

Barriers to Equity and Access

Below are some commonly asked questions regarding the College Board's Equity and Access Statement:

Q: If I have an open door policy to my AP class, won't the less talented students slow the curriculum delivery? How will I cover all of the necessary content?

The College Board is interested in maintaining the rigorous standards of the AP Program. Providing an AP course experience for students with multiple skill levels does nothing to benefit them if the rigor is withdrawn from the course. While an equitable AP Program is best built over time, we do encourage schools to allow students to participate in an AP Program if the student wants to accept the challenge.

Teachers often find that not all students arrive at the AP course with the same sets of skills. The best way to approach this is by implementing AP Vertical Teams where all teachers participate in preparing students for the AP course and integrating Pre-AP Strategies in the middle and early high school years to build a pipeline of well prepared students, while simultaneously recruiting additional students who may have been previously overlooked for AP-level instruction. Utilizing AP Potential is a great way to find additional students for AP courses.

Q: Our school adopted an "open-door" policy to AP courses, but we have not seen any increased enrollment in AP courses or in the diversity of the student population in those courses. How can we improve on this?

Open access is not enough. Schools need to actively recruit and encourage AP course enrollment and provide students with the support that they need to be successful in the program. There could be some silent gate-keeping mechanisms embedded in the school's culture that are preventing certain groups of students from accessing the AP courses. Recruitment and support is a shared responsibility among, teachers, counselors, administrators, students and parents. Schools that have had success with increasing the number and diversity of students in their AP Programs have been very aggressive in their approaches: parent meetings, student-to-student discussions, etc. Parents need to be involved early in their student's school career and to understand the benefits of AP.

Q: Our student population is not "college-bound" and many students are not interested in working hard. How can my school encourage more students to want to work as hard as is required in an AP course?

Success is a powerful motivator. Many students are unmotivated because they have become accustomed to failing in school. The College Board's Pre-AP Strategies program is designed to help students build the habits of mind that will foster their success.

Providing Pre-AP workshop training to your school's teachers is one way for them to learn to deliver content in a greater variety of ways so as to meet the needs of traditional as well as divergent learners. By meeting the learning-style needs of greater numbers of students, their success can improve, and what emerges is resultative motivation –the desire on the part of the students to do even better. By beginning to include Pre-AP strategies in the classroom as early as Middle School, teachers will find that students are better prepared for AP courses and more eager to continue being successful. If schools start by viewing all students as potential candidates for an AP course and building those students' skills over time, the result will be an increase in the number of dedicated, hard working, college-bound students. When all teachers have high expectations for their students, students will “rise to the challenge”.

Q: The public judges our school by its AP scores, and my administrators judge my performance by how well my students perform on the AP Exams. If we open enrollment in AP courses to less-than-gifted students, how will we justify potentially lower AP scores?

Schools that have embraced the College Board's Open Access philosophy have found that while there may sometimes be an initial drop in AP scores, over the long-term, the increase in the number of students served by the AP program is accompanied by an increase in overall AP Exam scores. One of the key elements to the success of Open Access is time. Schools will need to patiently support the program growth over a period of years. Equity will not be achieved overnight. Additional efforts to educate all of the stakeholders – from parents to administrators to counselors – about the potential benefits of the AP Program will serve to establish and maintain strong foundational support.

Q: We have a very small school. We cannot afford to have a large AP program because our class sizes are too small and we have trouble retaining quality AP teachers for that same reason. Scheduling AP courses is also a problem. How can we possibly consider expanding our AP course offerings?

By building the program using Pre-AP strategies and AP Vertical Teams concepts, schools will eventually see an increase in the number of students who are prepared to be successful in an AP course. Schools can also consider partnering with nearby schools or bussing students to alternate sites where AP is offered, in an effort to share AP instruction. If more students are taking AP courses, then all students have more options.

AP teacher support is available in many forms, beginning with AP Central where teachers can find large amounts of information about the AP Exams, AP courses, sample syllabi, resource reviews, and even Pre-AP resources and content. Electronic Discussion Groups in each subject area offer a powerful support mechanism, especially for beginning teachers. The College Board regional offices can help support schools in meeting their

professional development needs through their workshop offerings and by arranging workshops at local school sites. Funding is also available through the College Board, for training in AP Vertical Teams (Pre-AP Fellows Grant) and training for AP Teachers (AP Fellows Grant). Additionally, if your school currently offers fewer than three AP courses and wishes to add additional courses, the College Board offers funding and technical support via the AP Start Up Grant. To access information on each of these grants, please go to: <http://apcentral.collegeboard.com/apgrants>.

To qualify for the College Board AP Fellows and Pre-AP Fellows, schools must serve a population of 50% or greater under-represented minority students and/or low-income students. Schools that serve this population receive preference in the review process for the AP Start Up Grant.

Q: Some of our local colleges do not accept AP scores, so why should our school invest in enlarging the AP course offerings?

The value of enrollment in an AP course is not limited to the score that students receive on the exam. Even students who receive a score of a “2” have had the opportunity to experience subject matter in an in-depth and rigorous way. Although some colleges may not grant course credit based on AP scores, more and more colleges are looking at AP courses as a measure of the rigor experienced by students in high school. It’s not just about getting into college, but also about staying in college and graduating. The number one determinant of college success is the rigor that students experience while in high school. Visit <http://apcentral.collegeboard.com/colleges/research/0,3060,154-181-0-2014,00.html> for access to research studies about how AP students achieve in college compared to their non-AP counterparts.

Additionally, a large percentage of students transfer colleges after the first or second year. While colleges’ placement exams may grant credit for coursework, those credit-granting policies are rarely the same in every institution. Yet a student’s AP transcript is universally accepted as a standard measure of achievement and is a valuable tool to students who may decide to change institutions during their post-secondary academic careers.

The College Board continues to work with colleges and universities across the country with the goal of increasing the number of institutions that grant credit for AP coursework. Professional relationships built between secondary AP subject-area teachers and post-secondary instructors of similar courses not only serve to foster the sharing of ideas and best practices in a particular discipline, but can also be helpful in familiarizing those institutions with the goals and expectations of the AP program. By working to graduate strong AP students, local high schools can have an impact on how their area colleges regard effects of the AP program.

Q: Should all students enrolled in an AP Course necessarily take the corresponding AP Exam?

In order to complete the AP experience, students need to sit for the examination. Without the standardization of the exam, there is no way for colleges to measure the rigor of the academic experience. One of the silent barriers to access and equity is those teachers who make decisions for their students as to who should be taking the exam. All students should be encouraged to take the examination.