

EPISODE 05**[INTRODUCTION]**

[0:00:05.2] Aaress Lawless: Hi there. Welcome to Today's Homeschool Teen, a podcast for homeschooling parents who want to help their teens meet the challenges of high school and reach their incredible God-given potential. I'm your host, Aaress Lawless. On behalf of our team at Dual Credit at Home, thank you for joining me.

Today's podcast is really special because we are talking with one of our Dual Credit at Home students. Kimberly Snyder. Kimberly is a Dual Credit pro, an ESL teacher and she's going to be telling us all about her high school experiences with Dual Credit.

[INTERVIEW]

[0:00:42.6] Aaress Lawless: Kimberly, it is a joy to chat with you today, thank you so much for taking time to join us on the podcast.

[0:00:49.5] Kimberly Snyder: Thank you so much for inviting me. I'm really honored to be here.

[0:00:52.8] Aaress Lawless: Well, this is a joy, several of our listeners have probably had a chance to interact with you in our private Facebook group at Dual Credit at Home and we were getting ready to talk to some of our students, you were at the top of our list so I think we're going to have a fun chat.

[0:01:08.4] Kimberly Snyder: I hope so.

[0:01:10.5] Aaress Lawless: I've heard a little bit about your home school story but I would love to learn more. Tell us about your home schooling background and how you and your parents decided to pursue Dual Credit as part of that?

[0:01:23.2] Kimberly Snyder: Okay. Well, both of my parents graduated from public school. I think they had no idea when they got into homeschooling, what they were doing. But they jumped in with both

feet anyways and I'm the oldest of seven kids. My mom has her hands full and we're kind of the stereotypical family with the big 12-passenger van and everything. Yeah, we were homeschooled right from the beginning and my parents taught us really early on to pursue studying independently.

For example, for years, I was really interested in geology. I collected rocks by the dozens and my mom would take me to the library and she says, "Okay, go find a book, figure out what kind of rock it is. Learn for yourself what you're interested in." I remember countless times where I would ask how to spell something and my mom was like, "Okay, what do you think the first three letters are?" and then I would guess and she's like, "Okay, that's right. Now, go find the rest in the dictionary."

[0:02:32.1] Aaress Lawless: Exactly. Been there, done that.

[0:02:37.2] Kimberly Snyder: Really fun education process where it's not just school and a desk, your whole life is learning something and I remember pretty clearly at 10 or 11 when my mom first heard about Dual Credit from another homeschool family and I was completely disinterested. I was in sixth grade, I didn't like school, and I absolutely did not plan on going to college.

I was like, that doesn't concern me but my mom stayed interested in that, when I was 16, my mom convinced me to go to the community college and had this like, I don't know, aptitude test I guess, you would call it and they would have test students who are interested in doing Dual Credit through the community college and they were testing me in English, in science and math. All of my friends who had taken the same test from homeschool group, whatever, they were all put in intermediate courses.

Instead of going to college algebra 101, they would go to pre-algebra. When I took the aptitude test, I tested at college level in every subject that they tested me on. I was shocked. I remember, I was 16 and you wouldn't think I was that smart. My grades were average.

I guess I realized after the fact that I really, as a teenager didn't have tons of confidence in my homeschool education. I knew my grades were decent in my home. I didn't know how that was really translating or comparing to my peers. Once I took that test, which I know it sounds ridiculous but I took that test and I was like, actually, competent enough to go into college level classes according to the community college.

I really had a lot more confidence to pursue things like Dual Credit. Yeah, shortly after that is when my parents enrolled me in Dual Credit at Home because I finally the boost of confidence that I needed to try something like that. That's my story basically.

[0:04:57.8] Aaress Lawless: That is so incredible. Now, Dual Credit at Home has been part of that journey but overall, you've done a lot of different things and it's been fun, unique and out of the box. You even had time to do some incredible extracurricular activities as part of that. Tell us about your overall view. To sum up your college experience and tell people how you have been on this journey, how would you describe it?

[0:05:21.7] Kimberly Snyder: Out of the box, it's a great start. Overall, nothing I have done has really been traditional. I took my own lifestyle and things that I was interested in and the schedule that I wanted to have in my life. I was even able to participate in things that I was thinking about doing as a career.

