Declining Credibility for the AP Program

William Casement

Last year the history department at the high school my son attends decided to do away with honors courses, and put the students who would have been in them into Advanced Placement (AP) courses instead (beginning in the sophomore year). With a nay from the administration, the policy was abandoned (at least for now), but the incident reveals a departmental mindset that features AP as a growth industry. At another local school, a science teacher found sixty students enrolled in his two AP classes this year—nearly double the number in two classes last year. Why? Peer pressure, he says, and a school policy that has no restrictions on who is allowed to enroll. Increasingly, students are availing themselves of the opportunity, with some plunging in for full immersion, such as a student from still another high school in my area who graduated recently having taken nineteen AP tests. One of his classmates took twenty, and enrolled at the University of Florida as a sophomore. Another local high school product attends Stanford, having been awarded a full year of college credit there for AP courses. Is the small city where I live an anomaly? Am I citing extremes? A year's worth of college credit is unusual but hardly unheard of, and the other examples indicate a trend throughout the country: there is a large and still rapidly expanding movement to teach college-credit courses in high school through the AP program. Concurrently, and in reaction to this movement, there is a quiet but growing skepticism at selective colleges about the quality of AP courses, and a reluctance to continue awarding credit to entering students who have taken them.

Sponsorship for AP lies with the College Board (officially named College Entrance Examination Board), which also sponsors the well-known SAT and PSAT college-entrance exams. While the entrance exams have met with considerable scrutiny and criticism both inside and outside of academia, the Advanced Placement program has played to a mostly admiring audience. It has supporters in many places.

- College admissions officials use it as a guide to identify top applicants.
- High school students see it as a way to make themselves look good in the college admissions process, and to earn early college credits that will lighten their schedules or allow them to graduate early.

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- Parents, too, like the advantage it gives in admissions, and especially the money that will be saved by collecting college credits that are free of charge.
- Advocates of raising standards applaud it as a rigorous national curriculum.
- Public officials and lawmakers see it as a way to put many students through college more quickly, thus alleviating the cost they budget for.
- College administrators (although they might not admit it) appreciate that AP lightens their responsibility for providing general-education course work for first and second year students.
- College faculty (although they might not admit it) appreciate having someone else teach basic courses, so they will be able to concentrate more on teaching advanced courses in their specialties.

When dissent has emerged against the program, it has come in two distinctly different voices. One says AP is elitist—it is not universally available, and many students at high schools with large minority and economically disadvantaged populations are deprived of equal opportunity for the highest level of academics and the gateway to admission to top colleges. In other words, there needs to be an even greater expansion of AP. The other voice comes from college faculty and administrators who do not fit the above descriptions, and are concerned about the quality of instruction in what are supposed to be college-equivalency courses. They complain about the students they teach who use AP credit to skip basic college courses and then fare poorly in higher-level courses. The College Board has responded to the charge of elitism by pushing to make AP available in all high schools, and encouraging more minority and disadvantaged students to participate in the program. This tactic, however, only exacerbates concern about the quality of AP. Despite its widespread popularity, a close look at how the program operates, a questioning of the logic that supports it, and a consideration of the measures colleges have taken recently to restrict it, will show AP to be of questionable worth as a college equivalency program, at least for colleges that consider themselves selective or to offer high quality academics.

Whence It Came

When AP began fifty years ago, it was the brainchild of the elite of America's education establishment: Harvard, Yale, Princeton, Swarthmore, Oberlin, Wesleyan, Andover, Exeter, Lawrenceville, and other distinguished institutions were the collective force that conceived and organized the program.[1] It was intended for the brightest high school seniors who had completed their high school requirements and wanted to take a college-level course or two as a challenge. With discussion and planning beginning in 1951, a pilot program developed that included a couple of dozen schools, and in 1954 the College Board assumed control. In 1956, some 2,000 exams were administered to 1,200 students. By 1961, the numbers were 18,000 exams and 13,000 students; in 1971, 74,000 and 58,000; in 1981, 178,000 and 134,000; in 1991, 535,000 and 359,000; and in 2001, 1.4 million and 845,000. In 2003, 1.7 million exams were taken by

one million students.[2] As growth continued unabated, along the way many prominent educators gave their endorsements, including such icons as former longtime Harvard president James Bryant Conant and Albert Shanker of the American Federation of Teachers. Various state governments climbed on board as well, sometimes providing special financial help for their schools to participate in AP. Eventually the list of AP courses available expanded to thirty-four (in nineteen subject areas), and today many high schools offer from a dozen to two dozen of them (often multiple sections of a course).

