

EXCELLENCE A Report of the Commission
on the Future of the Advanced Placement Program
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A REPORT OF
THE COMMISSION ON THE FUTURE OF
THE ADVANCED PLACEMENT PROGRAM®

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COMMISSION ON THE FUTURE OF THE ADVANCED PLACEMENT PROGRAM®

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FOREWORD

It has been an honor for us to co-chair the Commission on the Future of the Advanced Placement Program® (AP®). The Commission, composed of distinguished scholars and educators, met six times over 18 months to address the challenges and opportunities facing AP and to make recommendations to guide its growth and development.

The College Board's Advanced Placement Program was founded in 1955 to provide high school students an opportunity to take on the challenges of college-level work while still in high school. For 46 years, students have enrolled in AP courses, taken rigorous end-of-course AP Examinations to demonstrate their achievement, and frequently have received college credit or placement into more advanced college courses if they performed successfully on these exams.

Over the past two decades, AP's emergence as a nationally recognized program of academic excellence has led to its rapid growth in the nation's schools. With growth have come challenges: How can the high quality of AP be maintained during a period of rapid growth? How can the existing educational inequities in student access to high-quality AP opportunities be diminished? In the 1999–2000 school year, only 57 percent of the nation's schools offered AP courses. Growth must include expansion of AP opportunities to those who have previously been denied them. Students should have access to AP no matter which school they attend. To directly confront the challenges that accompany the growth of AP, the Board of Trustees of the College Board established in 1999 the Commission on the Future of the Advanced Placement Program and gave us the following charge:

Looking ahead to a new century, the commission is charged to inquire into all issues relevant to the future health and vitality of the Advanced Placement Program. Broadly considered, the task of the commission is twofold: first, to consider and recommend actions needed to maintain the integrity and quality of Advanced Placement, even as the Program continues to grow, and to expand the role it plays in the improvement of American education; and, second, to consider and recommend actions needed to strengthen the Program in its character as a uniquely successful example of cooperation between schools and colleges.

During six meetings of the commission in 1999 and 2000, the dual challenges of providing equitable access to AP and maintaining the high quality of AP as the Program grows dominated our discussions and became the central themes for our report and its recommendations. We knew that we must frame recommendations that address fundamental equity issues in a way that protected, and even enhanced, quality. With a deep and abiding commitment to the values of equity and quality guiding us, we have developed this report. The commission members have worked with diligence and passion to devise recommendations that we hope will ensure that AP is inextricably linked to both excellence and equity. We are pleased to offer this report of the Commission on the Future of the Advanced Placement Program.

James O. Freedman, Co-chair

Jenny Oren Krugman, Co-chair

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

We would like to express our sincere gratitude to the many dedicated educators at both the high school and the college level whose continuing support of AP is responsible for the Program's success. The commitment and hard work of many high school students, teachers, college faculty, guidance counselors, principals, superintendents, and other education leaders have made AP what it is today. Without the enthusiastic support of thousands of people from across the country, AP would not exist, and students, teachers, schools, and colleges would not enjoy its many benefits. As the College Board moves forward to expand access to AP, we all share the task of ensuring that students in all schools have access to high-quality AP offerings.

We also would like to express our deep appreciation to the College Board for its stewardship of AP. We thank Donald Stewart, the former president of the College Board, for his decision to establish the commission and for his support of its work. In addition, we deeply appreciate the enthusiastic support for the work of the commission that Gaston Caperton has provided since he became president of the College Board.

We have been fortunate to have strong support from many College Board staff members and consultants. In particular, we would like to thank Howard Everson, vice president for Academic Initiatives; Lee Jones, executive director of the AP Program; Paula Kuebler, director of Program Integration, Teaching and Learning; Trevor Packer, associate director, AP Program; Jesann Giakoumis, administrative associate; and Jane Fisher, consultant to the project from Cambridge Concord Associates. Finally, we thank all those individuals at the College Board and in the larger AP community of educators who will be working to ensure that the vision put forth by the commission in this report becomes the reality for AP in the future.

INTRODUCTION

The future of our country depends in large part on the success of our complex and diverse educational systems. Decisions made and directions pursued today will impact generations of students. Educational leaders must, therefore, make the bold choices that will guarantee all students access to high-quality education. Failure to make these choices will exacerbate academic and social inequities. Failure to maintain quality will both reinforce those inequities and lead to dangerous declines in intellectual achievement and economic opportunity.

The College Board's Advanced Placement Program (AP) has earned an enviable position in the world of education. As the premier program for advanced placement and credit by examination, it has emerged as an important lever for promoting high academic standards for America's high school students. In the midst of debates about the quality of American education, AP is regularly cited as a high-quality program that works. The product of a unique collaboration between high school teachers and college faculty, AP is the de facto standard for academic programs that help students make the transition from high school to college.