I was interested in becoming a freelance copy editor. Actually, I was mostly interested in working for a publishing company but first; I was going to try freelance copyediting. I started doing that at 18 years old professionally for authors. I wouldn't have been able to do that if I was at college.

Then, at 19, I started teaching English, again, professionally. 19 year olds don't teach English professionally but I was. I was also pursuing opportunities where I was able to do what I wanted to do with my life and I was doing everything on my timetable and traveling the world. You know, at some point I even studied from South East Asia. I was taking college education and fitting it into my life and fitting it around my schedule.

[0:06:44.0] Aaress Lawless: Right.

[0:06:46.0] Kimberly Snyder: That's really where I like Dual Credit at Home and credits by exam. That really was a blessing to me. I didn't have to set aside my life and what I wanted to do to pursue college and that's amazing. That's an opportunity that I had that my parents didn't.

[0:07:06.5] Aaress Lawless: Right. So true. Let's talk nuts and bolts, take me through your degree plan, how has that led up, where you at currently, what courses, you don't have to tell me all of them but the highlights. Tell me what that looks like for you as you pursue that bachelor's degree?

[0:07:27.1] Kimberly Snyder: Okay, my bachelor's degree is in English and I started with 15 exams and then I also use this website called study.com. I know several Dual Credit at Home students have used it as well.

[0:07:44.5] Aaress Lawless: Yeah, absolutely.

[0:07:46.5] Kimberly Snyder: It's a great resource to supplement a degree I think.

[0:07:49.5] Aaress Lawless: Right.

[0:07:50.4] Kimberly Snyder: I used that very heavily. I'm not going to go into super specific because it can get a little bit messy. I did find this one interesting thing and I'm going to just put this out there because I think that students and parents who are interested in alternative college should get into the forums. See what opportunities are out there because I was following this page on Facebook and it wasn't even really applicable to the place where I was in my education.

I just happened to be following it and this post got shared on there about extension school classes starting last winter where they were offering advanced upper level and graduate level poetry classes which fits into my English degree.

[0:08:50.7] Aaress Lawless: Yeah.

[0:08:52.5] Kimberly Snyder: For \$50 a credit.

[0:08:54.0] Aaress Lawless: \$50, that's incredible.

[0:08:55.8] Kimberly Snyder: Yes. I know that's more expensive than the CLEP obviously but for upper level credit that applies directly towards your major, that is extremely affordable and it's harder.

[0:09:07.2] Aaress Lawless: Exactly.

[0:09:10.3] Kimberly Snyder: It's great. I did that for three semester last summer, last fall and then this spring semester so that was let's see, 20 credit hours altogether for a thousand dollars which is absolutely great. Then there are a couple of extra classes in here and right now; I'm about half way through my very last and final class, a liberal arts term course.

I have about six more weeks or so and I'll graduate with my English degree.

[0:09:47.7] Aaress Lawless: That's awesome, congratulations.

[0:09:52.2] Kimberly Snyder: Thank you.

[0:09:53.8] Aaress Lawless: Question for you on Thomas Edison. What prompted you to choose Charter, not to do Charter but to go with Thomas Edison and I think this is a really important thing that especially our dual credit home family's needs to consider because Thomas Edison is also an excellent school for credit by exam.

[0:10:10.5] Kimberly Snyder: If I had earned all the credits that I did, before I was 21, I probably would have graduated from Charter State because Thomas Edison does have the requirement that you're 21 to apply.

[0:10:24.2] Aaress Lawless: Right.

[0:10:26.1] Kimberly Snyder: I'm 22 now, which kind of assisted in me to work with Thomas Edison. I actually made spreadsheets and this is kind of my thing because I'm very detail oriented but I made a spreadsheet mapping out the cost of going to the rest of my degree with Charter Oak or Thomas Edison and what I found was that Thomas Edison was not only a little bit cheaper but also, I could finish a little bit faster.

Charter Oak for example, I would have had to take an additional science course would have taken longer and they require a lab to graduate whereas Thomas Edison doesn't. I actually really don't like science. Of all the CLEPs I searched, natural sciences was my lowest CLEP score. That just gives you an idea, I wasn't excited about biology.

Things just added up and Thomas Edison just kind of slightly edged out Charter. It wasn't a massive landslide where I just was, Thomas Edison is the best, it was just kind of like, okay, well, here's my spreadsheet and Thomas Edison just looks a little bit better, that's how it ended up coming together.