The expansion was supported by a change in philosophy about who should take AP courses. In the 1980s, juniors and sophomores began enrolling in them, and today they (along with occasional freshmen) often take AP as their introduction to a subject rather than taking a standard high school course in that subject first. Seniors now take less than 60 percent of the exams.[3] Many students have taken several AP courses by the completion of high school, and selective colleges expect to see AP on their applicants' transcripts unless they are from schools that do not offer the program. For admission to one of the elite colleges, four to six AP courses (presuming the high school offers them) is the figure bandied about by high school guidance counselors as the minimum needed for an applicant to have a serious chance.

Further, an emphasis came to be put on equity and access, as the College Board encouraged the enrollment of more minority and low-income students. In the five-year period from 1998–2002, when the number of students participating in AP rose 48 percent, underrepresented minorities were up by 77 percent, and low-income students by 101 percent.[4] The College Board's guidebook for high schools speaks to this policy by urging them toward openness in student selection for AP.

> Some schools admit virtually every student who applies for an AP course . . . if students can't keep up the fast pace, they simply transfer to a less demanding course.
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> Other schools are very restrictive in admitting AP students . . . other schools are more relaxed about requirements for entering AP courses. . . . Each position can be defended. . . . But opening the door a little wider is also a tenable approach. Sometimes students with quite mediocre records will blossom in a challenging classroom environment. The gain in student skills and confidence seems to counterbalance the lower grades that may result.
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> In summary, the AP program wants there to be the option for any student in any school to take AP courses if he or she has sufficient pre-AP knowledge and skills. We don't want this to be a program for elite students or just the gifted and talented.[5]

An effort also has been made to recruit more minority teachers to AP, with a hope that minority students will follow them, by holding College Board-sponsored workshops at historically black colleges.

Standing on the sidelines cheering the expansion of AP is influential *Washington Post* education writer Jay Mathews, who does an annual statistical rank-

ing of public high schools nationwide based on their rate of participation in AP. His list of "The 100 Best High Schools in America" is printed as a cover story in *Newsweek* magazine,[6] intended to parallel *U.S. News*'s popular *America's Best Colleges*, and an extended version (more than 700 schools are ranked) is found on MSNBC.com. Private schools are not included, presumably because they would occupy all of the top spots. But the *Newsweek* list serves to make the point that AP is big in the public sector of education. Mathews is also the author of a book on Jaime Escalante, the math teacher who became famous through the movie *Stand and Deliver* for teaching AP calculus successfully to at-risk students in Los Angeles. National efforts like Mathews', along with Escalante's popular culture status, have combined with the College Board's penchant for inclusiveness to move AP away from its original image of being for a small, highly select segment of students.

With expansion and inclusiveness has come still another wrinkle in how AP is perceived. Some proponents now hail it as a de facto national curriculum that will raise standards at schools where they need to be raised. *Newsweek*, for instance, quotes a high school principal who says adding AP courses to the curriculum at his rural low-achieving school bolstered student morale and confidence. Another principal relates that the worries she heard about opening AP to all comers were allayed when tutorial sessions and other extra help were put into place.[7] If AP can improve the standards at weak schools, the argument follows, then every school should have an AP program. And if students who traditionally would not have been considered AP material can get through an AP course, then they belong there.

Selective Colleges Versus the College Board

The College Board proposes that an AP score of 3 (on a scale of 1 to 5) is equivalent to a grade of C in a college course, and therefore worthy of college credit. A score of 3, then, is what is widely referred to as a "passing" grade. The Board promotes AP on this basis, and a large number of colleges throughout the country follow its lead by awarding credit for a score of 3. However, among the more selective colleges, many disagree that a score of 3 is worthy of credit, and they require at least a 4. A research study conducted in 2000 by a respected independent scholar points out the discrepancy between the College Board's claims about the quality of their program and the reality of its acceptance among higher-education institutions. The finding is that it is routine among "highly selective" colleges to require a 4, and also the practice at about half of the schools deemed "selective."[8] The study explains the discrepancy as the result of a natural reaction by selective colleges to the expansion of AP enrollment in high schools.

