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Setting a Policy for AP[®] U.S. History

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

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, more than 285,000 were in U.S. History. 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.

U.S. History 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.

“A course in AP U.S. History at the high school level enlarges the worlds in which our students live, encourages connections and comparisons, and provides them with an understanding of the American past that they can develop more completely at the college level. In an era marked by uncertainty at home and abroad, historians will play a crucial role in helping students understand American history from a more international perspective. Globalization did not begin in the 1990s, or the 1890s, or the 1790s. Increasingly, we must broaden the contextual frames within which we present the past in order to deepen our understanding of American democracy, citizenship, diversity, and national identity. In the twenty-first century, teaching about the richness and complexity of the American experience challenges us as never before. AP U.S. History serves as the gateway to the discipline, providing students with a solid foundation that they can build on throughout their lives.”

—Mary Frederickson
AP U.S. History Development Committee former Chair
Miami University of Ohio

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 U.S. History 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. See Table 1 for data from a research study comparing AP and non-AP student performance for second-level college U.S. History courses.

Table 1: Student Performance in Second-Level U.S. History Courses: AP U.S. History Students Versus Non-AP Students

	AP EXAM GRADE	GPA	PERCENT OF STUDENTS SCORING AN A OR B
AP Students Who Place Out of Intro. Course	AP 5	3.21	89
	AP 4	3.14	90
	AP 3	3.17	87
Students Who Complete Intro. Course	Non-AP	3.03	80

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/ushist/exam

“AP students are readily identifiable in the college classroom: they come equipped with some content knowledge of United States history, possess some critical thinking skills to analyze primary sources, realize that multiple factors shape historical events, and that there are various interpretations of the past. These students understand the significance of events and often are engaged with most historical topics and can offer different perspectives on issues, which can invigorate class discussion. Their high school AP experience will serve them well in other college classes.”

—Skip Hyser
AP U.S. History Development Committee Chief Reader
James Madison University

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 U.S. History Students, Course, and Exam

Participation and Performance Data for AP U.S. History Students in 2005

Total number of Schools Offering AP U.S. History: 9,922

Table 2: AP U.S. History Exam Score Distribution, 2005

EXAM GRADE	NUMBER OF EXAMINEES	% AT
Score of 5	26,220	9.2%
Score of 4	56,507	19.8%
Score of 3	61,145	21.4%
Score of 2	77,996	27.3%
Score of 1	63,500	22.3%
	285,368	100.0%

Figure 1: AP U.S. History Examinees by Gender, 2005

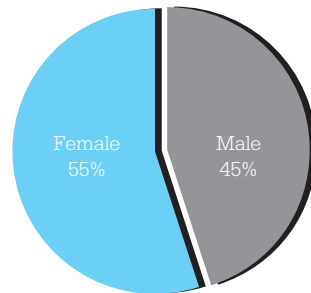
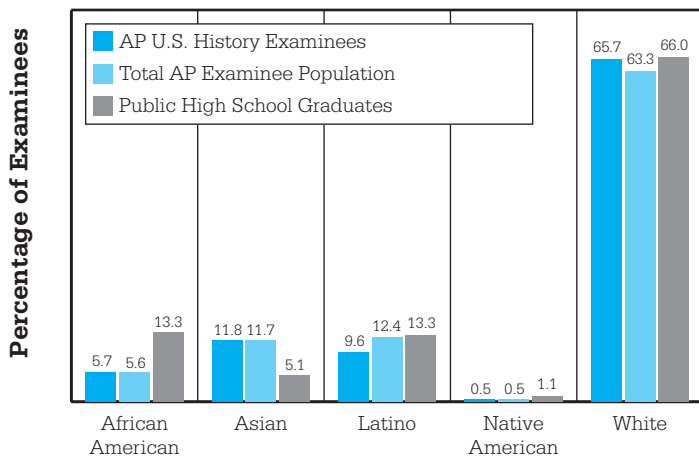


Figure 2: AP U.S. History Examinees by Race and Ethnicity, 2005



The AP U.S. History Course

The AP U.S. History course is designed to provide students with the analytic skills and factual knowledge necessary to deal critically with the problems and materials in U.S. history. The program prepares students for intermediate and advanced college courses by making demands upon them equivalent to those made by full-year introductory college courses. Students should learn to assess historical materials—their relevance to a given interpretive problem, reliability, and importance—and to weigh the evidence and interpretations presented in historical scholarship. An AP U.S. History course should thus develop the skills necessary to arrive at conclusions on the basis of an informed judgment and to present reasons and evidence clearly and persuasively in essay format.