[0:11:55.1] Aaress Lawless: That's incredible. Well, it's still excellent choice. I find that Thomas Edison has even more majors too that Charter Oak. It's a great resource for families to consider. You mentioned credit by exam, what are some of the exam types that you've taken. You said, what was it? 15 CLEPs, that's incredible. Have you taken any other types of credit by exams?

[0:12:20.7] Kimberly Snyder: No, I never even took a DSST. Which I know is shocking.

[0:12:26.5] Aaress Lawless: That's okay. That's the beauty; you've made it your own.

[0:12:32.7] Kimberly Snyder: Yeah, when I was first starting dual credit at home, I planned on going to a specific school with a very rigid acceptance policy on that and they wouldn't accept DSST. During those early days of Dual Credit and Dual Credit at Home, I just skipped the DSST. But come to find out, Thomas Edison accepts everything.

That's just how I started and it ended up working out so it's okay.

[0:13:07.7] Aaress Lawless: Yeah, it did indeed. What's been the biggest benefit for you of earning credit by exam?

[0:13:13.8] Kimberly Snyder: Absolutely flexibility.

[0:13:16.0] Aaress Lawless: Flexibility, yeah.

[0:13:17.3] Kimberly Snyder: We were talking about earlier, just being able to go and do and live my life and travel. The many years of missions work has absolutely changed my life. I just think back and wonder if I would be the same person that I am today if I hadn't had those opportunities and experiences. I was just so thankful for the flexibility that I had these last few years.

[0:13:47.0] Aaress Lawless: That's something I think a lot of high schoolers really want to have. I know it can be kind of daunting, you got this passions, these dreams that God has given and the thought of spending four more years to pin them on hold and hit pause but credit by exam does indeed open up that flexibility, good point, very good point.

Now, let's talk drawbacks. Has there been any drawbacks or the hardest part of earning credit by exam? I know it's not easy, it is challenging.

[0:14:16.2] Kimberly Snyder: No, it's not easy, somebody — who was it? Someone like extended family member was actually just recently like getting on me like, "When are you going to go to college?" And I'm like, "Wait, I'm about to graduate."

"It's not real, it's just online." "No, it's real, it's hard." Yeah. It's real. I would say the hardest part is probably self-discipline and perseverance because you don't have a professor breathing down your neck or emailing you deadlines. You have to find it within yourself to sit down and study, not just one day or not just after class but every day for months and years.

That can get old and that can be hard and like, I'm still on this Thomas Edison course and it's my last one and I'm so excited but I am like really tired, you know? Yeah, I think I got 26 or 27 semester hours this semester. I'm just tired, I'm just worn out and I don't want to study and I don't want to write but having that self-discipline, building out that perseverance. I think it has helped me that I started small, I started dual credit at home where there's a study plan to sit down and go through it.

After Dual Credit at Home, I started having courses that were not a part of the program. I had so many different classes trying to get my degree finished and it was okay. I got A's in everything and so even though it's hard, all of those little practices of self-discipline and just perseverance and sitting down and studying even if you don't feel like it has been a really good and growing experience.

I hope that even though I'm finishing my bachelor's degree soon that I can continue to be a good learner throughout adulthood, whenever I need to learn something, I can do it and it won't be too stressful because I learned how to have self-discipline to sit down and to do things that aren't necessarily fun or easy all the time.

[0:16:47.8] Aaress Lawless: I think one of the questions that sometimes makes me smile when I get it on live chat or in one of our webinars is are the test easy? It makes me chuckle and like well, no. They're college level, they're not easy and I know that's one of the hard parts for students as they transition from high school level to college level work. What advice would you give a teenager who is just getting started with their first CLEP exam?

[0:17:18.2] Kimberly Snyder: If you want it to be sustainable, if you want to do more than one CLEP exam, and if you are to potentially finish your degree, I would say, keep a hobby, okay? Don't make your whole life about studying. If you love music, keep practicing music.

If you like to write a blog, keep writing your blog because it won't be sustainable if your entire life is studying.

[0:17:51.5] Aaress Lawless: Right.

[0:17:52.2] Kimberly Snyder: I would also say that aptitude on these exams doesn't mean that you're a genius and lack of aptitude maybe if you fail and get a low grade, that doesn't mean you're not intelligent.

