Four Decades of the Advanced Placement Program

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"The college work was too easy. So I drank, and wasted time, and ran down to New York. I didn’t have to work so I didn’t. My grades were excellent and if I had bothered to work they would have been better.... I disliked all the courses, knew none of the professors, and didn’t care to. It was a game. I was seeing how little work I could do and still keep good grades, and how much I could drink in the weeks before exam period.... In the second half of my sophomore year, I got an inspiring tutor and took four fine courses. I started working for the first time in 18 months. I also stopped drinking. Even now with the objectivity of two more years I am seriously convinced that I was magnificently prepared at school and that my first 3 terms at college were a total loss."

The student was one of fifty-eight graduates of Andover, Exeter and Lawrenceville who responded to a questionnaire sent to seniors at Harvard, Princeton and Yale in the fall of 1951. These recollections and similar memories among other students played an important role in the birth of advanced placement a few years later.

In one sense, the United States has always had advanced placement. Even before 1776, a young immigrant to New York, Alexander Hamilton, walked into King’s College and demanded that he be allowed to complete his undergraduate studies in one year. For over a century, things changed little. Throughout the 1800s college students moved at their own pace,
behind in some subjects and advanced in others. In the early twentieth century, secondary education was democratized and individual placement in colleges nearly disappeared. At the same time, the gap between secondary and higher education broadened. It was not a problem that many in the United States chose to address.

The Cold War and outbreak of the Korean War in June 1950 changed all that, convincing many that the upgrading of American education was a matter of survival in a death struggle with communism. We needed engineers and scientists and people of talent in all areas if America was to see another century. Top professionals increasingly needed graduate work and graduate schools needed strong college graduates. If our high schools weren’t producing students of talent, America might rot at the core. And if our best high schools and colleges were teaching overlapping material that would be better taught quickly, then somehow we had to speed up the process.

In 1951 the Ford Foundation responded to the crisis by creating the Fund for the Advancement of Education (FAE). One of the Fund’s early initiatives, called “preinduction scholarships,” sent talented high school sophomores to the University of Chicago, Columbia, Wisconsin or Yale to ensure them two years of college before they turned eighteen and became eligible for the draft. School superintendents and high school principals were unhappy with the Fund’s initiative. Losing their most promising students was not seen as a patriotic duty. Indeed, the executive secretary of the National Association of Secondary School Principals called the preinduction scholarships “a bomb dropped on secondary education.” The metaphor was not lost on the Fund for the Advancement of Education, which soon shifted its support to other projects. A May 1951 letter from John Kemper, Headmaster of Andover, to FAE President Clarence Faust suggested a change in direction: moving students ahead in college after they had been admitted. Kemper wrote:

It appears obvious that school and college programs, especially during the important years from the 11th through the 14th grade, have not been planned as coherent wholes. Boys from the best independent schools often report that their early courses in college are repetitious and dull. We are much concerned that some of our best boys seem to lose interest in their work during their first and second years of college. It looks as though the country might no longer be able to afford the waste involved in the transition from school to college, especially for gifted and well-trained boys.

The subsequent report recognized that as schools which trained young men, they had used gendered language, but that “our concern is with basic principles of education which have relevance for both sexes.”
The Fund bought into the project and—led by Alan R. Blackmer, an English teacher at Andover—administrators, professors and teachers from Harvard, Princeton, Yale, Andover, Exeter, and Lawrenceville met in October 1951 to devise a plan for its implementation. Their final committee report, *General Education in School and College: A Committee Report by Members of the Faculties of Andover, Exeter, Lawrenceville, Harvard, Princeton and Yale*, published by Harvard University Press in 1952, is a key document for understanding the birth of advanced placement. Indeed, the term “advanced placement” first appeared on page 118 of that report. Not surprisingly, given the elite character of the institutions involved, the introduction, while professing a moderate objective, carried a superior tone:

There is no intent in what follows to call for reform of the whole educational system for the sake of a relatively small group of students. We are well aware that there are many secondary schools and colleges to whom the principles and recommendations of the report will seem visionary and utterly unrelated to local realities.  

*General Education in School and College* was, in fact, unashamedly elitist throughout. One key passage was brutally frank, in stating: “while we have tried to outline a program of study which would offer all students of college caliber a better education, *we have been particularly concerned about the superior students* [emphasis in original]. This concern is partly the result of our belief that standards can be pulled up from the top more easily than they can be pushed up from the bottom.” In fleshing out their argument, the authors looked closely at the courses the independent school students were taking in college. Of 344 students whose records were examined, 209 took physics, chemistry or biology in college; almost half had taken the beginners’ course as college freshmen, which largely duplicated what they had taken in high school. The conclusion of the report pulled no punches. It recommended that schools encourage more independent study for their brightest seniors, and it advanced a seven-year program and a specific outline for advanced placement. The report noted that with the possibility of Universal Military Training, acceleration might be of particular import. The authors further recommended “a set of achievement examinations…which would enable the colleges supporting these examinations to give an entering student advanced placement in a subject like, let us say, chemistry; or credit for the prerequisite to majoring in history…”  

**The First Decade**

By the time that *General Education in School and College* was published, a parallel project, also supported by the Fund for the Advance-
ment of Education, was well underway. Led by Gordon Keith Chalmers, President of Kenyon College, it attacked the same problem from a different direction, focusing on the establishment of descriptions of college freshman-level courses that college faculty would accept even if taught in high schools. There is some disagreement about dates of these early activities, as described, respectively, by William H. Kornog, the first executive director of the School and College Study of Admission with Advanced Standing (SACSAAS), and David A. Dudley, Director of the Advanced Placement Program in 1957-1958. This much is clear, however. In late 1950 or 1951, President Chalmers and the Kenyon faculty initiated discussions about the optimum length of the undergraduate experience and requirements for graduation. In 1951, presidents and/or deans from eleven colleges met in Washington, DC, to explore the Kenyon ideas further (Bowdoin, Brown, Carleton, Haverford, Kenyon, M.I.T., Middlebury, Swarthmore, Wabash, Wesleyan, and Williams). By the spring of 1952, a twelfth college (Oberlin) joined the group. These college administrators invited twelve headmasters, principals and superintendents to a planning session in early 1952. Among the principles on which all agreed were

...that admission to college with advanced standing at the normal college-entering age after high school graduation is more desirable, for many reasons, than acceleration of able students out of high school at age 15½ or 16 and that the advancement of American education demands the strengthening of secondary schools, especially in those divisions in which the ablest students are enrolled, and that colleges can and should give a vote of confidence and encouragement to secondary schools that try to establish and maintain high standards of academic achievement.

Seven schools introduced pilot advanced courses immediately, and ten more signed on by September 1953. Later, another ten “pioneer schools” were added. How and why did these schools get involved? Looking back after forty years, Ray Stephens, a mathematics teacher and from 1956 to 1989 coordinator of Advanced Placement at Newton High School, remembers clearly that there was no decision at all. “When word came out through Harvard College, the thing had a momentum of its own,” he explains. “Parents wanted it and the faculty wanted it.”