The Development Committee creates the guidelines for the AP U.S. History 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 U.S. History course remains current with concepts and themes as taught in college and university classrooms. The Development Committee has created both a list of themes and a topic outline that covers the main content areas that should be taught in AP U.S. History.

Themes

The themes are designed to encourage students to think conceptually about the American past and to focus on historical change over time. The themes may serve as unifying concepts to help students synthesize material and place the history of the United States into larger analytical contexts.

- American Diversity
- American Identity
- Culture
- Demographic Changes
- Economic Transformations
- Environment
- Globalization
- Politics and Citizenship
- Reform
- Religion
- Slavery and Its Legacies in North America
- War and Diplomacy

Topic Outline

The topic outline is intended as a general guide for AP teachers in structuring their courses, and for students in preparing for the AP U.S. History Exam. The topics provide broad parameters for the course and may be expanded or modified for instruction.

1. Pre-Columbian Societies
2. Transatlantic Encounters and Colonial Beginnings, 1492–1690
3. Colonial North America, 1690–1754
4. The American Revolutionary Era, 1754–89
5. The Early Republic, 1789–1815
6. Transformation of the Economy and Society in Antebellum America
7. The Transformation of Politics in Antebellum America
8. Religion, Reform, and Renaissance in Antebellum America
9. Territorial Expansion and Manifest Destiny
10. The Crisis of the Union
11. Civil War
12. Reconstruction
13. The Origins of the New South
14. Development of the West in the Late Nineteenth Century
15. Industrial America in the Late Nineteenth Century
16. Urban Society in the Late Nineteenth Century
17. Populism and Progressivism
18. The Emergence of America as a World Power
19. The New Era: 1920s
20. The Great Depression and the New Deal
21. The Second World War
22. The Home Front During the War
23. The United States and the Early Cold War
24. The 1950s
25. The Turbulent 1960s
26. Politics and Economics at the End of the Twentieth Century
27. Society and Culture at the End of the Twentieth Century
28. The United States in the Post–Cold War World

Beginning in fall 2006, AP U.S. History teachers and principals of schools where AP U.S. History 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 U.S. history courses “AP.” In fall 2007, colleges and universities will receive a list of all high schools authorized to use the “AP” designation for their U.S. history courses.

The AP U.S. History Exam

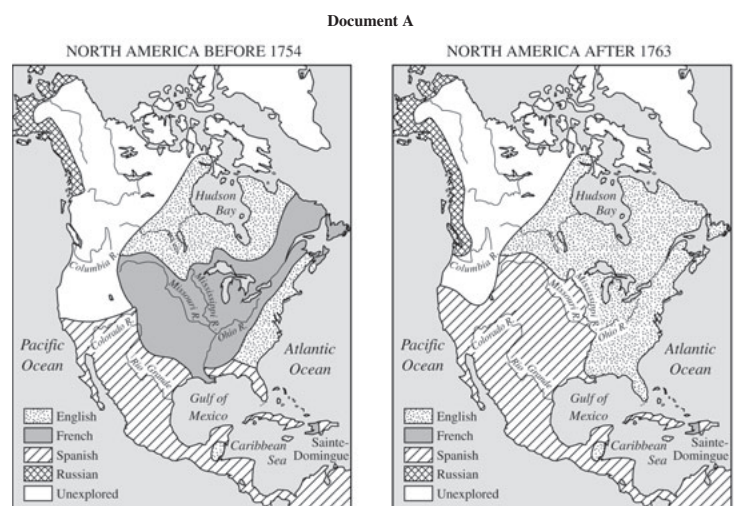
The AP U.S. History Exam lasts just over three hours and includes two equally weighted sections: a 55-minute multiple-choice section and a 130-minute free-response essay section. Both sections cover the period from the first European explorations of the Americas to the present, although a majority of questions are on the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. The questions in the multiple-choice section (80 in total) are designed to test students’ factual knowledge, breadth of preparation, and knowledge-based analytical skills. Essay questions are designed to make it possible for students from widely differing courses to demonstrate their mastery of historical interpretation and their ability to express their views and knowledge in writing. The free-response section consists of three essay questions: a document-based question (DBQ) and two standard essay questions. The standard essay questions may require students to relate developments in different areas, to analyze common themes in different time periods, or to compare individual or group experiences that reflect socioeconomic, ethnic, racial, or gender differences. The required DBQ differs from the standard essays in its emphasis on the ability to analyze and synthesize historical data and assess verbal, quantitative, or pictorial materials as historical evidence. The documents utilized vary in length and are chosen to illustrate interactions and complexities within the material. The material will include—where the question is suitable—charts, graphs, cartoons, and pictures, as well as written materials. In addition to calling upon a broad spectrum of historical skills, the diversity of materials will allow students to assess the value of different sorts of documents.