[0:18:08.0] Aaress Lawless: Right.

[0:18:08.5] Kimberly Snyder: Okay? Sure, you can study harder; everybody can study harder every time. I've never gotten a perfect score, I could have always studied a little bit harder but it's really a mental game that they're playing and you have to learn what the test administrators are asking and what they want you to answer sometimes.

Because I had gotten subjective questions on CLEP's where it's like, what do you think this author saying? There's a right and wrong answer. It's not really what do I think. I don't believe in evolution but when I sit down and take a science CLEP exam, I need to answer what they want me to answer. There's a mental game like aspects to it and if you don't do well, don't feel bad.

Don't be like – "Oh I am not smart because I didn't do this or that," that's not true. You're still smart and so yes, those would be my main things. Don't tie down your intelligence to the score and don't tie down your life to the test. Keep your life, keep your hobbies so that you can thrive.

[0:19:23.6] Aaress Lawless: That is wise advice. I want to come back and talk more of the hobbies in a minute but first, I am going to ask you, it is a bit of a personal question so I hope I don't put you in the spot too bad but have you ever failed a test?

[0:19:35.3] Kimberly Snyder: I have never failed a test.

[0:19:37.1] Aaress Lawless: Never failed a test, wow. That's incredible, well good job. Well then, that says a lot for your test taking abilities and also your study abilities. So let us talk about that for a minute before we go back and talk about hobbies. What are some of your favorite test exam strategies because obviously you've prepared very well for those exams and not failed?

[0:20:02.2] Kimberly Snyder: Well I did come close to failing because of low scores. But my top study resource that I think everybody should use and I have used it for every test is the degree forum website. This is a special forum that is only for instant search subscribers and you can go in and you can see exam feedback for every CLEP exam and DSST exams from hundreds and hundreds of people. That place is a gold mine.

I always take ridiculous amounts of notes from that forum. Personally I found out pretty early on in my class exam studying life, I learned that I cannot do studying if it is terms and definition like the appendix in RDA guide, I can't just study that. It doesn't help me. I learned that I am a timeline person so I write things out as a timeline and I even do this for things you wouldn't expect to have a timeline like literature exams.

Usually people will be like, “Oh this timeline goes with the history exam,” but I wouldn’t even make a timeline for literature. I would map out literature from just for example English literature starts in like 900, *Beowulf* or something like that and have that and then go all the way through. I would have three pages of timeline and every era, I would put authors and then I would put their most famous works next to their names and that is how I would study literature.

I wouldn’t study by author or by subject. I would study by timeline. This is just how I study. This is how my brain works and then I would do my best to memorize in my timeline, which isn’t really hard if it gets to be long. I would even take my timeline to my sister or somebody who has some free time and then I would hand them my timeline and say, “Could I recite this for you?” And then every time I miss something they would highlight it.

So that I know that I need to practice that again. So that is just me, I just know that I study well with a timeline and I think everybody studies a little bit differently. So a timeline might not be helpful at all to somebody else that if you could find something that does work for you that you feel like, “Wait I can actually remember this,” or you can look at it and then visually memorize it kind of thing, it is just easier to memorize in certain format.

If you could figure that out I think it would really help because when I go into a class exam, the first thing I do even before I click start on the class exam is I take my three sheet of scratch paper that they gave me and I would write out everything that I can remember from the timeline that I have spent in the last three or four days memorizing.

[0:23:15.0] Aaress Lawless: Wow that is brilliant.

[0:23:18.3] Kimberly Snyder: It’s not easy but it helps me so much and then I have the timeline sitting there and if I need to refer to it during the exam even just to help my process of elimination, there it is. It is tangible. It is like having a book sitting next to you during the exam but it all came out in my head and that is why I spend potentially a few days of study time memorizing. That is for the exam to be able to write it out. I am not going to say everybody can or should do it just like me.

I think that is silly, everybody's going to have different things. I would say the degree forum is absolutely and exactly my studying for a CLEP exam also if you can figure out a way that you can memorize or at least remember, it will help a lot in test taking because it is a lot of memorization. If you can memorize that is a big help.