While each pilot school’s experience in the initial years of advanced placement was different, there were common approaches and common problems. In every school the plan had to be introduced, course offerings determined (often accomplished by expanding pre-existing honors classes), students selected, faculties involved. In some schools, invitations were sent to parents and students to describe the program. In others, faculty
representatives, parents and students participated in joint meetings. Some schools sent out general invitations to all students; others called only a select few. Where honors classes did not exist and in some cases where they did, student selection was made by department heads or based on data such as I.Q. scores. Often the lists were submitted to guidance counselors for their scrutiny. Faculty response to advanced placement was mixed. Some teachers were delighted with the idea from the outset, while others—especially in schools in which classes were large—saw AP as just another burden to be avoided, if possible.  

In the last two weeks of May 1954, the first common AP examinations were administered. Only candidates from the original twenty-seven schools were permitted to take the examination. The Educational Testing Service (ETS) was contracted by SACSAAS to administer exams in the experimental schools and, in a blind test, to compare the high school students’ test results with those of freshmen in the twelve colleges participating in the program. The Final Report of College Admission with Advanced Standing, issued by SACSAAS, made clear that the high school students had acquitted themselves very well. The report gave a green light to press on, and test leaders were selected for ten disciplines: Biology, Chemistry, English Composition, French, German, Latin, Literature, Mathematics, Physics, and Spanish.  

Among the test committee chairmen of the first nationally administered examinations in 1956 was American history professor Charles R. Keller of Williams College. A year earlier he had led a “revolt” against the national exams in which historians had argued that high schools should certify the excellence of their students and their college peers should accept that accreditation on faith. Within a year, Keller was to become one of the leading missionaries for AP. As he said, “I thought things over, decided that since, no matter what, there was going to be a history examination, I might just as well be on hand to help work it out.”  

Thomas Mendenhall of Yale University was appointed Chairman of the European History Test Committee.  

The College Board, which assumed leadership of Advanced Placement following the final meeting of SACSAAS in the summer of 1995, retained ETS to design and grade the examinations, and settled a number of issues related to their first administration. No test could take more than three hours—a commandment not broken until forty years later. The fee was set at $10 per examination. Before the tests were given in May 1956, however, this policy was changed and students were allowed to take any number of tests for their $10 fee.  

Each of the student exams came to ETS with a “school report” attached, in which the AP teacher provided a description of his or her course and some commentary about the indi-
vidual student. While the syllabus provided by the schools was of some interest to the colleges, little stock was placed in the teacher's personal commentary.\textsuperscript{20} On the surface, at least, there was consistency from discipline to discipline in the grading of these questions. From the beginning, a scale of 5 (High Honors) to 1 (Fail) was employed. The chief reader in Literature had this comment about a score of 2: "The readers were unanimously of the opinion that on this single piece of evidence, the candidate would perhaps pass the first collegiate year of English with a D or conceivably, a low C; that he clearly does not exhibit any evidence of superiority and should not be recommended for advanced placement or credit."\textsuperscript{21} A closer look at the results of the May 1955 examinations, however, reveals some startling differences in score distributions among the disciplines. In the German Listening Comprehension examination, there were fourteen 5's, two 4's, two 3's, one 2, and one 1. In the Literature examination, there were twenty-three 5's, twenty-eight 4's, eighty-six 3's, one hundred nineteen 2's, and fifty-nine 1's. English Composition, by way of contrast, was a killer: of 337 students who took the Composition exam, there were no 5's and only three 4's; there were thirty-two 3's, one hundred twenty-one 2's, and one hundred eighty-one 1's.\textsuperscript{22}

Perhaps some of the unevenness in that first year's scoring can be tied to the "cottage style" approach that was taken to the reading. Separated into different sites, the readers of each examination developed their own culture. English Composition, for example, was graded on the Maine coast. William H. Brown of Andover wrote of those heady early days: "The reading was supposed to be held in Bowdoin.... [But] Bowdoin was hot and stuffy; we therefore moved the first day to some cabins out on Harpswell overlooking Mackerel Cove which were opening for the season but were not yet occupied." Harold Martin, Chief Reader of English Composition, recalled: "We had sobriety, wit and abandon, we had learning and levity, earnestness and ease, cocksureness and civility. The only things we lacked, some have averred, was humility." Other early reading sites included Harvard (German), Williams (Mathematics), and Brown (French).\textsuperscript{23}

In September 1955, Charles R. Keller became the first director of the Advanced Placement Program for the College Board. ETS ran the readings. The first ETS Program Director for Advanced Placement was John R. Valley, who served in that position for a decade. The one-to-five reporting scale continued under his leadership, but upon taking over in 1956, he found that the ways in which examination scores were determined in the different subject areas were wildly idiosyncratic. Some essays were being scored on a three-point scale, others on a hundred-
point scale. Top scores reached 3,000. Valley developed a fifteen-point scale which was frequently used, although one-to-nine and one-to-four scales were employed in some disciplines. (A year later, all but Latin had adopted the fifteen-point scale.) In American history, each exam was read three times to reach the fifteen-point score. The first time through, the reader could award up to five points for factual thoroughness and accuracy, the second time up to five points for the student’s interpretation, and the final run-through up to five points for presentation. Soon the three different scores were lumped into one holistic score.

The year 1956 marked the beginning of a geographic scavenger hunt by Advanced Placement: the search for the perfect reading site. The rapid growth in the program made each location at least partially obsolete as soon as the kinks were worked out. The 1956 reading site was Westminster Choir College in Princeton. In 1957, it shifted to Douglass College in New Brunswick, New Jersey—where it remained for 1958. In 1959, the caravan moved to the Pennington School in New Jersey, and then in 1960 to Rider College, where the reading remained for over two decades. These early years also saw the introduction of data processing by machine in 1958 and, in English, the appearance of the first Table Leaders (leading groups of readers) in the same year. Also, in the late 1950s, college students were selected by professors in consultation with ETS to take the examinations along with high school students as a validity test of the AP exams.

Reading and scoring of the examinations represented only part of the process; test scores had to be reported to the colleges, which then had to decide whether to reject a candidate’s work or to accept the test results for credit, advanced placement, or some combination of the two. The first crop of students to take AP exams in 1954 went to eighty-two colleges. The challenge was to persuade these colleges and hundreds of others in the United States to accept the program. In this effort there were missionaries aplenty. Among the most passionate was AP Director Keller. Twenty-five years later, he reflected on the obstacles he had faced, noting that “College people were reluctant to believe that school teachers could do something as well as—or almost as well as—they could.” Still, armed with the course descriptions and the fact that three-quarters of the examinations would be in essay form which the colleges could evaluate for themselves, he enjoyed some initial successes. (In these early years of the program, ETS automatically sent the already-scored examinations of the students to the colleges at which they planned to study.) The responses of colleges were generally positive, but in 1954, when the exam grades were forwarded to the colleges of the students who had taken the AP exams as high school seniors, “students who entered the 12 participating colleges
generally had a better chance of being considered for advanced standing than did those who attended other colleges." Another strategy that was designed to sell the AP program to the college audience—as well as to interested secondary schools—was a series of conferences first held in the summer of 1955. One such conference in English Composition and Literature was held in late July at Bowdoin College. At the time, these conferences represented the only venue in which schools and colleges met to discuss common educational concerns.