> There are few lasting success stories in American Education (Tyack and Cuban, 1995). As effective educational programs spread, the imitations often become less

> true to the original. A law of diminishing returns sets in as the originally well-qualified (often well-selected), well-informed and highly motivated group of teachers and pupils becomes flooded by the deluge of badly qualified, ill-informed, and poorly motivated followers. The program becomes less selective and quality declines.[9]

A look at the situation three years later, when AP has grown considerably larger than it was in 2000, shows that selective colleges are increasingly wary of the program, and tightening further on the award of credit. One means of tightening is to reject not only scores of 3 but also of 4, leaving only scores of 5 as credit worthy. In 2002, Harvard announced that a minimum score of 5 would be required for college credit for any of the AP exams. This move came after a study in two departments found that students who used AP credit to skip introductory courses fared significantly worse at the next level than students who took those courses. In 2003, the University of Pennsylvania also reached the level of accepting no score less than a 5 for credit. Policies like these are not simple administrative fiats, but a collection of decisions by individual departments. The matter usually lies within departmental control, and at various other schools—William and Mary, Carnegie Mellon, Washington University (St. Louis), and Carlton, to name a few as examples—several departments now require a score of 5, although other departments do not. Still, while academic departments within institutions are largely in control, administrators are actively involved in coordinating policy, and discussion often goes on among administrators at peer institutions. AP is talked about in the meetings of the Ivy League deans, where the growth and quality of the program are a significant concern. One veteran of these meetings summarizes the group's misgivings:

> It is certainly good that opportunities have spread beyond the more affluent high schools. . . . But there is evidence that AP has been simply dropped into or even forced upon many high schools without sufficient faculty preparation.
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> I think we are unanimous in wanting to see AP as a means of placing students in appropriate college courses but not as a substitute for the full experience of a residential college . . . even when our faculty are willing to allow students with AP to place out of introductory courses, they rarely believe that the AP experience is equivalent to those courses.
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> All of us are pretty much moving in the same direction, with a 5 being the minimum score that is accepted, and I predict that the next move will be toward granting placement but not course credit.[10]

Some of the Ivy League schools have already reached the point of refusing credit entirely for certain AP exams, although in some cases students are allowed placement out of the introductory courses AP is intended to match. When they place out, they act at their own peril in taking higher-level courses, as their colleges do not give them reason to think their AP experience is equivalent to a college course. Princeton, for instance, does not take even a score of 5 for Environmental Science, Music, Computer Science A, Statistics, Human

Geography, Politics, or Psychology. Some other exams receive credit only for a 5, and some for a 4. At Stanford, the Ivies' West-Coast cousin, beginning with the 2004–2005 academic school year, credit will no longer be given for sixteen of the twenty-six AP exams on the registrar's list for 2003–2004. Since the acceptable score for all 16 is a 4, Stanford will skip over the step of requiring a score of 5 and go straight to no credit. For most of these exams, placement out of introductory courses also will be refused. Stanford's new policy is one of the most restrictive in the country, although there are colleges where AP is rejected entirely. Amherst continues its longstanding practice not to accept AP for credit; in some cases, students are allowed to place out of basic courses, but they must take eight full semesters of credit to graduate. Great Books colleges such as St. John's and Thomas Aquinas, where there is no part of the curriculum that is matched by the sort of content found in AP subjects, allow neither credit nor placement for AP.

At other institutions, certain departments are wary enough of AP to have stopped awarding credit for it. At Swarthmore no credit is given for Economics, Music, or Psychology, and at Williams for Studio Art, Computer Science, English Language, or Music. Pomona refuses Statistics, Physics B, Environmental Science, English Language, and World History, while its sister institution Claremont McKenna refuses English Language or Literature, Economics, and Government. Washington and Lee denies credit for Geography, Statistics, Studio Art, and World History, and the University of Chicago for Computer Science, Environmental Science, Psychology, and Statistics. This list comprises a sampling, not a comprehensive survey, but it serves to show that resistance to AP is reaching a point where pockets within the upper echelon of academia are willing to turn away from the program altogether.

