

## Current and Recent Members of the AP Psychology Development Committee

### **Bernard C. Beins\***

Ithaca College  
New York

### **Carol J. Dean**

Lake Park High School  
Illinois

### **Alan J. Feldman**

Highland Park High School  
New Jersey

### **James Freeman**, former Chief Reader

University of Virginia  
Virginia

### **Tresmaine R. Grimes\***

Iona College  
New York

### **Jane Halonen\***, Chief Reader

University of West Florida  
Florida

### **Kenneth D. Keith\***, Chair

University of San Diego  
California

### **Loretta N. McGregor**

Ouachita Baptist University  
Arkansas

### **Christina Athanasopoulos\***

John Hersey High School  
Illinois

### **Marissa M. Sarabando\***

Lamar Academy & Memorial High School  
Texas

### **Chuck P. Schira\***

Portage Central High School  
Michigan

### **Kristin H. Whitlock**

Viewmont High School  
Utah

\* Current committee member

# Setting a Policy for AP<sup>®</sup> Psychology

The purpose of this guide is to provide college faculty and administrators with research data, participation and performance data of AP<sup>®</sup> Psychology students, curricular content, and sample exam questions to facilitate the establishment of appropriate credit and placement policies for AP Psychology.

The Advanced Placement Program<sup>®</sup> (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, more than 87,000 were in Psychology. 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.

## Psychology 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.

“My association with AP Psychology has become one of the highlights of my career. It has made me a better teacher and it keeps me in regular contact with many of the best teachers, both university and high school, in the country. It’s a pleasure to be associated with the Program.”

—Kenneth Keith, AP Psychology Development Committee Chair  
University of San Diego

## 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 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 Exams are significantly more likely to take further course work in the same subject area 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 minoring in the discipline.

PDF copies of research studies on AP student performance can be found at [apcentral.collegeboard.com/colleges/research](http://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](http://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/psych/exam](http://apcentral.collegeboard.com/psych/exam)

## AP Psychology Students, Course, and Exam

### Participation and Performance Data for AP Psychology Students in 2005

Total Number of Schools Offering AP Psychology: 3,511

Table 1: AP Psychology Exam Score Distribution, 2005

EXAM GRADE	NUMBER OF EXAMINEES	% AT
Score of 5	16,761	19.2%
Score of 4	23,926	27.4%
Score of 3	17,916	20.5%
Score of 2	11,715	13.4%
Score of 1	16,889	19.4%
	87,207	100.0%

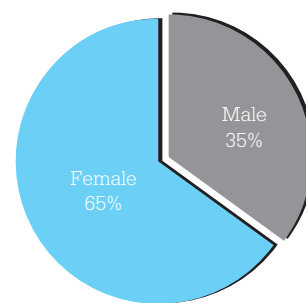
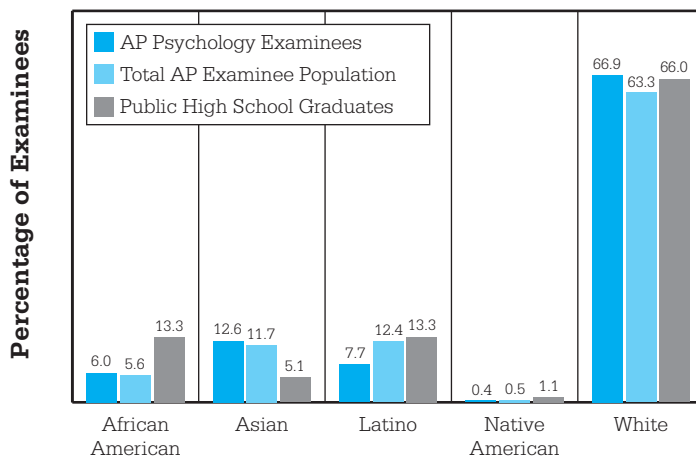


Figure 1: AP Psychology Examinees by Gender, 2005

Figure 2: AP Psychology Examinees by Race and Ethnicity, 2005



## 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](http://www.collegeboard.com/ap/creditpolicy).

## The AP Psychology Course

The AP Psychology course is designed to provide students with a learning experience equivalent to that of an introductory college course in psychology. The course introduces students to the systematic and scientific study of the behavior and mental processes of human beings and other animals. Students are exposed to the psychological facts, principles, and phenomena associated with each of the major subfields within psychology. They also learn about the ethics and methods psychologists use in their study and practice.

The Development Committee creates the guidelines for the AP Psychology 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 Psychology course remains current with concepts and themes as taught in college and university classrooms. The Development Committee has created a topic outline that covers the 14 main content areas that should be taught in AP Psychology, along with a percentage indicating the coverage for that content area in the AP Psychology Examination.