[0:24:21.1] Aaress Lawless: Yeah that is a great idea. Incredible idea. So we'll put the link to degree forum in the show notes that way our listeners can find it pretty easy. But I love to go back and tap into a little bit deeper what you are talking about your prep for the actual exam. Let us start say at the night before an exam. You've had 15 CLEP's, you've not failed one. Talk me through what goes on the evening before, the morning of, taking the exam, and then a celebration at the end. What does that day in a test taking life look like for you?

[0:25:01.5] Kimberly Snyder: I'm not sure it looks exactly every time but it is important to get a good night of rest. I usually will stay up just through a normal bedtime studying or something and then I'll get a full night of rest. I think being exhausted is never the right way to go in an exam. So I would eat a good breakfast so that you're satisfied but not full. You're not uncomfortable.

[0:25:35.5] Aaress Lawless: Right that stack of pancakes put you to sleep in the middle of the test.

[0:25:38.9] Kimberly Snyder: No don't do that. Yeah, so just like a healthy medium sized breakfast. Then I will call it the test center and I'll ask if I could come in like 30 or 45 minutes to take a prep exam because I don't usually schedule very far in advance. I usually just call the day of and they'll be like, "Oh sure the computer is open, we'll get things set up for you," and usually I am super nervous because you can take as many prep exams as you want but I don't think the nerves ever go away.

I'm just being honest here. It is always a nerve-racking ordeal. So I typically will drive myself to the community college where my testing center is and I like to just listen to calm or fun music while I am driving to relax and then I go all alone, sit down for the exams. I write all of my timeline like I said and then I go through the exam and I am always super nervous because you click your finish on the exam and then you can click through report scores and then you see your scores.

As soon as you report your scores they will show you your score, right? And I will click it and I'll click it again to report and then it pulls out my score on the screen and then I always super nervous that it is all the same of a bad score but it hasn't though thankfully. Thankfully I've always passed and then I go out and I print my ticket and I say congratulations and I am just super excited and I go home and I do like to reward myself after a CLEP exam.

So one of my favorite things is Oreos. I love Oreos so I'm like; "Oh you know I get to have three Oreos tonight."

[0:27:41.0] Aaress Lawless: That's awesome.

[0:27:42.0] Kimberly Snyder: Or something that I never do for myself is paint my nails but sometimes, I just like to reward myself. I will paint my nails something like that. It's just like something simple but something that is also special like, "I had an accomplishment today so I am going to do this," or once a movie that had come out that I really wanted to see but I didn't let myself go and see it until after I finished the class. So I took the class and then I rewarded myself and I went out to watch it with my family.

And so it's things like that I think are really smart and fun ways to keep yourself maybe a little bit extra motivated to not only do well on the CLEP but to just go and take it. Not to procrastinate it, which you can.

[0:28:35.6] Aaress Lawless: That was fun. Well, thank you for walking us through that day in the life of a CLEP taker that's awesome. So let us go back to you talking about hobbies and just having a very diverse college experience. Now you took a gap year as part of that. Talk us through what prompted you to take a gap year and what did you do during it?

[0:28:58.9] Kimberly Snyder: My "gap year" was actually over two years. Yeah it was a really long period. What prompted me to it was that I think I mentioned earlier about the college that I really, really wanted to go through after I finish high school and they had a really tight CLEP policy. That is why I didn't take the DSST's. So that school they only admit a few hundred students every year. It is a very hard to get in school. So I had my heart set on that.

And when I found out close to my high school graduation that I didn't meet all the criteria to be admitted. Well I did but I was put on a wait list. I wasn't actually admitted. I was on a wait list and I never got in and that was really actually depressing for me just like for my whole college idea. I was just like, "Oh I am depressed I am going to take a break," and also I didn't have very much money. I didn't have a job or anything like that.

And when I was in high school, my parents covered my CLEP expenses. That was part of my high school curriculum that they paid full but then once I was out of high school and then all of those expenses were on my shoulders and I didn't have the extra money like even one CLEP exam was very expensive for me just where I was in life and so those two things combined prompted I guess you would say my gap year and I was still interested in finishing my degree of course because I had all of these credits from Dual Credit.

But there was a lack of motivation I think because I didn't go to the school that I wanted to and then there was a lack of funds.

[0:31:00.7] Aaress Lawless: Sure, yeah.