The Advanced Placement Program was established in 1955 as an academic challenge to a small, elite group of able students. It provided them an opportunity to take on college-level work while in high school, thus making their educational development more continuous. The numbers of students participating in AP increased steadily during AP's first three decades, and as AP grew, its ability to prepare students for the rigors of college work was noted by

In the midst of debates about the quality of American education, AP is regularly cited as a high-quality program that works.

both educators and policymakers. They saw many benefits of AP. Students completing AP courses were better prepared for the rigors of college course work. They also obtained opportunities to accelerate their academic careers by earning college credit or advanced placement based on successful grades on the AP Exams. Teachers were also benefiting from AP. Participation in AP teacher professional development strengthened teachers'

Strong AP programs can upgrade academic standards throughout the school, raising the bar for all students, not only those who are ready for and participating in AP.

content knowledge and pedagogical skills, and they were energized by the opportunity to teach rigorous college-level courses. School administrators also saw that a commitment to AP could have a positive impact on the entire school curriculum. The goal of preparing students for AP classes demanded an increase in rigor in the courses that preceded AP in a student's high school experience. Strong AP programs could upgrade academic standards throughout the school, raising the bar for all students, not only those who were ready for and participating in AP. Spurred by increased recognition of the advantages of AP, the program grew beyond its initial core of private and largely suburban public schools, and the educational community began to realize that students from a diverse array of schools and from different socioeconomic and racial/ethnic backgrounds could benefit from participation in AP and succeed on AP Examinations.

During the 1990s, AP's success fueled a substantially increased demand for AP. Between 1990 and 2000, the number of students taking AP Examinations increased from 330,000 to more than 760,000. The number of examinations taken by these students increased from 490,000 to more than 1,270,000 (see Table 1).

Table 1: Participation in the AP Program, 1960–2000

	1960	1970	1980	1990	2000
Number of students	10,531	55,442	119,918	330,080	768,586
Number of examinations	14,158	71,495	160,214	490,299	1,272,317
Number of schools	890	3,186	4,950	9,292	13,253

In addition, in the 1999–2000 academic year:

- Thirty-two AP courses and exams were offered in about 13,000 high schools.
- Approximately 100,000 teachers taught AP classes in the various AP disciplines.
- More than 56,000 teachers participated at over 300 teacher professional development workshop and summer institute sites.

- 130 high school teachers and college faculty served on AP Development Committees, and nearly 5,000 faculty read and scored the free-response sections of the AP Examinations at the annual AP Readings.
- Approximately 3,000 colleges/universities recognized AP and offered credit and/or advanced placement to students based on their AP Examination grades.

Much of AP's growth has been driven by outside influences. These include policymakers and supporters of education reform who view AP as a way to improve the quality of American education while at the same time providing new opportunities for students. For example, former United States Secretary of Education Richard Riley put forth the goal of offering AP in every school in the nation, with 10 courses in each school by 2010. The federal Advanced Placement Incentive Program provides funding to 41 states to support access to AP for low-income students. Finally, many states have established legislative support for AP, ranging from mandating that AP be offered in every high school, to supporting teacher professional development, to subsidizing AP Examination fees.

AP's growth, while impressive, exposes significant challenges for the future, particularly in the key areas of **equity** and **quality**. For example:

- Forty-three percent of American high schools do not offer AP courses, and many participating schools offer only a few courses.
- Minority participation in AP has grown, but students from urban, rural, and poor areas are still underrepresented.
- Approximately 34 percent of students enrolled in AP courses do not take the AP Examinations.
- The number of teachers qualified to teach AP courses is limited. Without vigorous recruitment and increased in-service training, there will not be enough qualified teachers to meet AP needs, particularly in underserved areas.
- The number of college and university faculty engaged with AP, especially full-time faculty from four-year institutions, is inadequate. Without strong efforts to recruit faculty into the critical work of validation studies, examination development, and reading and scoring examinations, quality will suffer.
- Growth demands greater resources in high schools to support AP instruction because schools will be subjected to increased pressure to administer greater numbers of AP courses and examinations to more students, severely taxing budgets for such resources.
- Growth raises questions for colleges and universities about the consequences of ever-increasing numbers of students who may qualify for college credit or advanced placement. Some institutions are increasingly reluctant to grant large numbers of college credits to incoming AP students and have questioned whether the value of AP Examination grades has been maintained as the AP Program has become larger and more diverse.

The AP Program is a major national and international educational program. It has an opportunity to continue to grow and to be a dominant force in secondary and higher education in the twenty-first century. At the same time, AP functions in a political, social, and economic environment characterized by rapid change and new demands on the quality and accessibility of higher education. The College Board and the educational community must explore the best ways to position AP so that students have access to a high-quality education in every high school. Our commitment to equity and quality must be uncompromising and enduring.

A Commitment to Quality

AP succeeds because the quality of its courses and examinations satisfies the needs of colleges and universities, high schools, and students. The College Board's commitment to AP's quality requires close working relationships between high school and college educators and representatives of the disciplines so that AP courses and examinations will continue to reflect college-level expectations.