The best selling point for AP was probably the college performance of former AP students. In the first group to attend college in the fall of 1954, thirty-two percent finished in the top one-sixth of their class at the end of their freshman year, sixty-five percent were in the middle two-thirds, and only three percent were in the bottom one-sixth. To make sure that colleges received such information, the College Board created a special committee on advanced placement. In the 1957-1958 school year committee members included: Harold B. Whiteman, Jr., Dean of Freshmen at Yale University; Robert H. Pitt II, Dean of Admissions at the University of Pennsylvania; Helen W. Randall, Dean of the College at Smith College; Clara Ludwig, Director of Admissions at Mount Holyoke College; John P. Netherton, Dean of Students at the University of Chicago; and Rixford K. Snyder, Director of Admissions at Stanford University.

The Final Report of the June 1955 Evaluating Conference of the School and College Study looked ahead with optimism, but offered suggestions for improvement. In the introduction to the report, Gordon Chalmers advanced four propositions:

1. College and university faculties, in considering whether to join the program, should observe that it offers a positive way for higher education to help schools to improve and strengthen their work. While students and teachers in the study so far have been only slightly interested in college credit and almost exclusively interested in enrichment and a faster pace of study, it is important for colleges definitely to offer credit, for experience in the study shows that it is this public promise to consider successful candidates for college credit which has moved school boards and school trustees to appropriate the necessary funds to make possible the organization of the new courses at school.

2. Continuing study and revision of the syllabi and examinations will be necessary both to improve and to keep up to date the descriptions of acceptable college freshman-level work in the several subjects, and to this end, not merely the committees of examiners in each subject, but college correspondents in each should be engaged in a kind of running discussion and review.

3. To establish and improve the college freshman-level courses at school, extensive interchange between college and school instructors will
continue to be necessary. Summer sessions and visitations to schools and colleges should continue as a chief source of common understanding between school and college instructors of what the reasonable standard, purpose, and scope of the new courses should be.

4. If the program continues to grow at its present rate, the colleges will be obliged to study anew the proper pace of an able student in college, for they will be concerned not only with the conventional candidate for honors, but with an increasing number of undergraduates who have entered college with a head start.31

Efforts to expand the young AP program met with some opposition, of course. Some college professors expressed concern that advanced high school courses would equate to only a fraction of a college course and would leave a sort of “academic gaposis.” As one college official explained, “It is doubtful that anyone at the College is convinced that this is a step in the right direction; they would rather see stronger prep courses for those that can take them rather than encroachment on college work by high schools.”32 In these early years, too, many colleges demanded a higher level of performance from their advanced placement applicants than they did of their own first-year students. For instance, a number of colleges awarded “contingent credit” to AP students who earned a score of 3. If they received a grade of B or better in an advanced course in the same field, the credit was theirs; if they received less than a B, they were out of luck.33 Sometimes treatment was even worse. Edward T. Wilcox, AP director at Harvard in the early years of the program, later recounted horror stories about some Harvard professors who began their upper-level classes by identifying the advanced placement students and then tossing them out, to the amusement of the non-AP students who remained. A more subtle version of the same message was passed on by some advisors who—on having an AP student do poorly in an upper-level course—cursed the program that sent innocent children to their academic death.34 The decision whether to award college credit or placement was not unimportant, but for many students the issue never came up. Content with the enrichment that the AP courses had provided, many never applied for either AP credit or advancement in college. From Williams College, for example, Director of Admissions Fred Copeland “was glad to report that at Williams as elsewhere there had been little demand for acceleration.”35

A review of College Board reports during the first decade of the Advanced Placement program suggests that financial problems could well have led to its early demise. From the start, the Fund for the Advancement of Education paid the bill. Even after the College Board took over the administration of AP, the Fund helped out with grants of
$25,000 and $50,000 in 1955 and 1956, respectively. Nonetheless, the program remained in the red and by 1958 had run up an annual deficit of $150,000. Clearly, something had to be done. One immediate action was to raise the examination fees to $8 per exam, with an additional $5 registration fee. Another was to combine the Composition and English Literature examinations into one, thus saving the costs of designing and grading two exams. At least through the early sixties, recalled Paul Holbo, Chief Reader in American History from 1968 to 1971 and two-time chair of the test development committee, there was talk about ending AP because of the financial drain it caused for the College Board. Within a few years, however, the financial problems which had threatened to sink AP had vanished, as growing numbers of students took and paid for the examinations. Soon the program was a source of monies for other College Board enterprises.

Some creative efforts in the early years, though interesting, were unsuccessful. One such was a 1963 attempt, supported by the Fund for the Advancement of Education and the New York State Education Department, to present AP courses in intensive format on television in the New York City area. A calculus course taught by Frank Crippen of Fordham University ran Monday through Friday in one-and-one-half hour lessons from July 1 to August 22. James P. Shenton of Columbia University taught a televised American history class in two-hour lectures. The total estimated participation in the two courses was 1,000 students. On August 23, 1963, 149 students took the calculus examination and 132 took the history exam for these televised courses. The grades they earned, however, were lower on average than those earned on similar examinations taken in the previous May by full-year AP students. Despite reports that “most observers agreed that the television experiment was successful,” after a detailed evaluation by ETS, the Fund for the Advancement of Education decided not to renew its grant for the innovative courses.

Other aspects of the AP process also underwent revision at this time. The practice of granting contingent credit whereby a student had to earn a B in an advanced course in order to receive ex-post facto AP credit began to disappear in the early sixties. At the same time, ETS ceased its practice of automatically forwarding all of the free-response questions to the colleges. The original designers of AP had called for a profile of a student’s “intellectual curiosity, initiative and motivation, and social maturity and emotional stability” to be forwarded with the examination to the college admitting the student. This practice, too, faded from the landscape. Two early prophecies also missed the mark. Richard Pearson, Executive Vice President of the College Board, who deplored the pressures on students to achieve on SATs, Achievement Exams and grades as
admission to the top colleges became more difficult, predicted that advanced placement would be “a heartening and reassuring counterpressure to disturbing trends in the college admissions picture.” And David Dudley predicted “two college tracts [sic] for the future, one of the traditional four years, and one for a very small group of three years, Oxford and Cambridge fashion.”41

While the future was to hold some surprises, it was clear by 1965 that the Advanced Placement Program was a going concern. Carl Haag was one year into a distinguished career as ETS Program Director and Donald H. Byerly had been appointed Director of the Reading. The national press seemed supportive, attendance at AP teachers’ conferences was on the rise, and an important book, Slums and Suburbs, endorsed Advanced Placement. In it, James B. Conant said that “The success of the Advanced Placement Program in the last few years is one of the most encouraging signs of real improvement in our educational system.... To my mind, every high school ought to strive to provide the opportunity for Advanced Placement in at least one subject, no matter how few candidates there may be.”42

