

AP and College Enrollment

Introduction

Each year, nearly three million high school students use Advanced Placement[®] (AP[®]) to challenge themselves, explore their interests, and earn college credit, placement, or both. Multiple research studies validate that students who earn a score of 3 or higher on an AP Exam are academically prepared and highly likely to have a successful experience on campus.

AP can help campus leaders meet a range of institutional and strategic goals throughout the entire enrollment cycle. This toolkit will enable enrollment officers to effectively incorporate AP not only into the admissions process but throughout the full enrollment cycle. To help you get started, this toolkit includes current research, action steps, and key questions that can drive you and your staff toward new and innovative ways of drawing on AP as you engage with students across each phase of your enrollment funnel. Additionally, this toolkit provides resources, research examples, and conversation guides that best equip enrollment leaders to effectively explain—to a range of campus stakeholders including presidents, boards, provosts, and faculty—the impact AP has in building and retaining a successful student body.

Overview of AP

For over 60 years, the AP Program has enabled students nationwide to pursue college-level work while developing the academic skills they will need for college success. Each of the 38 AP courses is developed through a collaborative multiyear process involving thousands of university faculty and high school teachers. Each AP subject consists of a full-year course and, in May, students can sit for a corresponding AP Exam that is administered nationally.

While the AP Exam score is often the most visible marker of academic preparedness used by higher education professionals, the AP Program is a much richer experience for students. Research shows that participation in the AP course, regardless of the exam score, has tangible benefits on campus as students arrive well-prepared with experience in college-level work.

Higher Education Participation in AP

The deep participation of over 18,000 education professionals from universities and high schools all over the country makes the AP Program the largest K–16 educational collaboration in the world. AP courses and exams are developed by expert higher education faculty alongside their peers from high schools nationwide. Committees of teachers and university faculty meet regularly to ensure that each course aligns to current practices in the discipline.

As part of our commitment to continually enhance AP alignment with current best practices in college-level learning, College Board has evaluated and redesigned many courses and exams. The redesign process is a collaboration among college faculty, AP teachers, and learning and assessment specialists to support the development of the knowledge and skills students need to succeed in subsequent courses in the discipline at the college level.

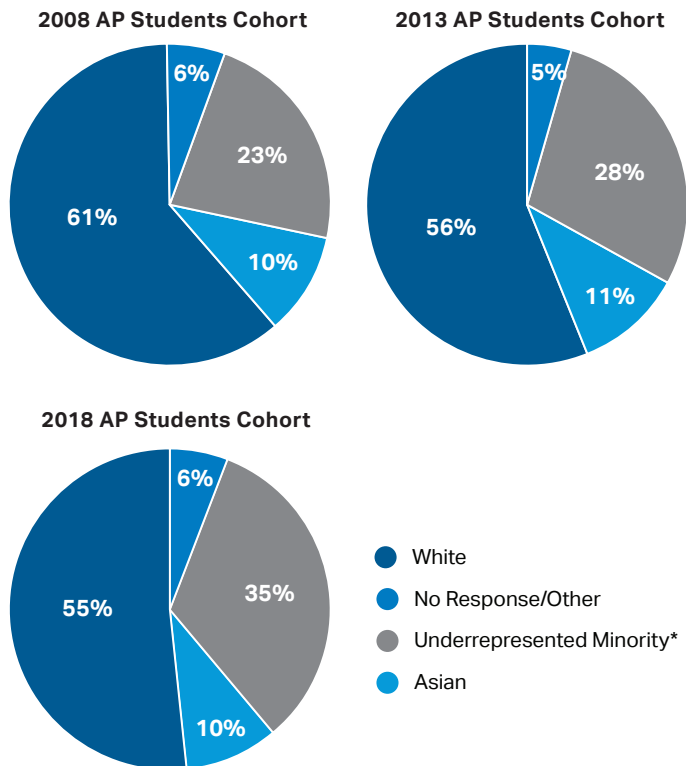
Hallmarks of the redesigned courses and exams include:

- A greater emphasis on discipline-specific expectations, including building up skills of inquiry, reasoning, and communication, as well as the incorporation of standards informed by national disciplinary organizations
- Detailed curriculum frameworks, which tie the discipline-specific concepts, themes, and skills to a set of key learning objectives and emphasize conceptual understanding
- Exam questions (developed by experienced faculty and teachers) that are designed to elicit evidence of student achievement for each learning objective