To meet these expectations, AP's courses and examinations must stay current with changes in the disciplines and in pedagogy. AP Examinations must be reliable measures of student achievement at the college level. Both AP's courses and examinations have come under increased scrutiny as more and more students reach college with AP courses and AP Examination grades in their portfolio. Some educators question whether the quality of AP course instruction and student preparation is as good as in the past when there were fewer teachers working with a smaller number of prepared and motivated students. The College Board must carefully monitor the impact of growth on quality to ensure that courses and examinations remain valid and reliable.

The College Board cannot maintain quality without the support of AP teachers and the enthusiasm of AP students. We must have sufficient numbers of dedicated, well-trained teachers. AP must also have the support of schools and school districts, guidance counselors, college and university faculty, as well as the support of local, state, and federal governments. A commitment to AP's quality requires a commitment by all.

A Commitment to Equity

More than 800,000 high school students took AP Exams in 2001. That is the largest number of students to participate in AP in any year, but a small number relative to the current population of high school students. Many more students could succeed in AP if they had the opportunity to enroll and had good preparation for AP's challenging course work. We must focus on our commitment to equity, especially in access to AP and in support for AP preparation in schools. All students should have access to AP courses and have the chance to acquire the skills needed to succeed in them.

As AP has grown, the College Board has been able to reach out to diverse groups of students and schools. However, African American, Hispanic, and Native American students, as well as students in poor urban and rural areas are still severely underrepresented in AP.

The College Board’s 1999 report *Reaching the Top* highlights this underrepresentation. The report notes, “When a great many individuals—and entire groups of people—do not have a genuine chance to develop their academic talents fully, our society is much poorer for their lack of educational opportunities.” We must confront this situation by emphasizing AP access for all students, and as with the commitment to quality, a commitment to equity in AP requires a commitment by all—the College Board, schools, colleges, and local, state, and federal governments.

All students should have access to AP courses and have the chance to acquire the skills to succeed in them.

The Equity + Quality Challenge

Broadening equitable access to AP while maintaining and improving the quality of the AP Program can create competing pressures. Intense pressure to provide AP in all schools on a fast track can lead to “parachuting” AP courses into high schools without first constructing the systemic support needed for successful AP programs. Key components of this support are teacher professional development, greater instructional resources, and adequate student preparation so that students come to AP with the knowledge and skills they need to succeed. However, political and legal pressures to rapidly expand access can cause some schools to fail to provide these supports. Alternatively, if a school chooses not to mount an AP program until all building blocks are solidly in place, the denial of access to AP could continue for many years. Pragmatically, maximizing both equity and quality may not be possible in the short term, but in the long term both are essential because there is no true AP equity without AP quality.

Guiding Values

During the early meetings of the AP Commission in 1999, a set of commonly shared ideas and values quickly emerged. These ideas and values guided our subsequent discussions and influenced the development of the conclusions and recommendations that we present here. We believe that these ideas and values, described below, must remain at the heart of AP as it meets its current challenges and prepares to meet the challenges of the future.

- **Offering AP in every school carries with it a commitment to quality and support.** If every school offers AP so that no student who is ready to take on the AP challenge is denied access, then we have a mandate to help ensure that students, teachers, and schools are prepared to succeed.

- **AP teachers are the heart and soul of the AP Program.** AP is an enterprise that relies on a culture of dedication, volunteerism, and altruism among AP teachers. We must provide high-quality service and support to teachers and maintain the involvement and interaction of teachers and college counselors.
- **College and university faculty play critical roles in AP and their continued support and participation must be assured.** The involvement of college and university faculty in developing courses, creating and scoring AP Examinations, and delivering AP teacher professional development assures the higher education community that AP content standards and instruction are at a college level.
- **Continued acceptance by colleges and universities of the validity of the content of AP courses, the validity and reliability of the AP Examinations, and the integrity of the scoring process is critical to AP's success.** We must maintain and unconditionally support high standards for course and examination development and for scoring.
- **AP can enrich teaching and learning in high school in many ways.** The benefits of AP go far beyond granting college credits or shortening the length of the baccalaureate experience. AP provides valuable academic preparation and support for high school students as they prepare for the transition to higher education.
- **Although the rapid expansion of AP to every high school is not within the College Board's control, the College Board will be held responsible for it.** AP is growing rapidly, and the College Board must manage growth while enhancing access and maintaining quality.
- **AP can succeed only as a collaborative program.** The College Board cannot "do it all." Partnerships and collaborations are key to continued success. Potential partners and collaborators include the principal stakeholder organizations (high schools, school districts, colleges, and local, state, and federal agencies) as well as other organizations that prepare students for success in higher education and recognize the value of AP.

Guided by these ideas and values, we reached a series of major conclusions and recommendations to address the future of the Advanced Placement Program. These recommendations identify actions that we believe the College Board and other educational leaders must take to meet the challenge of ensuring that all students have access to the high-quality education represented by AP.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

ACCESS TO AP

Conclusion 1: AP will grow because of a combination of political, educational, and social forces. But without strategies to manage growth, inequities could be exacerbated and quality eroded.