AP U.S. History free-response questions from recent exam years are listed below.

Question 1 (DBQ)

In what ways did the French and Indian War (1754-63) alter the political, economic and ideological relations between Britain and its American colonies?

Use the documents and your knowledge of the period 1740-66 in constructing your response.



Document B

Source: Canassatego, Chief of the Onondaga Nation of the Iroquois Confederacy, speech to representatives of Pennsylvania, Maryland and Virginia, 1742.

We know our Lands are now become more valuable. The white People think we do not know their Value; but we are sensible that the Land is everlasting, and the few Goods we receive for it are soon worn out and gone. . . . We are not well used with respect to the lands still unsold by us. Your People daily settle on these Lands, and spoil our Hunting. We must insist on your Removing them, as you know they have no Right to settle.

Document C

Source: George Washington, letter to Robert Orme, aide-de-camp to General Edward Braddock, March 15, 1755.

It is true Sir, that I have . . . expressed an Inclination to serve the ensuing Campaign as a Volunteer; and this inclination is not a little increased since it is likely to be conducted by a Gentleman of the General's Experience. But, besides this and the laudable desire I may have to serve (with my best abilities) my King & Country, I must be ingenious enough to confess, that I am not a little biased by selfish considerations. To be plain, Sir, I wish earnestly to attain some knowledge of the Military Profession: and, believing a more favourable opportunity cannot offer, than to serve under a Gentleman of General Braddock's abilities and experience.

Document D

Source: Massachusetts soldier's diary, 1759.

September 30. Cold weather is coming on apace, which will make us look round about us and put [on] our winter clothing, and we shall stand in need of good liquors [in order] to keep our spirits on cold winter's days. And we, being here within stone walls, are not likely to get liquors or clothes at this time of the year; and though we be Englishmen born, we are debarred [denied] Englishmen's liberty. Therefore we now see what it is to be under martial law and to be with the [British] regulars, who are but little better than slaves to their officers. And when I get out of their [power] I shall take care of how I get in again.

[October] 31. And so now our time has come to an end according to enlistment, but we are not yet [allowed to go] home.

November 1. The regiment was ordered out . . . to hear what the colonel had to say to them as our time was out and we all swore that we would do no more duty here. So it was a day of much confusion with the regiment.

Document E

Source: Rev. Thomas Barnard, sermon, Massachusetts, 1763.

Auspicious Day! when Britain, the special Care of Heaven, blessed with a patriot-Sovereign, served by wise and faithful Councillors, brave Commanders, successful Fleets and Armies, seconded in her Efforts by all her Children, and by none more zealously than by those of New England . . .

America, mayest well rejoice, the Children of New England may be glad and triumph, in Reflection on Events past, and Prospect for the future . . .

Now commences the Era of our quiet Enjoyment of those Liberties which our Fathers purchased with the Toil of their whole Lives, their Treasure, their Blood. Safe from the Enemy of the Wilderness, safe from the gripping Hand of arbitrary Sway and cruel Superstition, here shall be the late founded Seat of Peace and Freedom. Here shall our indulgent Mother, who has most generously rescued and protected us, be served and honored by growing Numbers, with all Duty, Love and Gratitude, till Time shall be no more.

Document F

Source: British Order in Council, 1763.