Besides refusing credit for AP exams, or giving it only for a score of 5, there are other measures colleges have taken to restrict students' use of AP toward earning a degree. One such measure is to limit the total number of AP credits allowed to any student. Claremont McKenna, Haverford, and Davidson, for example, limit the credit granted to one semester of college study. Carlton extends a bit further to a semester and a half. Williams takes a slightly different approach beginning with the class of 2008. AP credit may be granted, but it cannot be used to graduate in less than four years. Neither, by existing policy, can it be used to reduce a student's course load in any semester, although it can be used for placement into advanced courses and, in certain cases, in partial fulfillment of a major. So, while recognition of AP credit has not been abandoned entirely, in effect it will not contribute to the minimum amount of credit needed to earn a degree.

Still another variation is to grant credit but not allow it to be used in fulfillment of general education requirements. Additionally, it can be disallowed for application toward a major. The credit then falls into the category of electives, something students often have few of, especially if they are in a professional

major, or if they follow the increasingly common liberal-arts practice of taking a double major. Further, AP courses match lower-division college offerings, and do not suffice for the upper-division credit students often find they need from their electives in order to meet graduation requirements.

While selective colleges are growing wary of the worth of AP credits, the College Board continues to present an optimistic picture of the program. The organization works hard, it says, to maintain the integrity of its standards. The development and revision of syllabi for AP courses are done by committees whose membership includes both high school teachers and college professors, with the latter taking the lead. To ensure the courses are truly at the college level, they employ a system of comparability studies that every few years tries out exam questions on college students taking courses with which the AP courses identify. Further, college professors and experienced high school AP teachers lead the training sessions that the College Board offers for new AP teachers. And the grading process, as well, involves professors: they train the high school and college faculty who are employed in groups to grade the essay portions of the AP exams.

From the College Board's vantage point—looking from the inside—AP appears to be in good health. Quality controls are being exercised. But what skeptics at colleges are afraid of, as they look at AP from the outside, is that when students arrive at college with AP credit and are placed immediately into courses beyond the basic level, they are poorly prepared. As evidence to counter this fear, the College Board does have longitudinal studies it can point to that are done every few years. Such studies done in 1982, 1986, and 1993 confirmed that students with AP credits were at least as well prepared as other college students for higher-level college study. However, these studies were independent of one another and did not attempt to measure the same variables. And they included a very limited number of colleges. In 1998 the Educational Testing Service, a "partner" with the College Board (the organization to which the Board awards its contracts on testing), released a study of AP performance and its relationship to course grades at twenty-one colleges.[11] The institutions included were public and private, all selective in admissions standards, with several that are generally regarded as elite. The results of the study show students with AP credits doing well when they skip introductory courses and move to the next level. And, in 2002, a College Board Study[12] confirmed this finding, and supported the Board's contention that a grade of 3 is deserving of college credit.

Unfortunately, while all of these studies present AP in a positive light, their results offer little support to counter the program's critics in colleges today. The findings from all of them are long outdated. The 1998 study relied on data from the early 1990s, when AP was about a third of its present size. The 2002 study used data from 1996–1999, when the program was about half of its present size. And the students whose records were examined in this last study were

drawn from only one institution, the University of Texas at Austin. While this institution is quite selective relative to colleges in general, it is less so than at least a hundred others, particularly those where the college equivalency of AP credits is coming most strongly into question.

The Illogic of It All

While the College Board touts the AP program as maintaining high quality and at the same time expanding access, the logic behind this notion is lacking. Without an external assessment—one with comprehensive and recent statistics to back it up—common sense should lead us to be suspicious. Selective colleges are already telling us about the students they admit whose AP backgrounds leave them under-prepared for the next level of college work. Even without formal studies such as Harvard's, many administrators and professors are aware of students at their institutions who bear AP credit of questionable worth. As the vice-chancellor who oversees admissions at UCLA states, "We hear that students may have done reasonably well on an AP test, but often their level of proficiency is not what we expect from UCLA freshmen."[13] A professor of many years in the chemistry department at the University of Oregon says,

> Challenging high school courses are very welcome, but too often AP courses do not meet the standards of rigor expected of college work. I'm suspicious when a student takes AP chemistry as a junior in high school. Few students of that age have the intellectual maturity to do college level chemistry. . . . I advise students in the sciences, who need their introductory chemistry, physics, calculus, or biology as a foundation for future work, to start the college sequence at the beginning, unless they get the top score on the AP exam. Otherwise, they risk hampering or crippling themselves in future work. It's just not worth it. This is especially true of calculus, which is a foundation for all the sciences.[14]

This situation should come as no surprise if we consider who the students are in AP classrooms today, and who the faculty are who teach them and grade their exams.