Recommendation 1: Focus on expanding access to AP in underserved schools and for underserved populations, while continuing to maintain AP's high quality.

Our deliberations often focused on the implications of the tremendous growth AP has experienced over the past decade. In looking to the future, we can clearly see that AP will continue to grow, driven by its success and by the desires of policymakers and educational leaders to improve high school and college education.

However, the goal is not simply to cope with growth or to offer more AP courses to AP-ready students. Rather, we contend that the College Board must try to reach students and schools that do not have access to AP. In this way, expansion of AP supports former Secretary of Education Richard Riley's challenge to offer AP in every school.

Working toward this objective requires channeling and managing resources to support it. The College Board should direct growth into underserved areas by advocating access and equal opportunity for all students, regardless of race, socioeconomic status, geography, size of school, or other factors. At the same time, we recognize that two types of access

must be provided: access for students who are prepared for AP but to whom it is not available, and access for students who need preparation to benefit from AP. We believe that to deny the experience of high-quality education to any school or any student is not acceptable.

Recommendation 1a: Advance the expansion of AP in underserved schools.

Schools that do not offer AP are often in urban and rural areas that have limited resources and serve lower socioeconomic groups. Strategies for expanding into these schools must be different from those that have been effective in suburban schools or schools with substantial resources. The College Board first needs to define strategies that contribute to the successful introduction of AP in underserved schools.

For example, the College Board should explore collaborating with community colleges to provide professional development to AP teachers or to offer AP classes taught in high schools by community college instructors. These institutions often have a strong presence in urban and rural areas and provide access to higher education to many disadvantaged and nontraditional students. The College Board should also implement online AP support services to assist AP teachers and their students, and form partnerships with community organizations to provide school-home services, such as tutoring programs to improve students' study skills.

Providing access to AP also means ensuring that students are not tracked away from AP in middle school years before they have had an opportunity to become sufficiently prepared to participate in AP and other advanced courses.

Recommendation 1b: Strengthen the preparation of students in the grades prior to AP, with an emphasis on teacher professional development and the development and implementation of curriculum standards for elementary and middle schools.

As AP is offered by schools in more diverse settings, the need to prepare students to undertake AP courses and examinations will become even more acute. If students in these settings do not achieve success with AP, both the students and the AP Program will be blamed.

The College Board's AP Vertical Teams™ and Building Success programs are Pre-AP® professional development workshops that provide teachers with strategies for preparing students for success in AP. The workshops help teams of teachers understand how to successfully link middle school and high school curricula, giving students good preparation for AP and other rigorous courses. The College Board should greatly expand the use of these programs to enhance the education that students receive prior to AP.

Providing access to AP also entails implementation of policies that ensure that students, including those from underserved minority populations, are not tracked away

from AP in middle school years before they have had an opportunity to become sufficiently prepared to participate in AP and other advanced courses.

We recommend that the College Board play a leadership role in defining standards, not only for elementary and middle school courses but also for measuring progress in preparing students for success in AP or other advanced work. Given the magnitude of the task, the College Board should seek opportunities for collaboration with educators and organizations that focus on elementary and middle school curricula. More support for students and teachers in the years leading up to AP is critical to expanding access to AP.

SUPPORTING TEACHERS AND SCHOOLS

Conclusion 2: Expanding access to high-quality AP experiences will require extraordinary measures to support teachers, schools, and school systems.

Recommendation 2: Provide unconditional support for preparing teachers, schools, and school systems to offer high-quality AP programs —teachers’ needs are paramount.

In 2000, the College Board estimated that over 100,000 teachers were teaching AP classes. More than half of the teachers currently working in AP classrooms report that they will retire by the end of the decade. If the number of students participating in AP grows by another 50 percent during this decade, at least 150,000 AP teachers will be needed to teach AP in 2010, at a time when only 50,000 of the current teachers will still be teaching. Thus, at least 100,000 new AP teachers will be needed between now and the end of the decade.

Reliance on current professional development models will be insufficient to ensure adequate numbers of well-trained AP teachers, and the shortage will be most severe in underserved areas. Simply expanding the numbers of current College Board AP workshops and summer institutes is neither practical nor sufficient to generate the large number of teachers required to support expanded access to AP. Many of these teachers, particularly those who are teaching AP for the first time, will need more extensive training and opportunities for professional development.

If the number of students participating in AP grows by another 50 percent during this decade, at least 150,000 AP teachers will be needed to teach AP in 2010, at a time when only 50,000 of the current teachers will still be teaching.

The College Board, working in cooperation with schools, school systems, colleges and universities, governments, and others, must make an unconditional commitment to teacher professional development. Without this commitment, access to AP will not improve and quality will decline.

Recommendation 2a: Expand and enhance direct support for teachers.