Recent Trends

There are three key trends that are the most important for enrollment professionals to understand to more fully leverage AP in meeting institutional goals:

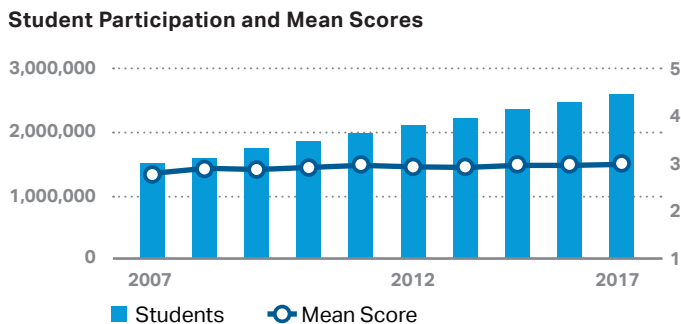
1. DRAMATIC PARTICIPATION INCREASES ACROSS DEMOGRAPHIC GROUPS



There has been a dramatic growth in AP participation over the past two decades that has led to a sharp increase in the number of AP scores sent to campuses. Over the past 10 years, the number of U.S. public high school graduates who have taken an AP Exam has increased by 65%, while the number who have scored a 3 or higher on at least one AP Exam has increased by 63%.

Most of AP growth has been in urban and rural schools, so the racial, ethnic, and socioeconomic demographics of AP Exam takers have shifted significantly. The data continue to show an upward trend in the number of underrepresented students participating and succeeding in AP, with more than an 8% increase in the last year. AP is now available in over 5,000 more high schools, compared to 10 years ago. As a result, now more than 90% of high school students attend a high school that offers AP.

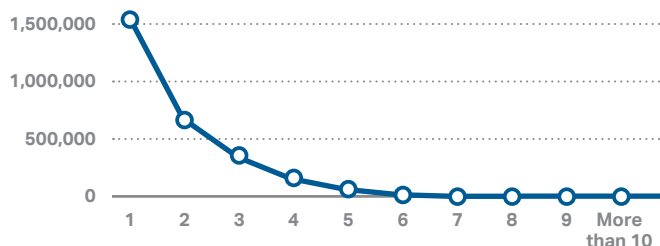
2. AS PARTICIPATION HAS INCREASED, PERFORMANCE HAS STAYED CONSISTENT



Throughout this dramatic growth, exam performance, as measured by mean scores, has stayed remarkably constant—varying by no more than .03 year over year. This suggests that AP participation has expanded into a deeper reserve of academically prepared students. As researcher Nat Malkus has noted, “[e]xpanding at scale without sacrificing rigor is the rarest kind of success in public education, and AP is showing just that.”¹

3. AP STUDENTS’ COURSE-TAKING PATTERNS

Numbers of AP Exams Taken by Students in May 2018
Expressed as Percentage of Total Cohort



The expansion of the AP Program is great news in terms of better preparing more students for college. But the AP Program shares enrollment leaders’ perspectives that students shouldn’t overload their schedule with AP or other advanced courses.² Accordingly, the AP Program has discontinued AP awards programs that recognize students for taking large numbers of AP courses, and the culminating recognition is now the AP Capstone Diploma™, awarded to students who take typically 1–2 AP courses per year—culminating in a sustained project and oral defense. While “overloading” is a concern we’re committed to mitigating, the good news is that 79% of AP students take just 1–2 AP Exams at any given time, and only 1% of AP students took a full slate of 6 or more AP Exams in May 2018.

1. Malkus, Nat, “Criticism misses this century’s biggest education success story.” American Enterprise Institute.
 2. *Turning the Tide: Inspiring Concern for Others and the Common Good Through College Admissions*, 18–19. (Making Caring Common Project, Harvard Graduate School of Education.)