**The Second Decade**

Education was not immune to the social and political shocks of the late 1960s. Between 1964 and 1973, average SAT mathematics scores dropped twenty-one points and average verbal scores fell nearly twice as far. The new president of the College Board, Sidney P. Marland, Jr., appointed a panel to study these declines. After exploring a number of hypotheses, the panel concluded that much of the slippage could be traced to “changes over the past 10 to 15 years in the standards to which students at all levels of education” were held.43 As Professor William R. Hochman of Colorado State University observed in 1970, “Only 14 percent of the nation’s secondary schools had students taking Advanced Placement Examinations in the Spring of 1969, and over half of the schools that did had fewer than ten students.”44 These changes can be explained by a number of educational and cultural trends of the late sixties. Top-flight American education had always been elitist, and the democratic trends of the sixties called for better education for the many, rather than the best education for the few. Moreover, the rise of student political activism was paralleled by students’ participation in their own education—including calls for the elimination of grades and grading. Formal examinations—especially objective examinations or examinations with quantified scores—were suspect. Rather, emphasis on individualization in learning and independent study characterized the era.45 Advanced Placement just did not seem
to fit into this new context. There was a formal examination and there were objective questions. Further, as Hochman observed in 1970, "Because there have not been as many black students in AP courses, some people regard the program as touched with...‘institutional racism,’ that is, the very structure of the program results in an unintended exclusion of blacks." During these years, too, the number of essays including pornographic prose and attacking the country, the schools, their teachers, AP, the College Board, and/or even the readers increased sharply. By 1973, there was the first positive proof of cheating—in fifteen essays. And the first four years of the 1970s saw a sharp drop in the rate of increase of the AP program itself. In 1973, the number of examinations given declined six percent—the only year of decline in the forty-three years of the Advanced Placement Program.

Given the climate of the late sixties and early seventies, what is remarkable is the resilience of the program. Why did it continue to flourish? Patricia Lund Casserly, a senior research assistant at ETS, conducted a study in 1966-1967 in which she asked fifty college freshmen and more than 350 other college students who had previously taken Advanced Placement courses about the impact of their AP experience on their college and high school lives. What came through in those interviews was that AP classes enjoyed a sort of partial immunity from the storms of discontent. Many students still wanted to learn. One said, “I fought my way in—went to the teacher, the principal, everybody. I was very tired of learning nothing and wasting time in classes with kids who didn’t care about anything but being 16 and getting out of school.” Another said, “I like working with kids of my ability or even more ability [laughter] and maybe it’s because it makes me work harder.” A third admitted, “I want to get the basics out of the way and get on in my field in college. Otherwise I’ll be an old man before I hang out my shingle.” In general, ambitious students were not disappointed. Over two-thirds of the students reported taking AP courses which hewed to the course outline for AP and prepared them for the examination itself. An addition ten percent took enriched or honors classes which also prepared them adequately. Only fifteen percent reported taking AP courses which were AP in name only and left them holding an empty educational bag. The remainder—five percent—either studied independently or took the examination blind. About seventy percent of the Advanced Placement students were tracked into separate homogeneous classes. Almost two-thirds of the students in these AP classes expressed concern about the "intellectual, social and personal implications of homogeneous grouping." Yet not one student in the survey reported that he or she would have opted out of Advanced Placement. Perhaps another explanation for AP’s
continuing popularity was the size of the classes. Most of the four hundred students involved in the study took AP in classes of between twelve and twenty students. The addition of new courses is yet another explanation for the growth of AP during its second decade. An examination in French language was introduced in May 1971. Course descriptions in Music and in Studio Art and the History of Art were published in the same year. The first examinations in these three subjects were offered in May 1972.

Advanced Placement examinations changed during this decade, as well. Massive changes marked the AP exams in both European and American history, reflecting seismic shifts in the content and practice of history instruction in the nation’s colleges. Longtime AP Reader Berky Nelson of UCLA has offered another explanation, suggesting that the exam changed to level the playing field for young African-American students by adding the Document Based Question (DBQ), which provided information for the students to manipulate in their essay response—information that might have been missing from their classroom experience. In American History, the essay portion of the examination had remained constant for several years prior to 1973; students were asked to answer three out of ten essay questions. Now they were asked to respond to two out of nine essay questions and were confronted also with a DBQ, requiring them to interpret and analyze data. The first DBQ, for example, included three graphs and a cartoon as well as eight other documents and asked students to analyze the factors that influenced Congress to pass the Immigration Act of 1924. Bright students loved the challenge, in large part because they were being asked to do what historians do.

European history was not far behind. Indeed, changes which called for an interdisciplinary approach to AP European History may have been more profound than the changes in American History. Writing about those changes in the fall of 1974, Mildred Alpern, later chair of the test development committee, claimed that the new syllabus “tacitly endorses a teaching/learning revolution long overdue.” Both the syllabus and the examination emphasized the modern world and European interglobal relationships and “outlined a thematic structure replacing the chronologi- cal one.” The first European history DBQ appeared in 1975. While it clearly was an unintended consequence of the change, young women did better on the DBQ in both American and European History than young men, partially balancing the advantage that male students had enjoyed on the multiple choice questions.

Near the end of the 1970s, the number of students taking AP examinations began to rise sharply. One explanation for this change was the practice of some schools of offering courses to underclassmen. Initially,
most schools had simply assumed that AP was a program for seniors only. In the late sixties and early seventies that changed. Harlan Hanson noted a slow but constant change as stronger schools became more efficient in offering the program. Chemistry and American history were the courses in which underclassmen most frequently stretched their wings.53

In 1975, gains appeared in both the total number of schools offering AP and the total number of courses offered, both of which rose by thirteen percent.54 This growth occurred despite fee increases for students taking the exams. In 1968, registration had been raised to $6, with an additional cost of $11 per exam, and in 1975 the cost rose to $20 per exam.55 In 1975, as well, the first program of fee reductions was implemented for students who were strained financially by the cost of the examinations. In this decade, too, schools were given the option of purchasing reports on their candidates’ performance in comparison to national results (as long as there were five or more students taking a particular exam).

In a few respects, AP remained unchanged. Throughout the second decade of the program, readers in all subjects continued to meet at Rider College in New Jersey. The essay readings themselves, of course, continued to be a happy combination of dogged labor, special friends, and intellectual discourse. Interestingly, despite the growth in the number of exams—from just over 50,000 in 1966 to nearly 86,000 in 1975—the total number of readers dropped from 521 in 1966 to 496 in 1975.56 Although clearly not the reason for it, the stability in the number of readers ensured the continued camp-like quality of the reading. At the same time, ETS moved to strengthen the reliability of the reading. In 1972, it introduced the Consistency Index Number (CIN). Readers were asked to score booklets previously scored by another reader and later in the reading were given a packet of ten exams which they themselves had scored earlier. The closer the numbers assigned, the better the CIN. Reader responses to this innovation were mixed.57 Some broad social changes that marked the era, however, were reflected in the readings. In 1972, for example, Ruth F. Smith of Hofstra University became the first female Chief Reader.58 Women readers and table leaders, however, were still a very small minority.

A few problems persisted in the AP program. One chronic difficulty was a shortage in funds. Creating and scoring examinations and running subject conferences were expensive undertakings. While the program was on much firmer financial footing during its second decade, the College Board continued to monitor it closely. One casualty was the summer conferences for teachers, which had taken place after the readings. In 1973, strapped for cash, the AP program changed to mini-
conferences, an idea begun in the late 1960s by the leaders of AP Physics. Overall, however, the College Board remained optimistic about the program. When Sidney P. Marland, Jr., took over as President of the Board in 1973, he called all of the organization’s administrative leaders to a get-acquainted meeting at which each introduced himself and said a word or two about his work. When Harlan Hanson’s turn came, Marland said, “You can be quiet, Mr. Hanson. I know what you do. You are doing the most important thing the College Board is doing.”

