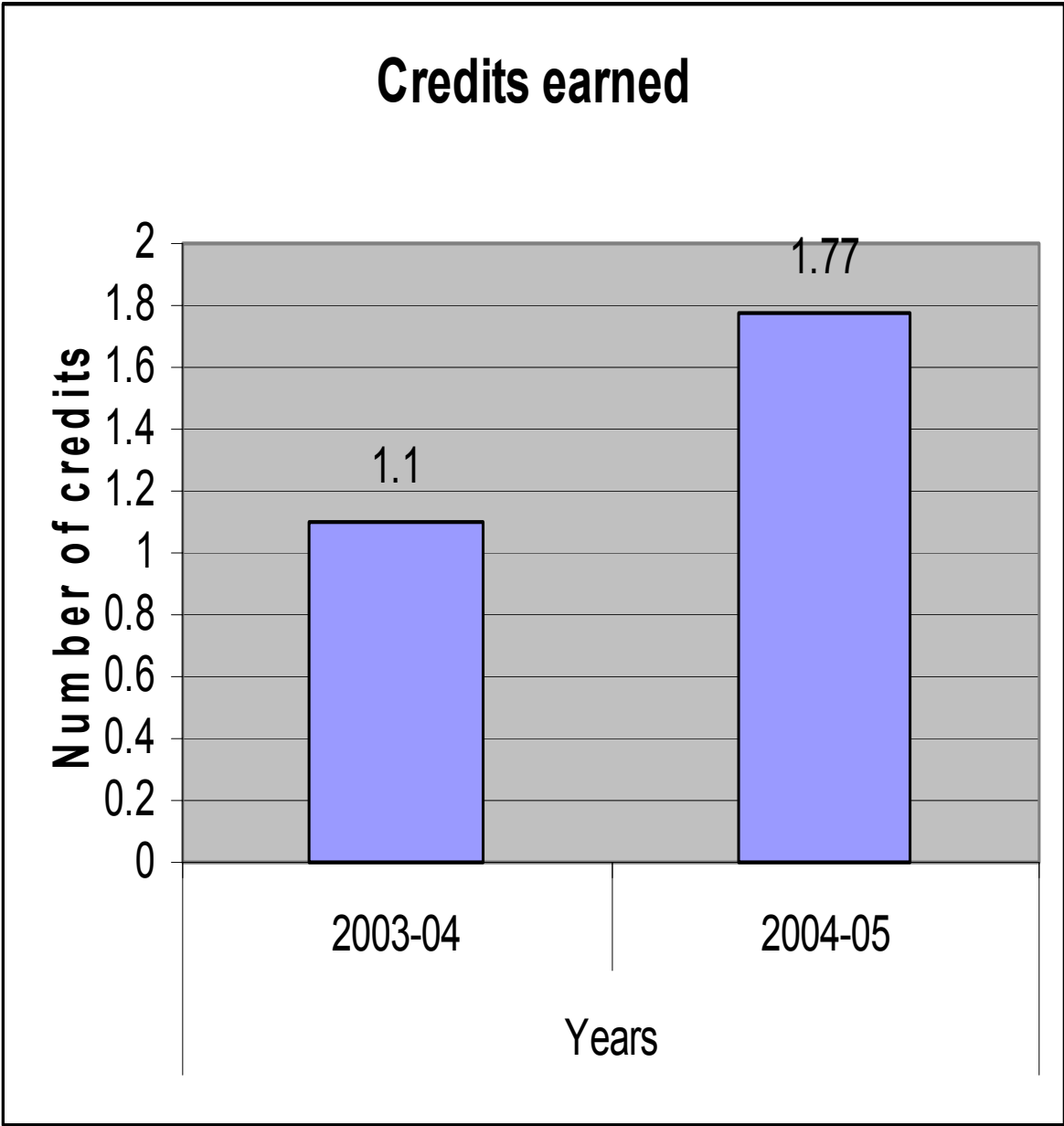
Appendix B



Appendix C



Appendix D



Appendix E