AP teachers need ongoing support. Nowhere is this more important than in schools or districts offering AP for the first time. The College Board should undertake specific actions to address these needs, including:

- Develop and implement a mentoring program for teachers, matching new teachers with master teachers or retired teachers.
- In each state, identify schools to serve as models of successful strategies for preparing teachers and students for AP.
- Evaluate the benefits of new models for professional development, including examining the applicability of the model used in the College Board's Pacesetter® program, and incorporate these benefits into AP teacher professional development.
- Provide demonstrations of “best practice” teaching approaches via video and other media that show outstanding AP teachers at work in their classrooms.

Recommendation 2b: Develop creative partnerships and tools to enhance teacher professional development.

Although the College Board must provide national leadership in AP teacher professional development, the magnitude of the task makes it essential to partner with organizations and institutions so that effective professional development is widely available. AP teacher professional development should be integrated into existing teacher professional development systems (such as pre-service and in-service programs at colleges and universities). We urge the College Board to collaborate with:

- Disciplinary societies, schools of education, teacher organizations, and others engaged in reshaping curricula so that teacher professional development is appropriately designed to support curricular changes.
- Web-based organizations, working with partners who already deliver high-quality teacher professional development online.
- Undergraduate and graduate schools of education, to upgrade pre-service teacher development, emphasizing the development of college and university course offerings that specifically prepare pre-service teachers to teach AP.
- States, to advocate for more robust subject-area academic preparation prior to teacher licensure or teacher recertification.

- Districts successfully using AP in the majority of schools, to create formal teacher-to-teacher mentoring programs for their new AP teachers.
- The U.S. Department of Education, to negotiate upgraded teacher certification, with emphasis on mastery of the AP curriculum in individual subject areas.
- Minority-serving colleges and universities, to build awareness of AP and prepare their students to become AP teachers and their faculty to serve as AP consultants and advisors.

Recommendation 2c: Promote the development of online support for teachers.

Teacher professional development must become the area of greatest emphasis for technological investment and development. Technology can supplement face-to-face workshops and institutes, providing ongoing support to teachers throughout the year.

Technology can also help teachers in underserved rural and small schools. The ultimate goal is not to provide online courses that replace AP teachers, but to provide online support that can empower a teacher who otherwise would not be able to teach AP.

Because of the rapid changes in the online world, the limited number of online AP resources, and the tremendous investment required for expanding these resources, we urge the College Board to nurture strong technology partnerships that can quickly provide effective support to teachers. Specifically, we urge the College Board to promote the development of technology to supplement and enhance teacher professional development in the following ways:

- Support the development of an “AP Central™” destination Web site that will provide online professional development opportunities to AP teachers.
- Develop Web-based resources such as course outlines, teaching guides, curricular materials, and online teacher discussion groups.

Recommendation 2d: Develop comprehensive services to help administrators, principals, and counselors design and implement successful AP programs.

Administrators and counselors need services to help them implement AP in their schools, particularly in areas where AP has been mandated and the schools and districts have little previous experience with AP. We need online administrator workshops and capabilities-and-needs assessment tools that can help schools understand how to best start an AP program or evaluate the effectiveness of an existing program. Because guidance counselors can play a key role in assuring access to AP, the College Board should develop and enhance programs to build their awareness, understanding, and support for AP.

MAINTAINING A STRONG CURRICULUM

Conclusion 3: Due to the growing presence of AP in high schools, the content of AP courses has a significant influence on the structure and content of high school and college curricula.

Recommendation 3: Engage leaders in the disciplines, pedagogy, and research to ensure that current reforms and best practices are reflected in AP.

Since the inception of AP in 1955, courses and the examinations that assess student achievement in those courses have faithfully mirrored the coverage of the most typical college-level introductory courses. The traditional strategy for determining the content and skills to be covered in an AP course and on the AP Exams has been to survey the course outlines of introductory courses from a range of colleges and universities. The information from these surveys is synthesized and the faculty who serve on AP's subject-specific development committees construct an AP course description that best represents the consensus view of the college-level introductory course.

The College Board has the opportunity and the obligation to be an advocate for curricular excellence at both the school and college levels. It can ensure that AP can leverage positive curricular change in high schools and in colleges and universities.

However, this strategy for determining AP course content has meant that until curricular changes have become common in introductory college courses, these changes are not reflected in AP. Thus, some disciplinary leaders have contended that AP can be in a position to slow, or even impede, the implementation of desirable curricular reforms, especially since AP's influence on high school curricula has strengthened as participation in AP has grown.

During the 1990s, several AP development committees, most notably in Calculus, Statistics, Computer Science, and World History, have used broader, more forward-looking strategies for revising or developing AP course descriptions and AP Examination specifications. We believe that such strategies must be replicated whenever AP course descriptions are reviewed and revised. Leaders in the disciplines, pedagogy, and research must all play a role in order to create the highest quality curriculum possible. The College Board must be an integral part of this leadership group (as it was in the recent reform of the AP Calculus course and examination). It must engage leaders throughout education and build on the College Board's unique role as a link between high school and college educators. Without such a strategy, AP will lag behind curricular change.

