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Setting a Policy for AP[®] Comparative Government and Politics

The purpose of this guide is to provide college faculty and administrators with research data, participation and performance data of AP[®] Comparative Government and Politics students, curricular content, and sample exam questions to facilitate the establishment of appropriate credit and placement policies for AP Comparative Government and Politics.

The Advanced Placement Program[®] (AP) provides motivated students with the opportunity to take college-level courses while still in high school. Students demonstrate their mastery of the curriculum by taking AP Exams—35 exams are available in 20 subject areas. In 2005, more than 1.2 million students took AP Exams worldwide. Of the 2.1 million AP Exams taken in 2005, about 15,000 were in Comparative Government and Politics. More than 3,000 colleges and universities, including many international institutions, accept qualifying AP Exam scores for credit, placement, or both.

Throughout its 50-year history, the AP Program has maintained high standards of rigor in its courses and exams. Since its inception, AP has been a respected force in American education due to the critical involvement of college and university faculty members.

Political Science Faculty Involvement in AP

College and university faculty members play a vital role in every stage of development and scoring of an AP course and exam, helping to ensure their high quality. Each AP discipline has its own Development Committee—composed of college and university professors and experienced AP teachers—that is responsible for creating the course guidelines and exam questions. College and university faculty members also serve as the Chief Readers, responsible for establishing the exam-scoring guidelines and overseeing the annual AP Reading of the free-response section for their academic discipline.

“The new AP Comparative Government and Politics curriculum reflects contemporary developments in higher education. In redesigning the curriculum, the Development Committee had wide input from a survey of college and university instructors who taught the introductory comparative course as well as from a specially convened group of prominent specialists in the field.”

—Donley T. Studlar
AP Government and Politics Development Committee former member
West Virginia University

The College Board publication *AP and Higher Education* discusses the following topics at greater length: how to set an AP policy, AP research studies, the development of AP courses and exams, and the AP Exam scoring. For more information or to request a copy of this publication, please go to apcentral.collegeboard.com/highered.

How to Set an AP Policy

The College Board encourages higher education institutions to base their AP policy decisions on data and research, and recognizes that different institutions and departments will set different policies, based upon factors unique to their institution, student body, and academic discipline. The best way for colleges and universities to determine their AP credit and placement policies is to conduct their own research on the performance of AP and non-AP students at their own institution and in their own department.

Research on AP Comparative Government and Politics Student Performance

Research studies show that students who do well on an AP Exam are academically prepared to place out of a corresponding college course and move on to the next higher-level course in the discipline.

[Taking the AP course and exam stimulates further interest in the subject area and encourages deeper disciplinary knowledge.](#)

Research studies show that students who take the AP Comparative Government and Politics Exam are more likely to take further course work in political science than students who do not take the AP Exam. Higher scores on the AP Exam make this trend even more pronounced, with a greater likelihood of majoring or minor-ing in the discipline. See Table 1 for data from this research study.

Table 1: Additional College Political Science Course Work AP Comparative Government and Politics Students Versus Non-AP Students

	AP EXAM GRADE	PERCENT TAKING ADDITIONAL POLITICAL SCIENCE COURSES	AVERAGE NUMBER OF COLLEGE POLITICAL SCIENCE COURSES TAKEN
AP Comparative Government and Politics Students	AP 5	47	1.3
	AP 4	37	1.3
	AP 3	36	1.0
Non-AP Students	Non-AP	31	0.7

PDF copies of this research and other research studies can be found at apcentral.collegeboard.com/colleges/research.

In addition to research studies on AP student performance, the College Board conducts college comparability studies to measure the degree to which the AP courses and exams are equivalent in content and difficulty to corresponding college courses. The AP Exam scoring rubric is established so that the lowest composite score that earns an AP grade of 5 is equivalent to the average score earned by college students who received grades of A in a comparable course. The lowest score that earns an AP grade of 4 is equivalent to the average B, and the lowest score that earns an AP grade of 3 is equivalent to the average C.

The research that the College Board conducts is intended to help institutions and academic departments as they establish appropriate AP policies. AP Central® (apcentral.collegeboard.com), the College Board's online home for AP professionals, contains other resources that may assist in this process, including the Course Description, released exam questions, and sample student responses at different levels of ability.

For more information go to: apcentral.collegeboard.com/govpolcomp/exam

AP Credit Policy Info on the Web

Information about AP credit and placement policies at more than 1,000 colleges and universities is available on the College Board's Web site at www.collegeboard.com/ap/creditpolicy.