Clearly, AP is no longer an elite program for only a few accomplished high school students in their senior year who are primed to do college-level work. The vastly expanded enrollment will have nearly quadrupled the number of exams by 2004 (about 2 million, by the current rate of expansion) from 1991 (535,000), and it now includes many students who, while they are college bound, will not be mistaken for the top echelon of high school seniors: many are not seniors, many of the seniors are not top students. It is not reasonable to expect these students to read college texts, comprehend college-level concepts, and move at a pace necessary to complete a college-level course successfully. And in fact, a third of all students enrolled in AP courses do not even attempt it.[15] They complete the courses and earn grades and high school credit, but do not take the AP exams for college credit. These students do not show up in the College Board's statistics, which focus on the exam takers. But they may well

influence the level at which the courses in which they sit are being taught. With a third of the students in the program performing such that they are not ready at the end to attempt the final exams, we must suspect that many AP teachers will feel pressure to compromise their standards. How many teachers with substantial numbers of students of this sort will remain staunch—refuse to ease up on pace and depth? Will they be willing to give a failing grade to anyone who refuses to take the final exam, as would be done in a course taught on a college campus?

The fact that many AP students are not seniors is particularly telling. They are taking what are supposed to be college courses at ages sixteen, fifteen, and a few at fourteen. It is a huge stretch of the imagination to think that any but a very tiny number of students at these ages are truly ready for college study. Some of the most heavily enrolled AP courses teach mostly underclass students. English Language–Composition, the third most heavily enrolled course, has three times as many eleventh graders as twelfth graders. They get college credit before their senior year in high school, although college instructors even at the most selective colleges routinely decry the poor writing skills of their freshmen students. U.S. history, the most heavily enrolled course, also is populated mainly by eleventh graders, with the number of tenth graders nearly equaling the number of twelfth graders. In European history, half of the students are tenth graders, and in world history, three quarters are tenth graders.[16]

The reason so many history students take AP early is that these courses replace the courses in that field that in the earlier days of the program they would have taken before AP. Instead of taking high-school-level world history or American history, and then later taking the AP college-level version, many students are skipping the high school course. At age fifteen or sixteen, they are enrolling for college-level study in a subject where their highest level of preparation is middle school.

The phenomenon of skipping high-school-level courses seems less likely in mathematics and science, where the type of knowledge involved is more recognizably cumulative. Still, more eleventh graders than twelfth graders take Calculus AB, and the same holds for chemistry. In the case of chemistry, it may be that some students complete a high-school-level course as tenth graders and then immediately enroll in AP chemistry the next year. They may also be taking high school physics as eleventh graders, and then AP physics in twelfth grade. This doubling up with two science courses in the same year is a strategy to prepare for entrance into a science or engineering program in college.

In a program for high school students where a large share of them are sophomores and juniors rather than seniors, where many are not top students but only good ones, and a third of them are either not serious enough or not accomplished enough to take the final exams, are we to believe the courses really live up to their billing as college level? With dilution in the body of students taking the courses—relative to the students for whom they were origi-

nally intended—can we believe that the quality of learning has not been diluted as well?

Given a student body that is ever growing in size and decreasing in selectivity, it is logical to expect that if the AP program is holding to its standards, a decreasing percentage of students will get high grades on the AP exams. Yet during the period from 1997 to 2002, when the number of exam-takers grew enormously, there was no appreciable change. The average grade dropped by 0.03, with nearly two thirds of the tests receiving a 3 or better.[17] How can this be? Are the masses of new students who have entered the program in recent years really performing as well as their predecessors? Are the students who in the program's earlier days would have taken perhaps two AP courses as seniors performing at the same level now when they start out in AP as sophomores and end up with half a dozen to a dozen courses by graduation?

Seemingly little noticed or fully understood beyond College Board insiders and AP graders is the process by which the exam scores are determined. The scores the graders put on the papers are not the scores students receive, but are used merely to compile a rank ordering. A further step is taken to determine where the cutoffs in that ordering will be for each of the five score levels. The College Board says the responsibility for deciding on grades lies principally with the head grader for each test, in consultation with Board and Educational Testing Service directors and statisticians.[18] A veteran who has graded exams in U.S. history for many years describes the process a bit differently.