The College Board has the opportunity and the obligation to be an advocate for curricular excellence at both the school and college levels. Its role in a leadership group will guarantee

that the AP portfolio remains valid and appropriate in the future and can ensure that AP will help leverage positive curricular change in high schools and in colleges and universities.

Recommendation 3a: Convene educational leaders and facilitate dialogue and research about curriculum among the high school and college faculty who are leaders in the disciplines.

Because the College Board occupies a unique position at the transition between high school and college, it has credibility in both constituencies. It is in a strong position to foster constructive dialogue within and across the disciplines. Historically, this is a role that the College Board has played, and the regular review and revision of AP course descriptions provide prime opportunities for discussion of desired reforms to college introductory-level curricula.

The Commission endorses periodic College Board–sponsored subject area and cross-disciplinary conferences to bring together leaders from the disciplines as well as other high school teachers and college faculty involved with AP. The conferences can serve both to review changes in the disciplines and to ensure the validity of AP’s course descriptions and the validity and reliability of its examinations in the context of current thinking. The College Board’s sponsorship would position AP as a catalyst for curricular improvement and constructive dialogue.

We recommend that the College Board aggressively recruit and involve even more college faculty in all aspects of AP.

With these conferences, the College Board can help redefine how education looks at disciplines. For example, in some cases, the division between disciplines has virtually disappeared, but the curriculum remains divided into compartments. While acknowledging that each discipline represents something unique, scholars and educators are focusing considerable attention on the interrelationships among disciplines and how disciplines reinforce each other. AP must be a part of these discussions.

Educators are faced with enormous curriculum challenges such as addressing the relationships among disciplines; moving toward an educational experience in which history, social sciences, the arts, and humanities are all interrelated; and redefining the sequence of teaching the sciences. College Board leadership is needed to assess these philosophical and pedagogical questions.

Recommendation 3b: Expand the involvement of higher education faculty in AP, particularly full-time faculty from four-year institutions.

Much of AP’s credibility comes from the direct leadership roles that college and university faculty play in developing AP courses and examinations, scoring students’ examinations, and determining policies at their institutions for granting credit and/or advanced

placement to AP students. Without continued and increased involvement of college faculty from leading institutions, AP's credibility will suffer and the validity of AP courses and exams may be questioned. We recommend that the College Board aggressively recruit and involve even more college faculty in all aspects of AP.

Continued college acceptance of AP for credit and/or advanced placement is important as participation in AP grows, but good information about AP among college faculty is surprisingly limited. We need greater efforts to ensure that more faculty have a clear understanding of and appreciation for AP.

Recommendation 3c: Ensure AP's continued relevance by ongoing evaluation of the composition of the AP portfolio.

The AP portfolio of courses and examinations has become a major component of many high schools' curricula. Representatives of some disciplines for which there are no courses and examinations in the portfolio have proposed that the College Board create AP courses and examinations in those disciplines to help sustain the discipline's legitimacy in the high school curriculum. When asked to consider the development of a new course for the AP portfolio, the College Board must evaluate the potential course in the context of its overall contribution to educational quality and equity.

Additions or changes to the AP portfolio represent significant investments. We believe that adding new AP courses and exams should be subordinate to expanding access to existing courses at this time. This does not mean, however, that the portfolio should remain static. For example, some courses, such as those in the arts, may be of special interest to some groups of underserved students; thus there may be cases where adding a new discipline might improve access to AP.

The College Board should be at the forefront of discussions about interactions among the disciplines (in effect, about how scholarly subjects are defined). Defining subjects differently might allow more material to be covered by fewer AP courses, but the College Board must carefully assess the implications of new cross-disciplinary courses for access, teacher professional development, examination development, and use by colleges for credit and/or advanced placement. We recommend that the College Board continuously monitor the AP portfolio to be certain that it represents current thinking on the disciplines and pedagogy, and that it is appropriately structured to support access, quality, and equity.

Recommendation 3d: Maintain the content validity and integrity of AP courses and examinations.

Examinations are at the heart of AP, serving as the external, objective standard of success and so providing colleges and universities with valid measures of accomplishment. As curricula change and educational reforms continue, the examinations give the College Board the means to exercise quality control over what is called an AP course. We must

ensure the continuing reliability of the examinations by reviewing the mission, composition, and function of the development committees that oversee AP course definition and examination development. Leaders in the disciplines who can bring both breadth and depth to the discussions must be represented on the committees and college faculty must continue to play a central role.

AP QUALITY STANDARDS

Conclusion 4: The growth of participation in AP understandably exposes the Program to closer scrutiny. AP must continuously and rigorously assess and prove its quality and validity, especially as increasing numbers of students enroll in college seeking credit and/or placement based on their AP grades.

Recommendation 4: Develop and disseminate AP quality standards and accelerate rigorous research efforts to validate AP.