We, the Commissioners of your Majesty's Treasury beg leave humbly to represent to your Majesty that having taken into consideration the present state of the duties of customs imposed on your Majesty's subjects in America and the West Indies, we find that the revenue arising therefrom is very small and inconsiderable, . . . and is not yet sufficient to defray a fourth part of the expense necessary for collecting it. We observe with concern that through neglect, connivance, and fraud, not only is revenue impaired, but the commerce of the colonies diverted from its natural course. . . . [This revenue] is more indispensable when the military establishment necessary for maintaining these colonies requires a large revenue to support it, and when their vast increase in territory and population makes the proper regulation of their trade of immediate necessity.

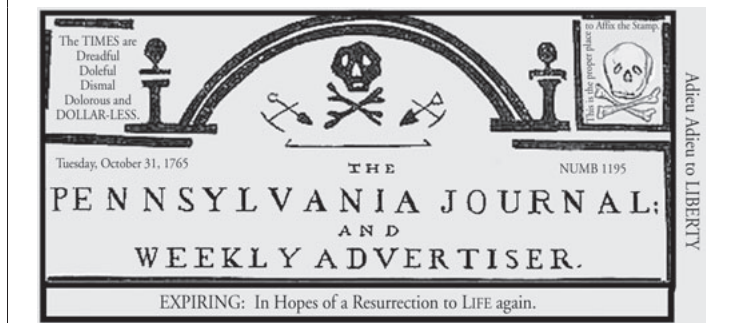
Document G

Source: Benjamin Franklin (in London) letter to John Hughs (in Pennsylvania), August 9, 1765.

As to the Stamp Act, tho we purpose [propose] doing our Endeavour to get it repeal'd in which I am sure you would concur with us, yet the Success is uncertain. If it continues, your undertaking to execute it may make you unpopular for a Time, but your Coolness and Steadiness, and with every Circumstance in your Power of Favour to the People, will by degrees reconcile them. In the meantime, a firm Loyalty to the Crown and faithful Adherence to the Government of this Nation, which it is the Safety as well as Honour of the Colonies to be connected with, will always be the wisest Course for you and I to take.

Document H

Source: Newspaper masthead, October 1765.



Question 2

Compare and contrast the ways in which economic development affected politics in Massachusetts and Virginia in the period from 1607 to 1750.

Question 3

To what extent did the debates about the Mexican War and its aftermath reflect the sectional interests of New Englanders, westerners, and southerners in the period from 1845 to 1855?

Question 4

Analyze the impact of the American Revolution on both slavery and the status of women in the period from 1775 to 1800.

Question 5

Analyze the effectiveness of political compromise in reducing sectional tensions in the period from 1820 to 1861.

Question 6

Describe the patterns of immigration in TWO of the periods listed below. Compare and contrast the responses of Americans to immigrants in these periods.

1820 to 1860

1880 to 1924

1965 to 2000

Question 7

Analyze the extent to which TWO of the following transformed American society in the 1960s and 1970s.

The Civil Rights movement

The antiwar movement

The women's movement

Question 8

Compare and contrast the programs and policies designed by reformers of the Progressive era to those designed by reformers of the New Deal period. Confine your answer to programs and policies that addressed the needs of those living in poverty.

Question 9

Analyze the successes and failures of the United States Cold War policy of containment as it developed in TWO of the following regions of the world during the period 1945 to 1975.

East and Southeast Asia
Europe
Latin America
Middle East

Question 10

“Geography was the primary factor in shaping the development of the British colonies in North America.” Assess the validity of this statement for the 1600s.

Question 11

To what extent was the United States Constitution a radical departure from the Articles of Confederation?

Question 12

How successful were progressive reforms during the period 1890 to 1915 with respect to TWO of the following?

Industrial conditions
Urban life
Politics

Question 13

Analyze the ways in which TWO of the following contributed to the changes in women’s lives in the United States in the mid-twentieth century.

Wars
Literature and/or popular culture
Medical and/or technological advances

“The AP Exam challenges students to demonstrate content knowledge of United States history, to apply critical thinking skills in the analysis of primary sources and in placing the documents in their historical context, and to synthesize their understanding and interpretation of past events in written essays. They must do history.”

—Skip Hyser, AP U.S. History Development Committee Chief Reader
James Madison 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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