The Third Decade

Between 1975 and 1985, Advanced Placement became a national program to a degree which even its most fervent supporters in the early years could not have imagined. In 1976, 3,937 schools participated in AP; by 1985, there were 6,720. In 1976, 75,651 students took 98,898 examinations; in 1985, a total of 205,650 students took 280,972 exams. What makes these statistics so extraordinary is that the gains took place at a time when, for a variety of reasons, education—especially public education—was scanted. Two reports written in 1983, *A Nation at Risk* and *High School*, underscored the trouble in which American education found itself. The former report, produced by the National Commission on Excellence in Education, pulled no punches. “Our Nation is at risk,” it began.

Our once unchallenged preeminence in commerce, industry, science, and technological innovation is being overtaken by competitors throughout the world.... The educational foundations of our society are presently being eroded by a rising tide of mediocrity that threatens our very future as a Nation and a people....

*High School*, subtitled *A Report on Secondary Education in America*, was produced by the President of the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching, Ernest L. Boyer. The Prologue to the report announced, “the time for renewing education has arrived.... If we do not seize this special moment, we will fail the coming generation and the nation.” The report went on to give a prescription for reinvigorating American secondary education. The section on Accelerating Students began with a discussion of Advanced Placement.

entitled, "Advanced Placement Will Make You a Hero to College-Bound Kids and Their Parents." Many "kids" did not have to be convinced. The sequence of "stagflation" of the late 1970s, recession early in the Reagan presidency, and opportunities in the mid-1980s created an atmosphere of anxiety among high school students, who worried about having the financial support to make it through college. Therefore, AP took on added importance for them.

There were also increasing numbers of AP choices for the student. In 1977, Spanish language was added. In 1980, drawing was offered as a second option in Studio Art, although the basic requirements for Studio Art remained the same. Four years later, Computer Science arrived. New courses increased the number of students taking AP. So did the growth in numbers of younger AP students, mostly from the same socioeconomic status as the original cohort that had taken AP. (Interestingly, the younger students generally did better on the AP exams than their older siblings.) AP also began to reach numbers of students from urban and rural areas who would not have considered or even known about AP in earlier years.

College Board President Marland wrote an article for Today's Education in the winter of 1976, in which he stated that AP was "an effective instrument for serving gifted but socially disadvantaged students." He noted that he had found this to be true in his years in the Pittsburgh schools and suspected that "the same would be true in other inner-city schools where pride in the program often helps urban school leaders change negative stereotypes held by some parents and segments of the public."

Near the end of AP's third decade, the College Board produced a film to sell the program to these new students. The students' voices came through clearly in this twenty-nine minute production, "A Chance to Excel," which focused on four high schools: Mt. Greylock Regional High School (MA), Whitney Young High School (Chicago), and John Marshall High School and Southside High School (both in San Antonio). Harlan Hanson, appearing at the end of the film, delivered the punch line: "Schools need something solid that a youngster can take along to college rather than receiving earnest letters that say, 'John has done well in my course, please place him ahead.'" The score that the AP student earned on his or her exam was the "something solid" to which Hanson referred. A higher percentage of students taking AP courses appeared to be taking the AP exams. Several possible explanations were advanced for this change. Teachers appealed to their students to take the examinations. One student reported, "Our teacher explained that if we didn't take the exam, she'd never get any feedback on how she was teaching the course." Some students received advice from friends and siblings in college about
the advantages of having AP credits, and some parents alerted their children to the economic benefits. "When one young women was suffering pre-AP Examination jitters," ETS researcher Patricia Casserly wrote, "she reported that her father, a logger, encouraged her to take all three she was signed up for: 'I'd rather bet on you, Jill, than a turnaround in the lumber industry.'" Even the American School Board Journal told students, "If you are already in AP courses, take the tests! Whose time are you wasting?" Many school boards took their own advice and made it mandatory for all students taking an AP course to take the AP examination. The result of these pressures appeared in a number of studies. In 1973, 72.9 percent of the students taking Advanced Placement took only one examination before they graduated, while 17.9 percent took two, 6.0 percent took three, 2.1 percent took four, and a small fraction took more than four. By 1984 the numbers were 65.5 percent, 21 percent, 8.1 percent, and 3.2 percent. Clearly, individual students were taking more exams.

As the numbers of exams swelled, dormitory space at the readings was squeezed. Rider College remained a reading site throughout the third decade; in 1980, Lawrenceville was added, and a year later, Trenton State College. A profound event took place in 1977, when European history Chief Reader Robert Blackey convinced ETS that civilization would survive if men and women were allowed to stay in the same dormitories.

Despite the sharp growth in Advanced Placement during its third decade, a few chronic problems remained. Some teachers and schools, for example, either directly or subtly urged selected students to duck the exams in order to keep the teacher's and/or the school's average scores high. Often, too, students chose to suppress their AP scores or declined credit offered by their college so that they could repeat an introductory course and presumably get a high grade the second time around.

Some changes in this era lessened pressures on the Advanced Placement Program. For example, changing cultural values made students less concerned about the negative consequences of taking AP. Unlike their predecessors in the sixties, who took AP with a certain amount of guilt, seeing it as a vehicle of social exclusivity, students of the eighties accepted its academic advantages and got on with it. At a time when A Nation at Risk and High School were deploring the state of American education, Advanced Placement was having its greatest success yet.

The Fourth Decade

In 1991, President George Bush convened a meeting of governors and issued a call for America to rise to the challenge of securing for its young citizens a "world class" education by the year 2000. Advocating that
“tests and high standards be applied to every student in fourth, eighth, and twelfth grades,” he established the National Education Goals Panel and expressed his hope that he would be known as “the education president.”

Clarion calls were not enough, however. Even when people pressed for assessment of students or teachers, there was no general agreement as to the nature of the tests, their role in education, or who should administer them. In Texas in 1992, for example, 8,000 students failed the mathematics proficiency test required under the Texas school reform law. The State Board of Education responded by lowering the passing grade from sixty to fifty-five. When the public howled, the Board reversed itself.

Under President Bill Clinton, little changed. Clinton supported the principles of “Goals 2000,” which had been initiated by Bush, and the call for national standards—but on a voluntary basis. A major test for these standards involved the writing of national standards for both world history and United States history. The new standards were hammered in the Senate, however. By a ninety-nine-to-one vote, a “sense of the Senate” resolution demanded that any future standards “should have a decent respect for the contributions of Western civilization, and United States history, ideas, and institutions, to the increase of freedom and prosperity around the world.”

So, as the United States limped toward adoption of national standards, concerns about federal control, the decentralized nature of American education, the commitment to equal educational opportunity, and the “culture wars” made it appear that—although educational improvement was on everybody’s political wish list—there it would remain.