To assess and prove quality and validity, the College Board must set standards for AP. This includes high standards for course delivery and for teacher professional development to ensure that the prestigious AP name does not lose its value as participation in AP grows. The College Board must also provide up-to-date, rigorous, high-quality research on AP and its impact on students, schools, and teachers. AP's credibility cannot be maintained without hard evidence that supports its value, benefits, and uses.

Recommendation 4a: Significantly expand and enhance research on the quality and validity of AP.

Because increasing numbers of students are entering college with AP experience, we need extensive and ongoing research to support the validity of the uses of AP by students in college. We need research on the long-term effects of the granting of credit by colleges for AP work. Is a student better educated if she or he takes AP? What hard evidence supports the assumption that the student who takes AP goes on to take a more advanced course of study? As AP becomes a bigger part of American education, its impact on the educational experience will be challenged. We need to know much more about how AP enhances the college experience.

In addition, other research is essential to support our recommendations. For example, we need research to document successful models for establishing AP programs in urban and rural schools, to investigate the impact of barriers to access to AP, to evaluate the performance of state-funded AP support programs, and to determine the efficacy of new models of teacher professional development.

The commission commends the College Board for recent increases in support for AP research. In addition, we urge that both the breadth and depth of AP research be further expanded, working in partnership with major universities and research centers. Without an up-to-date, credible body of research, AP will be subjected to increasing criticism. We need significantly more data to create a body of evidence that demonstrates the validity, reliability, and legitimate uses of AP.

Recommendation 4b: Develop and implement standards for AP programs in schools and school systems, for AP teachers, and for AP teacher professional development workshops and institutes.

- *Standards and guidelines to help schools understand what is required to initiate a successful new AP program or strengthen an existing program.*

The College Board should encourage schools to recognize the importance of the AP Examinations in validating student performance and support their use by encouraging all or most students in AP classes to take the AP Exam.

Rather than developing standards and requiring schools to meet them in order to offer AP (a restrictive approach), we favor providing schools clear guidance on what is expected if a school is to offer a high-quality AP program that promotes equitable access to AP within the school. The College Board should develop a self-assessment tool for schools, addressing such topics as what constitutes an AP-level course; high-quality teacher professional development; appropriate roles for AP coordinators, teachers, counselors, administrators, and other staff; student preparation for AP; strategies for ensuring equity in access to AP; and expectations about participation in the AP Examinations. We urge schools to recognize that without the AP Examinations, AP risks losing validity. The College Board should encourage schools to recognize the importance of the AP Examinations in validating student performance and support their use by encouraging all or most

students in AP classes to take the AP Exam.

The College Board also should identify within each state schools that meet criteria for providing high-quality AP programs so that they may serve as models for others, acting as resources to schools planning to begin or expand AP programs.

We believe that as AP grows, it must maintain the balance between providing standards and guidelines and requiring adherence to them while still leaving decision-making authority in the hands of district leaders, principals, department heads, and others who are actively involved with implementation of AP in schools.

- *Standards for AP workshop consultants and summer institute faculty.*

Recognizing the need for consistency and high quality across College Board–sponsored AP teacher professional development, we heartily endorse the College Board’s recent development and implementation of quality standards for AP workshop consultants

and AP Summer Institutes. The commission expresses the strong view that anyone who is representing the College Board in a sponsored event such as a workshop or institute should meet these standards.

- *Standards to define the desired preparation and qualifications of AP teachers.*

As AP grows, and pressures to identify new AP teachers increase, the College Board should set clear standards to define the desired preparation and qualifications of AP teachers and should recognize teachers who meet these standards. Experienced master teachers also could be certified to serve as resources to mentor other teachers and to help new schools develop AP programs.

Recommendation 4c: Set standards for third-party online AP services and provide evaluations of online services to assist schools in understanding the quality and utility of these services.

Advances in technology now make it possible for colleges, universities, technology companies, and other organizations to create online AP courses and other AP online support services. Although the impact of such services on AP has been modest to date, they have tremendous potential to assist in expanding access to AP. Because of this potential, and given the intensive efforts by numerous third parties to develop online AP courses, AP teacher professional development services, and online AP Exam review services, we recommend that the College Board set quality standards for these services and take an active role in evaluating the quality and utility of online offerings related to AP. In particular, these standards must address strategies for accomplishing AP course components that are not easily replicable online, such as laboratory work in the sciences.

APPROPRIATE USES OF AP

Conclusion 5: The growth of AP has led to its use for some purposes beyond those for which it was originally intended. While some of these uses may have a positive impact on education, others may in fact conflict with the Program's principles.

Recommendation 5: Provide explicit guidelines and information about the appropriate use of AP and AP Examination results.

Participation in AP creates many benefits: increasing students' abilities to cope with college-level work, improving students' writing and communication skills, providing teachers with professional development, and raising standards in schools. Recognizing these benefits has multiplied uses of the Program beyond its original primary purpose of

granting college credit or advanced placement for AP work and accelerating the pace of a students' collegiate study.