AP Comparative Government and Politics Students, Course, and Exam

Participation and Performance Data for AP Comparative Government and Politics Students in 2005

Total Number of Schools Offering AP Comparative Government and Politics: 1,255

Table 2: AP Comparative Government and Politics Exam Score Distribution, 2005

EXAM GRADE	NUMBER OF EXAMINEES	% AT
Score of 5	2,062	14.3%
Score of 4	2,329	16.1%
Score of 3	5,022	34.8%
Score of 2	3,052	21.1%
Score of 1	1,982	13.7%
	14,447	100.0%

Figure 1: Comparative Government and Politics Examinees by Gender, 2005

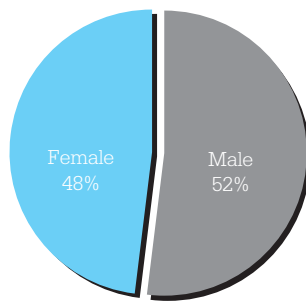
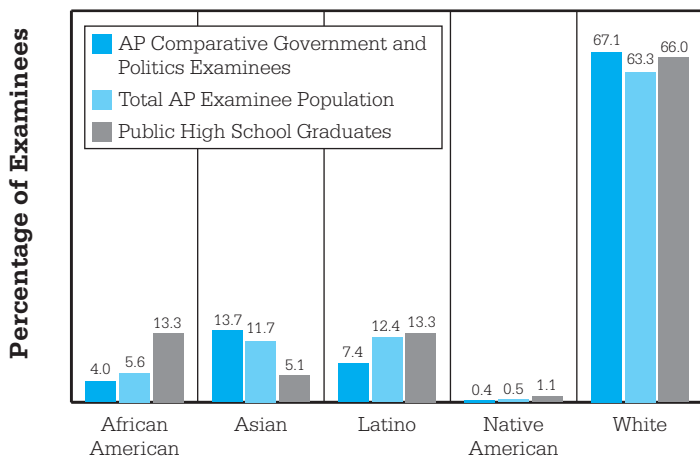


Figure 2: AP Comparative Government and Politics by Race and Ethnicity, 2005



The AP Comparative Government and Politics Course

The AP Comparative Government and Politics course is designed to provide students with a learning experience equivalent to that of an introductory college course in comparative government and politics. The course introduces students to fundamental concepts used by political scientists to study the processes and outcomes of politics in a variety of country settings. The course aims to illustrate the rich diversity of political life, to show available institutional alternatives, to explain differences in processes and policy outcomes, and to communicate to students the importance of global political and economic changes.

In addition to covering the major concepts that are used to organize and interpret what we know about political phenomena and relationships, the course covers six countries: China, Great Britain, Iran, Mexico, Nigeria, and Russia. By using these six core countries, the course can move the discussion of concepts from abstract definition to concrete example.

Students successfully completing this course will:

- know important facts pertaining to the governments and politics of China, Great Britain, Iran, Mexico, Nigeria, and Russia;
- understand major comparative political concepts, themes, and generalizations;
- understand typical patterns of political processes and behavior and their consequences;
- be able to compare and contrast political institutions and processes across countries and to derive generalizations; and
- be able to analyze and interpret basic data relevant to comparative government and politics.

The Development Committee has created a topic outline that covers the main subject areas that should be taught, along with the relative weight to be assigned to each topic.

- I. Introduction to Comparative Politics 5%
 - A. Purpose and methods of comparison and classification
 1. Why/ways to organize government
 2. Normative and empirical questions
 - B. Concepts (state, nation, regime, government)
 - C. Process and policy (what is politics; purpose of government; what is political science/comparative; common policy challenges)
- II. Sovereignty, Authority, and Power 20%
 - A. Political culture, communication, and socialization
 - B. Nations and states
 - C. Supranational governance (e.g., European Union)
 - D. Sources of power
 - E. Constitutions (forms, purposes, application)
 - F. Regime types

- G. Types of economic systems
- H. State building, legitimacy, and stability
- I. Belief systems as sources of legitimacy
 - 1. Religion
 - 2. Ideology (liberalism, communism, socialism, conservatism, fascism)
- J. Governance and accountability
- III. Political Institutions. 35%
 - A. Levels of government
 - 1. Supranational/national/regional/local
 - 2. Unitary/federal
 - 3. Centralization/decentralization
 - B. Executives (head of state, head of government, cabinets)
 - 1. Single or dual
 - 2. President
 - 3. Prime minister
 - C. Legislatures
 - 1. Unicameral/bicameral (symmetric/asymmetric)
 - 2. Organization
 - 3. Membership (representation)
 - D. Parliamentary and presidential systems
 - 1. Institutional relations
 - E. Elections
 - 1. Presidential
 - 2. Parliamentary
 - 3. Referendums
 - 4. Noncompetitive
 - F. Electoral systems
 - 1. Proportional representation
 - 2. Single member district (plurality, majority runoff)
 - G. Political parties (organization, membership, institutionalization, ideological position)
 - H. Party systems
 - I. Leadership and elite recruitment
 - J. Interest groups and interest group systems
 - K. Bureaucracies
 - L. Military and other coercive institutions
 - M. Judiciaries
 - 1. Degrees of autonomy
 - 2. Judicial review (including European Union in relation to states, citizens)
 - 3. Types of law
- IV. Citizens, Society, and the State 15%
 - A. Cleavages and politics (ethnic, racial, class, gender, religious, regional)
 - B. Civil society
 - C. Media roles
 - D. Political participation (forms/modes/trends) including political violence
 - E. Social movements
 - F. Citizenship and social representation
- V. Political and Economic Change 15%
 - A. Revolution, coups, and war
 - B. Trends and types of political change (including democratization)
 - 1. Components
 - 2. Promoting or inhibiting factors
 - 3. Consequences
 - C. Trends and types of economic change (including privatization)
 - 1. Components
 - 2. Promoting or inhibiting factors
 - 3. Consequences
 - D. Relationship between political and economic change
 - E. Globalization and fragmentation: interlinked economies, global culture, reactions against globalization, regionalism
- VI. Public Policy 10%
 - A. Common policy issues
 - 1. Economic performance
 - 2. Social welfare (e.g., education, health, poverty)
 - 3. Civil liberties, rights, and freedoms
 - 4. Environment
 - 5. Population and migration
 - 6. Economic development
 - B. Factors influencing public policymaking and implementation
 - 1. Domestic
 - 2. International