Donald Stewart, President of the College Board, seized the moment in a 1993 report, writing:

In a period of continued questioning about the quality of American secondary education and the accomplishments of our high school students, the Advanced Placement Program is nationally acknowledged as an educational approach that is a superb model for the nation to emulate. The National Education Goals Panel, America 2000, and the New Standards Project have all praised AP as a program that works on a national scale.... In addition, the U.S. Department of Education is using AP data as an indicator in the annual report—The Condition of Education.

Indeed, AP was highly successful during its fourth decade. AP courses grew and changed and the groups reached by the program expanded dramatically. In 1986, 7,201 schools had participated in the program; in 1997, the number was 11,500. In 1986, 231,000 candidates had taken 319,224 exams. In 1994, these numbers were 458,945 and 701,000,
respectively. The sharpest gains occurred in the southwestern United States, where the percentage increases in students taking the exams were in double digits almost every year.77

One explanation for the growth nationwide was AP’s policy regarding college curricula. At least every four years, the AP program conducts a full-scale college curriculum survey involving up to 200 colleges and universities. In this way, the program can keep abreast of changing content and instructional approaches. Those changes can then be reflected in decisions about adding, subtracting or changing AP courses. Similarly, AP course descriptions are reviewed and revised every two years.78 By 1995, AP had twenty-nine courses and examinations in place. Some were new. Government and politics, including both American government and comparative government, began in 1987. Economics, both micro- and macro-economics, was initiated in 1989, and psychology in 1992. A course in statistics was introduced in 1997 and an environmental science course appeared in 1998. About the turn of the century, there will be separate AP courses and exams in geography and world history. Many of the AP courses had the same labels as in past years, but they were not the same courses or the same exams. In the late 1980s, the AP Biology Development Committee announced that it would publish twelve laboratory exercises and that experience with those labs would be tested on the AP examination in 1988 and subsequent examinations. An equally dramatic change was the introduction of the graphing calculator into Advanced Placement Calculus in 1995.

The College Board took advantage of new technology, as well. “Videoconferencing” of teachers’ conferences began in 1992 with teleconferences in calculus and government and politics. The positive response to these conferences resulted in a 1993 videoconference in European history and subsequent conferences in computer sciences and United States history.79 In 1998, a Statistics videoconference was held for the first time, and computer science, biology, and Spanish had repeat performances.

As the number of AP offerings continued to expand, so did the program’s reach. While Canada was the largest international user of AP—all eighteen of its major universities have AP policies—forty-nine other countries had students involved in the AP program by 1994, with 16,659 examinations being taken outside of the United States.80 Two factors account for these gains from a small beginning in 1981, when overseas students took 2,720 exams. In the late 1980s, the Department of Defense Dependent Schools (DoDDS) made a commitment to the program, including a very well attended three-day workshop in Bad Kissingen, Germany, in 1989. Subsequently, week-long Summer Institutes were
held at the Max Weber villa in Heidelberg in 1993 and 1994. In 1994, 1,806 AP examinations were taken by DoDDS students.\(^{81}\) Also in 1993, eighty-seven German universities decided to admit United States high school graduates who had scored a 3 or higher on the AP German exam and three additional subjects, with no additional examination. Not surprisingly, that year saw a twenty-one percent increase in the number of students in Germany who took AP examinations.\(^{82}\)

The energy for expanding the Advanced Placement Program has often come from local school systems, state legislatures, foundations and professional organizations. The stories of a number of local school districts are worth exploring, but one seems especially revealing of the decade. In March 1991, the Supervisor of Advanced Placement Programs, Walter Lambert, a former member of the U.S. History Test Development Committee and table leader, wrote a letter to AP teachers around the country, asking them to identify exceptional teachers who might wish to teach AP in his district (Oklahoma City). The letter included an Advanced Placement Teachers Salary Supplement Plan. In addition to off-contract time tutoring AP at $15 per hour for a maximum of three hours per week, an AP teacher would receive $100 for every score of 3 earned by his or her students, $200 for every 4, and $300 for every 5. The letter continued,

To encourage student success on the Advanced Placement examinations, the District inaugurated a college scholarship program based on AP scores. Students who receive a '5' on any AP exam will receive a $300 college scholarship, a '4' on any AP exam earns the student a $200 scholarship, and a '3' on any AP exam merits a $100 college scholarship. It is believed that this is the first scholarship program of its kind in the nation.\(^{83}\)

The scholarship money was provided entirely by supporters of the program in the local business community. After the first year of this experiment, the number of AP exams taken by Oklahoma City students jumped by forty-five percent and the number of students receiving a 3 or better on their exams increased ninety percent. When, a few years later, Lambert and the superintendent Arthur Stellar left the district to work in Boston, however, the program lost support and ultimately collapsed.\(^{84}\)

State legislatures increasingly gave active support to Advanced Placement. In the late 1980s, South Carolina was among the first to pass legislation promoting AP participation, by requiring all of the state’s high schools to offer AP courses and its colleges and universities to accept scores of 3 or better. At about the same time, Florida provided funds to schools that established AP programs and, in turn, Florida school districts made money available to its AP teachers for use in their classes on the basis of their students’ scores. In 1995, Texas began reimbursing the
exam fees to students who scored 3 or higher on their AP exams. By 1994, Florida, Georgia, Indiana, Kentucky, North Carolina, Minnesota, South Carolina, and the District of Columbia paid all or part of students’ AP examination fees. The effect was predictable. When states began to pay the costs of AP exams, the number of students taking the exams jumped by sixty to eighty percent. In addition to state support for the examination expenses, by 1993 seventeen states were funding teacher attendance at summer Advanced Placement Institutes. The District of Columbia provided money to train AP teachers and West Virginia created a statewide AP center.

Similar to the critical support given by the Ford Foundation during the first years of the Advanced Placement program, the Mellon Foundation and the Josiah Macy, Jr., Foundation provided much-needed funding during the late 1980s and early 1990s for schools and teachers who were hoping to use Advanced Placement as a vehicle to improve the quality of instruction. Starting in 1987, the Mellon Foundation offered fellowships to summer AP institutes for teachers working in districts whose student population was primarily minority or economically disadvantaged. By 1994, 1,021 such teachers had benefited from these fellowships. The Macy Foundation’s support for disadvantaged students began in 1980, when it sponsored AP programs in five rural schools in Alabama and two schools in New York City.

Professional organizations also worked closely with the College Board to ensure that changes in the profession were reflected in AP instruction and examinations. In 1989, The Joint Council on Economic Education developed an Advanced Placement Instructional Package that included student workbooks based on the macro- and micro-economics outline developed by the AP Economics Committee. The Math Association of America participated actively in changes in the calculus program that climaxd in 1995, the American Chemical Society pressed the College Board for more laboratory activities in AP Chemistry, and the National Council of Geography Education, the Association of American Geographers, and the National Geographic Society played important roles in the decision of the College Board to offer AP Geography by the end of the nineties.