Although the College Board cannot explicitly control the ways in which AP is used, it can and must provide guidance about appropriate and inappropriate uses of AP Examination results. The absence of such statements can be interpreted as condoning inappropriate uses. AP is dynamic, and it is inevitable that its uses will evolve over time. But if these uses are in conflict with its principles, the College Board has an obligation to speak out and provide direction on appropriate uses of AP.

Recommendation 5a: Develop and disseminate clear guidelines about the appropriate uses of AP to its many constituencies, and to other interested parties.

AP has many constituencies—high schools, school districts, colleges, teachers, counselors, faculty, students, parents, legislators, regulators, policymakers, and the media—and the College Board must tailor and disseminate communications about appropriate uses of AP to each group.

Of greatest concern is the misuse of AP Examination results, particularly the inferences that are sometimes made from AP grades. Grades may in fact be used in ways that punish students, teachers, and schools. Students may be denied the opportunity to take an AP Exam because of concern about the likelihood of low grades.

Some additional areas of concern include:

- Using Pre-AP to track or limit access to challenging course work for some students.
- Using AP in college admission and selection. AP Examination grades may be given undue weight in admission decisions, contributing to inequities in admission, especially as not all students have access to AP at their schools.
- Using AP as a teacher and school accountability measure, without appropriate supports or controls.
- Assigning all the “best” teachers to AP, leaving less-qualified teachers for the other students.
- Rushing to install AP courses in schools that have not prepared students and teachers for the rigor of the program.

We recommend that the College Board take clear policy positions on these uses of AP and prepare and disseminate these positions to a wide range of constituent groups.

Recommendation 5b: Discourage any uses of AP that limit access, and support schools in the use of AP to enhance equity.

The College Board's commitment to equity requires that the organization take a strong position on the need for open access at all levels of courses leading up to and including AP. At the same time, the College Board needs to provide tools and guidance to schools

on how to achieve a balance between full access and the need to make sure that students are prepared for AP. This approach should include workshops and seminars for guidance counselors and school administrators that describe proven strategies for improving access to AP.

Recommendation 5c: Clarify the implications of using AP in college admission and provide guidance to colleges and universities on appropriate use.

Many colleges use evidence of AP participation, regardless of whether a student takes the examination, as a component of admission decisions. There is some support for this practice, such as the findings conveyed in *Answers in the Tool Box*, the recent U.S. Department of Education study. It reports that one of the strongest predictors of college success is participation in rigorous and challenging high school courses such as AP, regardless of the grade received in the course. AP participation can thus be an important source of information for admission decisions, although it should certainly not be the primary or exclusive source. AP Examination grades provide strong validation of the rigor of a student's AP experience, as course quality can and does vary from school to school.

The extent to which colleges and universities use AP as an admission criterion creates a tremendous responsibility to promote equitable access to AP.

The extent to which colleges and universities use AP as an admission criterion creates a tremendous responsibility to promote equitable access to AP. While accepting that AP may provide valuable input for admission decisions, the College Board should clearly state that it will not endorse the use of AP as a primary criterion in admission as long as all students do not have access to AP.

Recommendation 5d: Clarify the implications of using AP as a measure of performance and accountability for schools, districts, and teachers, and provide guidance to schools and school systems on appropriate use.

AP results can provide guidance to systems and schools about areas of weakness and opportunities for improvement, and these uses should be encouraged. The College Board should develop specific guidelines regarding practices that should be in place if a school or district wants to use the program for accountability. We also recommend that the College Board review its current grade reporting practices to ensure that current metrics and reports do not foster inappropriate interpretations and uses.

SUMMARY

The Commission on the Future of the Advanced Placement Program was charged with “inquiring into all issues relevant to the future health and vitality of the Advanced Placement Program.” As we did so, we gained new appreciation for the breadth and depth of AP’s impact on the education of today’s students and its potential for advancing critical educational and social goals. We believe that American education and society will benefit from the recommendations of this report:

- 1. Focus on expanding access to AP in underserved schools and for underserved populations, while continuing to maintain AP’s high quality.**
- 2. Provide unconditional support for preparing teachers, schools, and school systems to offer high-quality AP programs—teachers’ needs are paramount.**
- 3. Engage leaders in the disciplines, pedagogy, and research to ensure that current reforms and best practices are reflected in AP.**
- 4. Develop and disseminate AP quality standards and accelerate rigorous research efforts to validate AP.**
- 5. Provide explicit guidelines and information about the appropriate use of AP and AP Examination results.**

The challenges that AP faces during the current period of unprecedented growth are daunting. These challenges can be met through unified effort on the part of all stakeholders: the College Board, students, teachers, schools, colleges and universities and their faculties, and local, state, and federal governments. Implementing the

recommendations in this report will require a sustained collaborative effort. We urge the College Board and leaders from across the educational spectrum to vigorously support this critically important work so that all students may have equitable access to high-quality programs of advanced study.