The data showing that most students are taking only 1–2 exams are particularly compelling when aligned with recent research examining incremental gains in college student outcomes by taking and performing well on differing numbers of AP Exams. This research shows that the biggest predicted boost in college grades and on-time degree completion comes from moving a student from taking 0–1 AP courses and from 1–2 AP courses. Introducing students to the rigors of AP courses is strongly associated with future college success and is associated with the largest return on college outcomes. After taking and performing well on more than 4–6 AP Exams, predicted incremental gains in first-year GPA and degree completion begin to level off and lose statistical significance.

THE TAKEAWAY: WIDER ACCESS BRINGS GREATER ACADEMIC READINESS

These statistics indicate that the growth in AP participation is due to a significant expansion in the availability of the program to student populations who had previously not had access. The AP Program is a valuable pipeline for a more diverse pool of college-ready students.

CONTINUING TO CLOSE THE GAP

While there has been a historic expansion of access to AP courses across all demographic groups, more can be done. African American students, in particular, remain underrepresented in AP classrooms nationwide. And many students from traditionally underrepresented groups who do enroll in AP courses haven't received the same preparation in earlier grades for the challenges of such coursework. College Board is committed to providing resources to teachers and schools in order to ensure that all academically able students not only have equitable access to rigorous courses but also have equitable access to the educational supports that foster academic success.

Beginning in fall 2019, College Board unveiled new instructional resources that provide daily support for students and educators. These tools were designed and tested in collaboration with AP educators and include: Unit Guides that provide an outline of the content and skills covered on the exam; Personal Progress Checks that measure student progress; an AP Question Bank of over 15,000 questions; and a Progress Dashboard that helps teachers recognize student achievement and prioritize areas for additional support.

Understanding Scores

An AP score can range from 1 to 5 and signifies how qualified a student is to receive college credit, placement, or both. Because decades of research at selective colleges and universities has consistently confirmed the validity of an AP score of 3 for placing students out of an introductory course, College Board recommends that colleges award course credit for that score and/or placement into the subsequent course.

These recommendations are reinforced by the American Council on Education (ACE) and institutional research conducted at colleges and universities across the country examining the millions of students who have demonstrated academic success after earning credit through AP.

These recommendations and the overall reliability of the AP Exam score are reinforced by the scoring process: AP Exams are scored at the annual AP Reading, where approximately 18,000 college faculty and high school professors score the exams of every student. Some key facts:

- Approximately half of all AP readers are college faculty.
- AP readers are selected to ensure an appropriate balance in gender, race, ethnicity, school location, years of teaching experience, and other factors.
- AP readers undergo a rigorous training to ensure that they have a thorough understanding of the scoring rubric.
- The work of all AP readers is monitored throughout the AP Reading for fairness and consistency.
- All scores for any given subject are overseen by the Chief Reader, who is always a college or university faculty member.

AP scores and the AP Exams are further validated through a process led by college and university faculty who take a leadership role in determining the performance students must demonstrate for each AP score:

- Committees of college faculty who teach the comparable course develop detailed descriptions of the performance required to earn each score.
- A panel of faculty and teachers then reviews and determines how many questions a student would need to answer correctly at each level.
- Finally, university faculty administer portions of an AP Exam to students on campus, and their AP scores are correlated to their course grades.

AP SCORE DISTRIBUTIONS

It can be informative to view an individual student's AP scores within the context of the nationwide distribution of scores for each AP Exam. Because AP Exams are criterion referenced, not norm referenced or curved, the score distribution rises or falls each year as a greater or smaller percentage of exam takers demonstrates mastery of the course content and skills. Understanding the national performance on an exam may shed light on a student's performance, compared to the overall performance of the class body that year. Score distributions for each course are available online at bit.ly/2MYRzVG.

The Impact of AP Credit Policies on Student Decision Making

College Board research has shown that an institution's published AP policy is highly influential in student enrollment decisions. In fact, three out of five AP Exam takers report that an institution's AP policy—and how much credit can be earned—impacts their college choice.

A strong, data-influenced, and easily accessible AP credit policy can be a key differentiator between your institution and its peers at a time when demographic trends are resulting in increased competition. It also reflects the extent to which your college or university values your prospective students' performance and hard work in high school.

WHY YOU NEED AN AP POLICY

Recruitment

- A clear and accessible AP policy can attract motivated and prepared students. By granting credit, placement, or both on the basis of their AP Exam scores, you recognize their academic achievement.
- Your institution's recognition of AP sends a message to students and secondary schools that your institution values and encourages student engagement in rigorous high school coursework.