[0:31:01.6] Kimberly Snyder: Yeah, so fast forward about two years – well about one year after that I went on a first missions trip about a year after high school graduation I mean I was on my first missions trip to South East Asia and I fell in love and I decided that I really wanted to teach English at a foreign language and previously, I didn't even really know what my degree should be in. I think I applied originally as a music education major because I like to teach.

I knew that I liked to teach but I just didn't know how that was going to translate into a degree. So yes, it was at my first missions' trip that I decided I wanted an English degree and shortly after that, I started teaching professionally and also moved to Taiwan where I was teaching with the missions group, all of these things accumulate into, "Okay now I have funds." On one hand I have funds again where I could pursue collage again.

And on the other hand I am also very motivated again because I really want to teach English long term. So the lack of funds and the lack of motivation prompted my gap year and I think that was healthy. If I would just have plowed forward and said, "I am going to school anyway," I would have to go into debt and I wouldn't have been very happy. I would have missed myself on a lot of important life lessons. So it was healthy for me to take that gap year and then when I did have the funds.

And the motivation again, that's when I got back into earning college credits and that was actually while I was in Taiwan, which is a completely different story in itself. I was working like 50 hours a week, doing mission work and teaching and then I started doing classes again. I was like wow, I am crazy but it was really good and I think that just goes a long with what I was talking about earlier. It's your own story. It is your own journey and I don't fit into any box and I think that's okay. It's healthy.

[0:33:26.6] Aaress Lawless: That's great. Well you have been so gracious to share parts of your story and so much of your story not just now on the podcast but also in our dual credit at home private Facebook group but you are also launching a website as well. Tell us a little bit more about the website and your plans for it.

[0:33:41.5] Kimberly Snyder: Okay, well a few years ago was the first time that I was asked about like altering your college stuff and a mom just called me out of the blue and I had known her from a church that I used to go to but I wasn't expecting her to call me and she had all of these questions about dual credit and earning credits for her daughter and I was completely taken aback like, "Wait, why are you asking me?" But since then, I have had literally hundreds of emails and text messages and calls and Facebook messages.

I mean from strangers like complete strangers. I am confused on how some of these people find me but I decided that I really wanted to just like make a website where I could at both share my story, share my degree plan and also truthfully be an inspiration to people who want to pursue college but they can't do it traditionally or they're not interested in doing it traditionally maybe because this kind of unconventional education not only exists but it is possible for normal people.

You don't have to be some kind of a genius. It's okay to do it and also like debt and student loans are not necessary. So many people think they are and they're just not and there's so many misconceptions like

you have to go to a brick and mortar school for four to five years to get a bachelor's degree and that's completely not true. It is okay, anybody can do this and you don't have to be at the school. You don't have to go into debt and it's possible.

And college education really can fit around you and your needs and your lifestyle. So that's why I have that and I have my entire degree plan onto my website and I am still in the development stages of writing new content, hopefully sharing CLEP tips and study tips. I have some list of my favorite websites and my favorite study resources that I have used over the years. I am hoping that my site can be a help and inspiration to anybody who might be interested in doing a crazy college journey like I did. Yeah, so it is called Degree Hackers and because I feel like I hacked a degree.

[0:36:24.2] Aaress Lawless: Yeah, you did in an incredible way.

[0:36:27.3] Kimberly Snyder: Yeah and I just think that anybody can do it. I mean I am not that smart. I really am not, I just work really hard and I think that anybody can do it. So you can be a degree hacker too.

[0:36:39.1] Aaress Lawless: That's awesome. Well Kimberly, thank you so much for taking time to tell us about your story and we will put the link to Degree Hackers in the show notes that way our listeners can check it out and we look forward to seeing lots more of your tips in the future.

[0:36:56.3] Kimberly Snyder: Oh thanks. I had so much fun today.

[END OF INTERVIEW]

[0:37:02.2] Aaress Lawless: Now if you are interested in CLEP and Credit by Exam, be sure to check out today's podcast show notes. You can find those at dualcreditathome.com/podcast. Inside the notes, you'll find a link to Kimberly's website as well as some of the other helpful credit by exam resources that we have available at Dual Credit at Home.

Also, don't forget to hit subscribe, so you don't miss the next episode of Today's Homeschool Teen.
Thanks again for joining us and we're praying that God blesses you and your family as you homeschool high school.

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