I. History and Approaches.....	2–4%
A. Logic, Philosophy, and History of Science	
B. Approaches	
1. Biological	
2. Behavioral	
3. Cognitive	
4. Humanistic	
5. Psychodynamic	
6. Sociocultural	
7. Evolutionary/sociobiological	
II. Research Methods.....	6–8%
A. Experimental, Correlational, and Clinical Research	
1. Correlational (e.g., observational, survey, clinical)	
2. Experimental	
B. Statistics	
1. Descriptive	
2. Inferential	
C. Ethics in Research	
III. Biological Bases of Behavior.....	8–10%
A. Physiological Techniques (e.g., imaging, surgical)	
B. Neuroanatomy	
C. Functional Organization of Nervous System	
D. Neural Transmission	
E. Endocrine System	
F. Genetics	
IV. Sensation and Perception.....	7–9%
A. Thresholds	
B. Sensory Mechanisms	
C. Sensory Adaptation	
D. Attention	
E. Perceptual Processes	
V. States of Consciousness.....	2–4%
A. Sleep and Dreaming	
B. Hypnosis	
C. Psychoactive Drug Effects	
VI. Learning.....	7–9%
A. Classical Conditioning	
B. Operant Conditioning	
C. Cognitive Processes in Learning	
D. Biological Factors	
E. Social Learning	
VII. Cognition.....	8–10%
A. Memory	
B. Language	
C. Thinking	
D. Problem Solving and Creativity	
VIII. Motivation and Emotion.....	7–9%
A. Biological Bases	
B. Theories of Motivation	
C. Hunger, Thirst, Sex, and Pain	
D. Social Motives	
E. Theories of Emotion	
F. Stress	
IX. Developmental Psychology.....	7–9%
A. Life-Span Approach	
B. Research Methods (e.g., longitudinal, cross-sectional)	
C. Heredity-Environment Issues	
D. Developmental Theories	
E. Dimensions of Development	
1. Physical	
2. Cognitive	
3. Social	
4. Moral	
F. Sex Roles, Sex Differences	
X. Personality.....	6–8%
A. Personality Theories and Approaches	
B. Assessment Techniques	
C. Self-concept, Self-esteem	
D. Growth and Adjustment	

XI. Testing and Individual Differences.....	5–7%
A. Standardization and Norms	
B. Reliability and Validity	
C. Types of Tests	
D. Ethics and Standards in Testing	
E. Intelligence	
F. Heredity/Environment and Intelligence	
G. Human Diversity	
XII. Abnormal Psychology.....	7–9%
A. Definitions of Abnormality	
B. Theories of Psychopathology	
C. Diagnosis of Psychopathology	
D. Anxiety Disorders	
E. Somatoform Disorders	
F. Mood Disorders	
G. Schizophrenic Disorders	
H. Organic Disorders	
I. Personality Disorders	
J. Dissociative Disorders	
XIII. Treatment of Psychological Disorders.....	5–7%
A. Treatment Approaches	
1. Insight therapies: psychodynamic/humanistic approaches	
2. Behavioral approaches	
3. Cognitive approaches	
4. Biological approaches (psychopharmacology/psycho-surgery)	
B. Modes of Therapy (e.g., individual, group)	
C. Community and Preventive Approaches	
XIV. Social Psychology.....	7–9%
A. Group Dynamics	
B. Attribution Processes	
C. Interpersonal Perception	
D. Conformity, Compliance, Obedience	
E. Attitudes and Attitude Change	
F. Organizational Behavior	
G. Aggression/Antisocial Behavior	

Beginning in fall 2006, AP Psychology teachers and principals of schools where AP Psychology is taught must certify that their 2007-08 courses follow all the requirements stipulated by the Development Committee, including using a college-level textbook, 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 psychology courses “AP.” In fall 2007, colleges and universities will receive a list of all high schools authorized to use the “AP” designation for their psychology courses.

## The AP Psychology Exam

The AP Psychology Exam includes a 70-minute multiple-choice section that accounts for two-thirds of the exam grade and a 50-minute free-response section made up of two questions that accounts for one-third of the exam grade. The free-response questions evaluate a student’s mastery of scientific research principles and ability to make connections among constructs from different psychological domains. Students may be asked to analyze a general problem in psychology using concepts from different theoretical frameworks or subdomains in the field, or to design, analyze, or critique a research study.

**AP Psychology free-response questions from recent exam years are listed below.**

---

### Question 1

Describe a specific example that clearly demonstrates an understanding of how each of the following concepts can lead to an inaccurate perception, cognition, or conclusion. Each example must include an explanation of the relationship between the concept and the inaccuracy.