In the late 1980s and early 1990s, Americans found a folk hero in Jaime Escalante. In 1988, Escalante was the focus of a popular movie, “Stand and Deliver,” which captured the power of one person to make a difference in the lives of young people. A math teacher at Garfield High School in Los Angeles, Escalante believed in his Latino students so strongly that the kids finally believed in themselves. In 1981, only eighteen students took AP calculus at Garfield High; by 1987, the num-
ber of students in Escalante’s and fellow teacher Benjamin Jimenez’s AP classes had grown to 155. Less renowned than Escalante, but equally significant, Principal Joe L. Arriaga of Southside High School in San Antonio, Texas, led his students to similarly immense gains. With limited funds, Arriaga “changed the mindset of its teachers and students” by revising their schedules from the traditional English I, English II, and so on, to English I pre-AP, English II pre-AP, etc. In the end, everyone—teachers and students alike—knew the expectations of the school had of them. Under Arriaga’s leadership, Southside High School—a school in which 70 percent of the school population was minority, mostly Hispanic—advanced from a situation in 1981 in which ten percent of the students went to college to a rate of over sixty percent in 1994 (the year of Arriaga’s death).90

In the fourth decade of Advanced Placement, the answer to the question, “Who is the Advanced Placement student?” has changed. In 1986, a longitudinal study of AP students concluded that “The AP Students were…. more likely to come from homes where the parents were highly educated or held prominent occupations. In fact, prominent parent occupations such as judge, surgeon, and company president were half again as likely among the AP freshmen as among the non-AP.” The typical AP student was likely to come from a large rather than small school and from a school with a minority enrollment of fifteen to forty-nine percent, rather than fifty percent or more.91 By 1998, the typical AP student could no longer be so easily categorized.

Major changes in the AP population began in the late 1980s. By 1988, participation by minority students had increased 140 percent over 1983, with a 32 percent jump between 1987 and 1988. By 1988, minority students represented 19.5 percent of all U.S. students who took the examinations. This trend has an important social effect. As Raul Rodriguez, a teacher of AP Spanish and AP United States history—who teaches history in Spanish at the largely Hispanic Xaverian High School in Brooklyn, New York—has observed, “It is automatically assumed that white kids can do the work in school and minority kids can’t. With AP, Hispanics see that they can do it too.”92 In a 1989 interview published in Black Issues in Higher Education, Donald Stewart underscored the importance of these gains. “By using our Advanced Placement Program to raise the expectations of minority students and helping them achieve higher goals,” he said, “these schools are bringing more minorities into professional and graduate schools. They are also producing some of the brainpower this nation needs to compete successfully in the world.” In computers, for example, 521 African-Americans took the AP exams in 1988, compared to only seventy-two the year before.93 The increase in
numbers of African-American, Native American, Asian American, and Hispanic AP students continued into the 1990s. In 1994, such students represented 26.3 percent of those taking AP examinations in the United States. Between 1989 and 1994, the percentage of AP exams taken by Black students rose from 3.7 to 4.3 percent; among Mexican Americans, Puerto Ricans, and Hispanics, from 5.2 to 7.3 percent; Asian Americans, from 12.5 to 14.2 percent; and Native Americans and Inuits, from 0.3 to 0.5 percent.94

By the mid-1990s, half of the nation’s high schools were participating in the Advanced Placement Program. In 1995, students completed 779,000 exams, with the number of students doubling between 1987 and 1994. In the latter year, “approximately eleven AP Examinations were given for every one hundred U.S. secondary school juniors and seniors.” Approximately seventy percent of these exams were taken by public school students. On a per capita basis, however, private school students took a little more than twice the number of exams as their peers in the public schools.95 In congruence with its efforts to involve all talented students in the AP program, the College Board in 1995 reduced the examination fee for students with financial need from $72 to $43. That policy, in addition to the increased willingness of local school boards and states to pay for the examinations, accounted in no small part for the sharp increase of students in the program—and possibly for part of the increase in the numbers of minority students. In addition, the Advanced Placement Program introduced a variety of testing procedures to make it easier for students with disabilities to take AP exams.96

The thousands of additional exams required increasing numbers of readers. For the first national tests in 1956, there were eighty-one readers. By 1986, this number had increased to 1,162, and eleven years later, to 3,709. The average AP reader serves six years, a term of service that has remained relatively unchanged over the years. Given the age and longevity of readers, they have proved remarkably willing to change with the times. In 1993, English and one or two other examinations moved to a “folderscan” method of mechanizing the reporting of AP scores. In 1995, United States history did the same. The transition went smoothly; there were few Luddites in the crowd. As the number of exams grew, it became more difficult to find suitable institutions large enough to host the readings. From 1986 to 1995, a series of new ‘homes” opened to the separate disciplines. The reading moved out of the Northeast and, in some cases, away from college campuses and into hotels. During 1986 and 1987, the reading sites remained unchanged at Rider College and Trenton State. In 1988, the Somerset Hilton (Somerset, NJ) was added; Clemson University came aboard in 1989, the last year for Rider, and in 1990 and 1991,
the Somerset Marriott served as an additional AP site. Trinity University in San Antonio, Texas, hosted a large number of readers in 1992, in addition to the two Somerset hotels, Trenton State, and Clemson. By 1993 and 1994, only the colleges and universities remained—Trenton State, Clemson, and Trinity—and in 1995, the University of Maryland, College Park, was added, and then in 1996, the University of Nebraska.97 As the number of readers grew, so did the number of rumors. Readers talked about moving West, having separate readings for East and West Coast readers, or even a “homework” kind of reading that evoked images of the early Industrial Revolution.

In 1993, the College Board produced a small pamphlet, *The Advanced Placement Challenge: Providing Excellence and Equity for the Future*, which warned administrators and teachers against expecting too much, too quickly when an AP program is first initiated. The pamphlet underscored the facts that an AP program takes time to build and that the AP experience—including an upgraded curriculum and the genuine excitement about AP work—is more important than initial grades received by students. Exceptional AP scores come in the wake of exceptional AP classes. The pamphlet noted, “When pressured for high scores on tests, teachers may discourage students from taking the national exams or become highly selective when granting admission into AP. Consequently, many academically able and hard-working students could be excluded.”98 Perhaps because at least some schools heeded this warning, during the fourth decade of Advanced Placement the percentage of grades of 3 or higher decreased slightly. In 1985, 67.2 percent of test-takers earned 3, 4, or 5; the comparable figure in 1994 was 66.3 percent. Other possible explanations include the addition of four new exams, on which the average grades initially were lower, and, for several AP examinations, the development of more demanding standards, for example, the requirement in Biology that experience in new laboratory work would be included in the examination.99 However well or poorly their students performed, schools could get a more accurate reading of their performance. Starting in 1986, schools automatically received their students’ results and a comparison to the national performance on the different parts of each student’s examination for all exams in which five or more of their students participated.