Student Success

- Students who earn credit or placement on the basis of their AP scores are more likely to experience success in college. They tend to earn higher GPAs and to persist and graduate at rates higher than non-AP peers.
- Students earning credit or placement can benefit from greater flexibility in academic planning or benefit from the opportunity to pursue a new area of interest.

Disciplinary Focus

- AP students who earn credit or placement tend to persist in courses associated with their AP subject area at a higher rate when compared to non-AP students.

WHY YOU NEED TO REVIEW YOUR AP POLICY

Most colleges and universities grant credit, course placement, or both for qualifying scores on AP Exams. In 2018, over 2,600 institutions received AP Exam scores for consideration. Institutional AP credit policies are remarkably stable over time—less than 3% of policies change in a given year. When they do change, however, it's important for you to update your public-facing materials so that prospective students have up-to-date information. It's also important for College Board to know so we can have accurate information that prospective students can use to understand their options. Please coordinate with your registrar to send any credit policy updates to apcreditpolicy@collegeboard.org.

THE REVIEW PROCESS

1. Assemble a policy review team on your campus. This team can include provosts, department chairs, and deans—any faculty and campus leaders who play a role in setting academic policies. Be specific about what you need, and set a timeline for the review process.
2. Make sure everyone involved has a solid understanding of your institution's current AP policy.
3. Visit AP course and exam home pages to download course descriptions. Share this information, along with credit-granting recommendations from College Board and the American Council on Education, with your review team.
4. Take advantage of additional resources, including recent research and the Admitted Class Evaluation Service™ (ACES™), the free online service to help validate existing or proposed AP credit and placement policies at your institution, to analyze AP students' performance at your institution.
5. If you need additional materials or further guidance, visit us online at aphighered.collegeboard.org.

During the review process, make sure your team addresses these questions:

Tactical Questions

- Which AP Exams does your institution recognize for credit, advanced placement, or both? Are any exams missing? If so, why are they missing, and should this be addressed?
- How much credit is awarded for qualifying scores on each exam? Does this vary by exam score? Does this vary by a student's intended major or the program in which the student is enrolled? Might it benefit students to make the policy more consistent across all programs?
- What type of credit is granted for a successful AP Exam score? For example, does the credit satisfy requirements for the student's major, general education requirements, or electives? What are the pros and cons of these options?

- Is there a cap on the number of credits that may be earned through AP in a particular subject or department, or within the institution overall?
- How does your AP policy compare to your policies for accepting credit transferred from another institution or program (for example, International Baccalaureate or dual enrollment)? Is there parity in how your institution recognizes transfer credit and proficiency demonstrated through assessment?
- How often is AP policy evaluated or revised? Does this vary by department or school?
- Who is the key contact for students if they have questions about your AP policy? Is this information easily found by a prospective or incoming student?
- Is your AP policy included in first-year advising discussions?
- What are the procedures involved for managing AP scores sent to the institution and how are the scores received? (For example, do you receive scores on paper or electronically? Are they stored in the registrar's office only, or are they shared with academic advisers and individual departments?)
- How do you communicate your AP policy to current or prospective students? (For example, is your credit policy available through your website, course catalog, and intranet?)
- Does your published policy align with advising and placement practice on campus?

Strategic Questions

- What factors are of priority importance to your institution in terms of higher education goals—recruitment, retention, facilitation of transfer, or improving completion rates? How could your AP credit or placement policy support these goals?
- Are you using AP Exam information to recruit students to specific majors, departments, or colleges? If not, how might you do so in order to address gaps in undersubscribed programs?
- Does your institution recognize AP achievement beyond offering credit and placement? (For example, engaging AP students as peer-to-peer tutors, offering them leadership opportunities, or providing scholarships to students earning qualifying AP Exam scores.)
- Has your institution conducted any research to correlate your students' AP Exam scores to their performance in subsequent courses?

Once you have a revised policy, make sure it's communicated to your staff and students. Send the updated policy to apcreditpolicy@collegeboard.org.