> We only rank the students. College Board statisticians determine the cutoff points . . . conventional wisdom among the graders is that about one-third of the tests are worthy of college credit. Scores of 4 and 5 closely match our perception, 3's do not.[19]

Here it is evident that there is a tension between graders and College Board officials, as the Board stands firmly behind a 3 as a credit-worthy score. This grader, a professor at a four-year college (one that is only modestly selective) says about those of his fellow graders who come from the college ranks, "many of us recommend that our campuses no longer accept scores of 3."[20]

Exactly what goes on as the grade cutoffs are established may remain something of a mystery, as may the degree of dissatisfaction among graders about that process. But if we give the Board the benefit of the doubt that their perception of fair and accurate grading is generally consistent with that of the graders, a further question arises about the graders' professional qualifications. Among them are college professors, although many are from two-year colleges. The majority are high school teachers. So for many of the graders there is a disparity between the level of students they teach and the level at which the students whose exams they grade are supposed to be writing. Should this circumstance lead to concern about the graders' capability to perform their task? The College Board could point out that the graders are overseen closely by

supervisors from 4–year colleges, through a system of training and the fact that multiple graders read each exam. A skeptical perspective, on the other hand, places the process in a broader framework. High-school professionals are not unaware of what a college-level performance looks like. They were college students themselves. But given the level at which they work day-in-day-out, are they fully ready to look for the nuances and depth that are expected at this level? To what extent are they truly college-professor equivalents and to what extent are they merely the next best labor pool a mass employer can find?

Concerns about mass employment and about professional qualifications can be applied to AP teachers as well. By the College Board's own estimates, in the year 2000 over 100,000 teachers were teaching AP classes, and, given anticipated growth in student enrollment and attrition among teachers, 100,000 *new* AP teachers will be needed by 2010.[21] Multitudes of high school teachers are teaching college-equivalent courses, many of which will be awarded credit at our nation's most prestigious higher-education institutions. What preparation do those teachers have to ready them to teach the equivalent of freshman courses at Harvard and Yale, or at a liberal arts college, or at a state university? They are offered College-Board-sponsored training sessions which only some attend. Also, they may avail themselves of the extensive materials and contacts available through the Board's AP Central website. And, of course, they can always call upon experienced colleagues from their own high schools or other local ones. All of this speaks to help with pedagogy, and amounts to as much in that regard as a faculty member employed at a college might expect to find in preparing for a college course. But what about subject matter? At what level of accomplishment do we find the high school teachers who teach AP? According to the College Board's assessment based on a nationwide survey in 2000–2001, 6 percent were found to hold doctorates, and about half to hold master's degrees "in an academic discipline that was consistent with the AP course that they teach" (70 percent hold some sort of master's degree).[22]

At what colleges would a faculty profile like this be considered acceptable—roughly half of the faculty lacking a master's degree in what they teach? The vast majority of college professors at 4–year colleges today hold doctorates, and even teaching assistants, who are employed at some schools in teaching the courses AP is meant to substitute for, generally have reached the master's degree level (many are far beyond it) in the field in which they teach. A master's degree is the professional credential considered to be the minimum for community-college teachers. If we consider the AP program to be a large lower-division college, which is precisely how it functions, what would we expect an accrediting agency to say about the acceptability of its faculty's credentials? Borderline for a community college? Shaky, at best, for a non-selective four-year college? For a selective four–year institution, how could the answer be anything but "unacceptable?" And what about colleges themselves? What can their take be on the faculty who teach many of the lower division courses they

routinely give credit for through AP? They would not hire the same faculty to teach on their campuses. Especially at selective colleges, there is a disconnect. The quality of their faculty as promised through the school's reputation is vastly different from the quality of the faculty at the "College of AP," which is actually doing much of the lower-division teaching for them through courses that are transferred in.