“With my involvement with the AP Comparative Government program I’ve had the rare opportunity to engage in a continuing and comprehensive discussion of the goals and structure of the Introduction to Comparative Government course with similarly interested colleagues. One might expect this to happen in one’s home department, but all too often the pressure of teaching schedules, research and administrative commitments get in the way of a sustained discussion.”

—Neil Mitchell, AP Government and Politics Development Committee
University of Aberdeen

The Development Committee creates the guidelines for the AP Comparative Government and Politics course and designs the AP Exam. Periodically the Development Committee conducts curriculum surveys, sent to professors who teach the comparable college-level course, that help ensure that the AP Comparative Government and Politics course remains current with concepts and themes as taught in college and university classrooms.

Beginning in fall 2006, AP Comparative Government and Politics teachers and principals of schools where AP Comparative Government and Politics is taught must certify that their 2007-08 courses follow all the requirements stipulated by the Development Committee, including using college-level texts, in order to ensure that the AP course reflects college-level standards. By completing this AP Course Audit, high schools will receive individual licenses to label their comparative government and politics courses “AP.” In fall 2007, colleges and universities will receive a list of all high schools authorized to use the “AP” designation for their comparative government and politics courses.

The AP Comparative Government and Politics Exam

The AP Comparative Government and Politics Exam, lasting 2 hours and 25 minutes, consists of a multiple-choice and a free-response section. The two sections are designed to complement each other and to measure a wide range of skills and knowledge. The free-response section includes eight questions.

Sample AP Comparative Government and Politics free-response questions are listed below.

Questions 1 to 5 (Definition and Description)

Students will provide brief definitions or descriptions of five concepts or terms, noting their significance. Students may be asked to provide an example of the concept in one or more of the countries studied or to contrast concepts.

1. How are legislative seats distributed in a proportional representation system?
2. Define and contrast the concepts of “state” and “nation.”
3. Define political legitimacy and identify the principal source of political legitimacy in Iran.
4. Define “political cleavage,” and identify the difference between crosscutting and coinciding (cumulative) cleavages.
5. Define the concept of “corporatism.”

Question 6 (Conceptual Analysis)

This question requires students to use major concepts from comparative politics, identify and explain important relationships, and, where appropriate, discuss the causes and implications of politics and policy.

6. Define “revolution.” Explain how revolutions are distinct from other forms of political change. Describe one political institution and one public policy, and explain how each would help reduce the chances of revolution.

Questions 7 and 8 (Country Context)

Two questions will require students to use core concepts in an analysis of one or more of the countries studied. For example, students might be asked to discuss a concept and then apply this concept in a comparative context.

7. Define the concept of economic globalization and explain two ways it has affected policy in China or Mexico or Nigeria over the last 10 years.
8. Both Great Britain and Russia have prime ministers. While the British prime minister is well known, the Russian prime minister is not. Explain how two factors account for the differences in the two prime ministers’ powers.

“I have great respect for the AP teachers who are able to take college-level material and work with high school students in a sophisticated and rigorous course. I am impressed with the college faculty and high school teachers who are involved in the Reading, training institutes, and workshops. I know how dedicated all of these people are. And I can say honestly that I have learned a tremendous amount in the 11 years that I have been associated with the AP Program—about teaching, about rigorous and fair testing, and about comparative politics and U.S. politics. It has been an extraordinarily valuable professional experience for me.”

—Jean Robinson, AP Government and Politics Development Committee
Indiana University

How to Get Involved

There are many ways college and university faculty members can help maintain the high standards of the AP Program:

- Participate in a college comparability study
- Be an AP Reader
- Contribute multiple-choice test items for the AP Exam
- Become an AP Faculty Consultant

For more information, please go to: apcentral.collegeboard.com/highered/getinvolved

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The College Board: Connecting Students to College Success

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