A NOTE ON SYSTEMWIDE AP POLICIES

A number of state higher education systems have implemented articulation policies for AP Exams. There are many benefits to this approach, including:

- Guarantee that all publicly funded institutions award credit fairly and consistently
- Maximizing earned credit toward meeting general education requirements
- Support for seamless course articulation and credit transfer, thereby improving degree completion rates
- Reduction in the accumulation of excess credit hours

While nearly 40% of high school students participate in AP annually, the majority of AP students reside in states where state and system policies guarantee college credit for AP Exam success.

ACADEMIC OUTCOMES OF STUDENTS WITH AP SCORES OF 3 OR HIGHER

When universities award credit or placement for AP scores of 3 or higher, they are encouraging students from diverse backgrounds to participate in rigorous coursework while still in high school. Recognizing qualifying AP scores of 3 or higher can help a university attract a more diverse student body that has academic preparation that correlates to success in college. Multiple research studies confirm that students who earn a 3 or higher on AP Exams:

1. Perform well in subsequent college courses in the discipline.
2. Are more likely to major in their AP subject or a related discipline, particularly in STEM subjects.
3. Take more—not less—college coursework in the discipline.
4. Are more likely to graduate within 4 years.

Learn more at:

aphighered.collegeboard.org/sites/default/files/ap-student-success-college-recent-research.pdf.

Committing to a broader AP policy is not only evidenced-based but also encourages and rewards the hard work that AP students pursued as they were preparing for college. This is particularly true for student population groups that are the most underrepresented on college campuses nationwide: students of color, first-generation students, and, low-income students.

Many enrollment leaders have successfully collaborated with their peers in academic departments to advocate for an AP policy that matches the institutional commitment to building a well-diversified pipeline of academically prepared students applying to and enrolling at their institution.

Conclusion

The subsequent pieces of this toolkit contain strategic questions, guidance, and actions steps, as well as recent research and statistics, and lists of resources you can access as you build strategies and processes on your campus. Perhaps one of the most important resources is the support available from your College Board staff. As a member-based, national not-for-profit organization, College Board is here to serve you.

LANDSCAPE

Landscape™ is a new resource that provides consistent and systematic information about neighborhood and high school context for consideration in the application and scholarship review process. Currently in a research partnership pilot phase, Landscape allows practitioners to evaluate applicants' accomplishments—like AP—in the context of the opportunities available to them and the potential challenges faced where they live and learn.

Learn more at landscape.collegeboard.org.

About AP

The Advanced Placement[®] (AP[®]) Program allows millions of students to take college-level courses while still in high school. AP Exams are given each year in May. Students who earn a qualifying score on an AP Exam are typically eligible to receive college credit, placement into advanced courses, or both. Every aspect of AP course and exam development is the result of collaboration between college faculty and AP teachers. They work together to develop AP courses and exams, set scoring standards, and score the exams. College faculty review every teacher's course syllabus.

There are 38 AP Courses and Exams:

ARTS

- AP 2-D Art and Design
- AP 3-D Art and Design
- AP Art History
- AP Drawing
- AP Music Theory

AP CAPSTONE DIPLOMA™ PROGRAM

- AP Capstone™: Seminar
- AP Capstone: Research

ENGLISH

- AP English Language and Composition
- AP English Literature and Composition

HISTORY

- AP European History
- AP United States History
- AP World History: Modern

SOCIAL SCIENCES

- AP Comparative Government and Politics
- AP Human Geography
- AP Macroeconomics
- AP Microeconomics
- AP Psychology
- AP United States Government and Politics

COMPUTER SCIENCE

- AP Computer Science A
- AP Computer Science Principles

MATH

- AP Calculus AB
- AP Calculus BC
- AP Statistics

SCIENCES

- AP Biology
- AP Chemistry
- AP Environmental Science
- AP Physics 1: Algebra-Based
- AP Physics 2: Algebra-Based
- AP Physics C: Electricity and Magnetism
- AP Physics C: Mechanics

WORLD LANGUAGES

- AP Chinese Language and Culture
- AP French Language and Culture
- AP German Language and Culture
- AP Italian Language and Culture
- AP Japanese Language and Culture
- AP Latin
- AP Spanish Language and Culture
- AP Spanish Literature and Culture

Visit aphighered.collegeboard.org for more information.