Recognized as transfer credits, AP credits bring up another key issue. They are given dual use in being applied to both a high school diploma and a college degree. Is this "double dipping" proper? Is it educationally sound? In the early days of the program, the AP course or two that students took in their senior year could be considered as over and above the requirements for their high school diplomas. Today that is not the case, especially with juniors and sophomores increasingly taking AP. Colleges often have very restrictive policies about courses being used for fulfilling the requirements for more than one degree. The same course could not apply toward a bachelor's degree and then toward a master's degree, for instance. The use of AP credits for both high school credit and college credit should be treated in the same way. Some colleges are attentive to this situation and spell out their policy for entering students, but, if it is adhered to consistently, it will mean that AP English cannot be used for college credit since high schools routinely require four years of English for graduation, and AP replaces one of those years (or two, if a student takes both the AP composition and AP literature courses). The AP U.S., world, and European history courses would be disallowed for the many students who now take them to fulfill high school social studies requirements. The same point would hold for students who take biology, chemistry, or physics without having a prior course in the subject, unless their school has a minimal or loosely stated science requirement.

High school graduation requirements, of course, are variable across institutions, and subject to change and manipulation. The larger question here, beyond whether double dipping with AP credits skirts the rules, is whether the practice of acceleration that it facilitates is good for students. When students use an AP credit to reduce the number of courses they take in college, they are losing out on an amount of learning they would have gained otherwise. When several AP credits are involved, the missed opportunity for learning is substantial. Consider two students. One takes AP English Literature, and because it transfers to college for credit, decides not to take another course in literature upon arriving there. The other student takes honors English in high school, which is only a bit less rigorous than AP, and then takes a literature course in college. The second student will have read about twice as much literature as the first (presuming the AP and college courses did not have identical readings), and have spent twice as much time analyzing it. The second student will have gotten a more extensive education when all is said and done.

Add to the first student's high school transcript an AP U.S. history course as a junior and AP economics as a senior, which are used to fulfill the social-science distribution requirement in college and get on quickly to specialized courses in a major. The second student takes honors high-school courses in the same subjects and then takes two social-science courses in college, perhaps in history or economics, or perhaps political science or sociology. The second student is building a deeper and more well rounded education than the first, who is rejecting that in a push to accelerate. While the first student can be said to have reached as high vertically in certain areas as the second—completing the level of a basic college literature course and two basic college social-science courses—the second student has reached much further laterally. It should go without saying that a sound education pushes in both directions. This point can be extended from the humanities and social sciences to the natural sciences as well, although in mathematics an argument could be made that the subject matter is more vertical and less lateral than in other disciplines. But clearly, when colleges allow students to use AP credits to accelerate, their graduates who do so emerge with a less complete package of secondary and higher education than students who do not use AP credits in that way.

As Things Stand Now

No longer serving a small, highly select cohort, AP is becoming a common experience for college-bound high school students. The program functions as a lower-division college that is the source of a vast number of college credits, such that, at selective colleges, a large percentage of the entering students are not true freshmen but transfers from the "College of AP." This "college" is unaccredited, and would be unlikely to pass muster by any reasonable assessment. Nearly half of its students are high school sophomores and juniors—still two or three years away from college age—and a third of them skip the final exams. Two thirds of the ones who take the final exams get scores the "College of AP" says are worthy of college credit, but some of the people hired to grade the exams seem to think otherwise. Half of the teachers at the "college" would be un-hirable at most four-year colleges, and only a tiny fraction would meet the standards of selective colleges.

Many colleges have become skeptical of the quality of the AP courses for which they grant credit, and they are taking various measures to restrict students' use of AP to enroll in less than a full college program or to start immediately in courses beyond the basic level. A score of 4 has been the minimum required at many selective colleges, with a push now toward raising the minimum to 5. That adjustment is consistent with a suspicion that with large numbers of young and otherwise questionably qualified students now taking the exams, and exam scores not dropping, the quality of performance needed to get a 3 or 4 or 5 is dropping. But is raising the bar on test scores enough? A

few colleges are now taking the logical next step, which is to refuse credit entirely for at least some subjects. With recognition of the makeup of the program as it exists today, and the image it is taking on of changing from elite to commonplace, we will likely see increased rejection of AP to the point where certain colleges refuse to give credit for any of the exams, and perhaps for placement as well.