- Afterimage effect
- Availability heuristic
- Ethnocentrism
- Groupthink
- Lack of object permanence
- Nonrandom assignment of research participants
- Optimistic explanatory style
- Proactive interference

---

### Question 2

Psychologists conduct research to investigate controversial issues. Consider the following:

- The value of diagnostic labeling
  - Children’s acquisition of language
  - Explanations of hypnosis
- Describe the opposing points of view on each of the psychological issues listed above. Your description must provide one argument on each side of the controversy.
  - For each issue, choose one point of view to support. Using evidence from psychological research, justify why you think this point of view is correct.

---

### Question 3

Dr. Franklin investigated the relationship between stress and physical illness. She persuaded a high school principal to require all female athletes in the school to participate in her study. She explained the purpose of her research to the athletes and asked them to use a standard form to rate the severity of their stress over the last six months. More than 250 athletes completed the form. Then Dr. Franklin analyzed the forms returned by the first 100 athletes. She

requested the attendance records from the nurse's office for each of those athletes to verify the number of days absent due to illness during the same six-month period. In the debriefing summary that Dr. Franklin sent to the 100 athletes after she completed the study, she stated that athletes who reported more stress also experienced more frequent illness. Dr. Franklin concluded that stress causes physical illness.

- Identify the research method used by Dr. Franklin.
- Describe the operational definitions of the TWO key variables that Dr. Franklin used in the study.
- Based on the information provided, describe ONE appropriate and ONE inappropriate ethical feature of the study.
- Identify ONE statistical technique that Dr. Franklin could use to represent the relationship between the variables in the study.
- Describe TWO aspects of research design that weaken the validity of Dr. Franklin's conclusion that stress causes physical illness.

---

#### Question 4

Time is an important variable in many psychological concepts. Describe a specific example that clearly demonstrates an understanding of each of the following concepts and how it relates to or is affected by time. Use a different example for each concept.

- Critical period
- Fluid intelligence
- Group polarization
- James-Lange theory of emotion
- Presentation of the conditioned stimulus (CS) and unconditioned stimulus (UCS) in classical conditioning
- Refractory period in neural firing
- Sound localization
- Spontaneous recovery

---

#### Question 5

- A. Statistics are often used to describe and interpret the results of intelligence testing.
- Describe three measures of central tendency (mean, median, and mode).
  - Describe a skewed distribution.
  - Relate the three measures of central tendency to a normal distribution.
  - Relate the three measures of central tendency to a positively skewed distribution.
  - An intelligence test for which the scores are normally distributed has a mean of 100 and a standard deviation of 15. Use this information to describe how the scores are distributed.
  - In two normal distributions, the means are 100 for group I and 115 for group II. Can an individual in group I have a higher score than the mean score for group II? Explain.
- B. Apply knowledge of psychological research in answering the following questions about intelligence scores.
- Explain why norms for standardized intelligence tests are periodically updated.
  - Describe how to determine whether an intelligence test is biased.

---

#### Question 6

- A. Define the following psychological concepts.
- Cognitive dissonance
  - Conformity
  - Incentive motivation
  - Negative reinforcement
  - Physiological addiction
- B. Use one specific example for each of the concepts in part A to explain how the concept might relate to either the development of or the continuation of a smoking habit. It is not necessary to use the same example for each concept.

“The Development Committee starts with some very good test questions from members of the committee. The Committee revises the questions to produce a rich array of possibilities. Usually the submitter can recognize the heart of the question but the collaboration produces a question that has been thoroughly improved. The test questions we produce could easily be placed on my final exams at the college level. In fact, the process of writing and scoring the exams has had a significant impact on how I construct the tests in all of my courses and grade by rubric.”

—Jane Halonen  
AP Psychology Development Committee Chief Reader  
University of West Florida

## 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](http://apcentral.collegeboard.com/highered/getinvolved)

## Contact Us

National Office  
Advanced Placement Program  
45 Columbus Avenue  
New York, NY 10023-6992  
212 713-8066  
E-mail: [ap@collegeboard.org](mailto:ap@collegeboard.org)

## The College Board: Connecting Students to College Success

The College Board is a not-for-profit membership association whose mission is to connect students to college success and opportunity. Founded in 1900, the association is composed of more than 5,000 schools, colleges, universities, and other educational organizations. Each year, the College Board serves seven million students and their parents, 23,000 high schools, and 3,500 colleges through major programs and services in college admissions, guidance, assessment, financial aid, enrollment, and teaching and learning. Among its best-known programs are the SAT®, the PSAT/NMSQT®, and the Advanced Placement Program® (AP®). The College Board is committed to the principles of excellence and equity, and that commitment is embodied in all of its programs, services, activities, and concerns. For further information, visit [www.collegeboard.com](http://www.collegeboard.com).