This ultimate position stands opposed to the primary objective that many AP proponents champion for the program—earning college credit before going to college. It withdraws recognition of AP as truly being college equivalent. It does not, however, oppose the worth of AP as a high-school-level endeavor. Today the College Board and many supporters praise the program as a de facto national curriculum that is rigorous and can challenge individual students and whole schools to improve academically. Whether or not AP functions well in that role has not been questioned here. It is a matter worthy of study in its own right.

Rejecting AP for college credit also does not oppose the program's importance in the college admissions process. Applicants bearing AP courses on their transcripts will still be looked upon favorably. But what colleges will be doing is exercising their responsibility for the academic well-being of their students once they have passed through the gates of admission. They will be making the statement that the degrees their students receive are based on four full years of solid college study, and that the institution's reputation for ensuring this standard is upheld. They will be choosing that path rather than following along with the inertia and popularity of a high school program with a questionable claim to college equivalency. The issue for colleges, then, becomes one of integrity compromised versus integrity maintained.

Notes

1. An informative summary of AP's history is provided by the College Board on their AP Central web site: Bob DiYanni, "The Story of AP, the Advanced Placement Program," http://www.apcentral.collegeboard.com.
2. "AP Then and Now," in "Participation in AP: Annual Participation," AP Central web site section "The Courses." http://www.apcentral.collegeboard.com.
3. "Advanced Placement Program, National Summary Report, 2002" (New York: The College Board).
4. "Equity and Access," in "AP Initiatives," AP Central website section "The Program." http://www.apcentral.collegeboard.com.
5. *A Secondary School Guide to the Advanced Placement Program* (College Entrance Examination Board), 34–35.
6. "The 100 Best High Schools in America," *Newsweek*, 2 June 2003, 48–54.
7. Ibid., 52–53.
8. William Lichten, "Whither Advanced Placement?" *Education Policy Analysis Archives*, volume 8, number 29 (2000). http://epaa.asu.edu/epaa/v8n29.html.
9. Ibid.
10. Statement for this article made September 2003 by Kent Peterman, Director for Academic Affairs, School of Arts and Sciences, University of Pennsylvania.
11. Rick Morgan and Len Ramist, "Advanced Placement Students in College: An Investigation

of Course Grades at 21 Colleges" (Princeton, NJ: Educational Testing Service, February 1998), Report SR-98-13.

12. Barbara G. Dodd, "An Investigation of the Validity of AP Grades of 3 and a Comparison of AP and Non-AP Student Groups" (College Entrance Examination Board, 2002).
13. Quoted from Rebecca Trounson and Richard Lee Colvin, "Rapid Growth of Advanced Placement Classes Raises Concerns," *Los Angeles Times*, 7 April 2002.
14. Statement for this article made October 2003 by Michael Kellman, Professor of Chemistry at the University of Oregon.
15. "Access to Excellence: A Report of the Commission on the Future of the Advanced Placement Program" (College Entrance Examination Board, 2001).
16. "Program Summary Report, 2002," in "Exam Data: 2002," AP Central website section "The Exams," subsection "All About the Exams." http://www.apcentral.collegeboard.com.
17. "School AP Grade Distribution by Total and Ethnic Group," AP Central website: http://www.apcentral.collegeboard.com.
18. "Exam Scoring," AP Central website section "The Exams." http://apcentral.collegeboard.com.
19. Bruce Leslie, "What AP Scores Really Mean," *Chronicle of Higher Education*, 11 August 2000.
20. Ibid.
21. "Access to Excellence," 9.
22. "What are the Characteristics of AP Teachers? An Examination of Survey Research" (New York: College Entrance Examination Board, 2002). College Board Report No.2002-10.

for reasoned scholarship in a free society

The National Association of Scholars (NAS) is an organization of professors, graduate students, college administrators, independent scholars, and trustees committed to rational discourse as the foundation of academic life in a free and democratic society. The NAS works to enrich the substance and strengthen the integrity of scholarship and teaching, persuaded that only through an informed understanding of the Western intellectual heritage and the realities of the contemporary world, can citizen and scholar be equipped to sustain our civilization's achievements. In light of these objectives, the NAS is deeply concerned about the widening currency within the academy of perspectives that reflexively denigrate the values and institutions of our society. Because such tendencies are often dogmatic in character, and indifferent to both logic and evidence, they also tend to undermine the basis for coherent scholarly dialogue. Recognizing the significance of this problem, the NAS encourages a renewed assertiveness among academics who value reason and an open intellectual life.