For top students, AP apparently played an increasingly important role in the college admissions process in the 1980s and 1990s. The journal *College & University* published the results of a survey of admissions officers in the fall of 1991. Among its findings was that “Fifty-eight percent of the colleges in the sample reported that it had become progressively more difficult to be admitted without AP or honors coursework.”100
Some scholars have suggested that since grade inflation has made rank in class and GPA less meaningful, colleges were forced to turn to AP scores as a more reliable indicator. Others have suggested that the rising relative costs of higher education have driven students to AP to save money. The latter explanation seems questionable because few AP students trigger AP credits once in college. In 1986, for example, only three percent of students who took AP graduated from college in less than four years. In the Harvard Class of 1995, 295 out of 1644 students took advanced standing.101

The expansion of Advanced Placement Program in the 1980s and 1990s to American students who in the past might not have even considered AP is significant. It was a type of expansion, however, that had marked the program from its earliest days. Every decade of Advanced Placement has left its own special signature. The transportation of AP overseas was unique to the fourth decade of the program. For years, American colleges and universities had broadened and enriched their student population, and in some cases helped to balance the books, by attracting able students from around the world. Now some American students were using AP courses and credits as a kind of intellectual global passport. Advanced Placement credits are now accepted, for example, by universities in Great Britain, Germany, and a number of other countries. (In some, the B.A. is a three-year program, in others the tuition is well below American costs, and in a very few—such as Germany—there is no tuition at all.) In any event, the American student abroad, with AP credits in hand, is a phenomenon which will become more common in the future.102

The other most significant change in AP during the 1980s and 1990s has involved technology. Technological change, of course, has been with the program since its beginning, but during the last decade those changes have been so vast that they signal a qualitative difference. The College Board has pushed along this process. For example, in the late nineties, it published “College Explorer,” guidance software which allows students to identify a college’s AP policies along with a host of other important information. There are proposals under consideration to design a voice response system, “AP Explorer On-Line,” which will provide additional information to the student. More importantly, the teaching of AP has been altered by videotdisks, CD-Roms, and the like. The services that AP provides have likewise been upgraded by on-line communications. As early as 1994, the College Board announced, “The Program has recently introduced an AP information database, called a gopher server, on the Internet, the global computer network. The AP gopher was developed with help from the University of Georgia, where the gopher resides.”103
There is now a College Board web page: <http://www.collegeboard.org/ap/html/index001.html>. Students can log on and, for a price, get DBQs and free response essays evaluated in a short period of time. And, as mentioned earlier, the entire process of the reading of AP examinations has been made more efficient because of the latest advances in technology.

Concluding Observations

Looking back over the forty-three years of the Advanced Placement Program, it is clear that a number of the concerns and joys that seemed to be special in the 1980s and 1990s have been with the program since its birth. The opening up of AP to all comers in some schools and the untracking of AP in others represent just the latest round in the debate about power and opportunity in America. If the world remains a dangerous place where America’s brightest students must be better educated to reach their full potential so that our country can survive, is it better or worse to expand the reach of AP? (Certainly this question resonates with those asked in the 1950s.) If it is better, are there enough teachers capable of teaching AP courses? That question, too, has been with the AP program since the fifties. The present turnover of experienced teachers and the shortage of talented science and mathematics teachers, in particular, may make this problem especially acute in our time. An additional issue that has long been with Advanced Placement—and with American education in general—involves the lack of women in mathematics and the sciences. In the fifties it may have been a problem that had no name; it is a hot public topic today. There have been some gains over the decades, but in the mid-1980s, three-fifths of the students taking AP examinations in English and foreign languages were women, while only one out of four students taking AP Physics or Chemistry was a female.104

It is estimated by Wade Curry that 45 percent of the students in AP courses do not take AP examinations.105 Since such information is by its nature difficult to verify, it is hard to judge whether this has become a more significant issue as the program has expanded. In any event, all major reports on Advanced Placement through the years have mentioned it as a problem.

The most severe problem of all remains that of communication between AP and the colleges and universities. Rumors about both “credit inflation” in AP and the declining quality of AP students feed other rumors. Unlike the days long gone when barely a dozen colleges were involved, now 2,964 institutions of higher education participate and each year more are added. These new participating institutions—and many of the old ones—need “refresher” courses on AP standards and process.
Without such updates, every college administrator or professor becomes “the expert” on AP, relying on rumors or on the reports from a colleague who has participated in a recent reading. In this situation, whether a college or even a department accepts a 3, 4, or 5 for credit is dependent on happenstance. Unless this informational gap is effectively addressed, the AP-college connection will become more shaky.

What of the future? It is possible that economic factors may limit the growth of Advanced Placement. As schools are squeezed by a lower tax base, they may not be able to pay for the textbooks, the materials, and the teacher training that are essential to a strong program. As families and students are squeezed, the costs of AP exams, notwithstanding reductions for financially strapped students, may prove to be too high. Or, as the costs of higher education escalate, students may decide that college itself is not for them from the beginning, and opt out of the fast track. On the other hand, maybe students will consider AP to be a great financial deal. The picture is unclear. Four years ago, the late Al Shanker and the American Federation of Teachers issued a call for a national high school exam. Both sides in the struggle over national standards have called for a fair and scholarly curriculum. Each commission that is formed issues a call for a standard of excellence for all students. The Advanced Placement Program is answering these calls. Given AP’s elitist roots, its founders would be shocked—but probably delighted.

Notes

1. Portions of this essay were previously published in *College Board Review*, Nos. 176/177, 1995, pp. 24-32.


7. Ibid., 3.

8. Ibid., 2, 118.
9. Ibid. 10, 13.
10. Ibid., 111, 118.
14. Dudley, “Beginnings of the Advanced Placement Program,” 13. The seven initial participating schools were Bronx High School of Science; Central High School and Germantown Friends School (Philadelphia), Evanston Township High School (Evanston, IL); Horace Mann School (New York); Newton High School (Newtonville, MA); and St. Louis Country Day School (St. Louis, MO). Of the first seventeen schools to offer such pilot courses, six would be among the one hundred schools administering the greatest number of Advanced Placement examinations forty years later.
17. Ibid., 72; School and College Study of Admission with Advanced Standing, Final Report and Summary of the June 1955 Evaluating Conferences of the School and College Study (March 1965): 5.
22. Ibid., 5.
24. Ibid., 12.
47. *An Informal History of the AP Readings, 1956-76*, 13, 26, 27, 29.
51. Author’s conversation with Berky Nelson, June 5, 1996.
53. Author’s conversation with Harlan Hanson, April 22, 1995.
59. Author’s conversation with Harlan Hanson, April 22, 1995.
64. Joan B. Grady, “Advanced Placement Will Make You a Hero to College-


90. Arriaga used several thousand dollars that the school earned from soft drink
concessions to pay the expenses of teachers to attend AP Institutes each summer, and held
AP dances to help students pay test fees. The Advanced Placement Challenge: Providing
Excellence and Equity for the Future (New York: College Entrance Examination Board,
1993), 5, 9; The College Board Review (Winter 1995).
91. Warren W. Willingham and Margaret Morris, Four Years Later: A Longitudi-
nal Study of Advanced Placement Students in College (New York: College Entrance
Examination Board, 1986), 11; Charles H. Hammer, “Advanced Placement Programs in
Public and Private Schools: Characteristics of Schools and Program Offerings, 1984-86”
(Washington, DC: National Center for Education Statistics, U.S. Department of Educa-
tion, July 1990), iii.
92. Beverly T. Watkins, “Participation of Minority Students Rises 32 Pct. in
Advanced-Placement Tests: Many Score High,” The Chronicle of Higher Education
XXXV, No. 16 (December 14, 1988): 1, 26.
94. 1994 AP Year Book, 13, 15.
8; author’s conversation with Wade Curry and Phil Arbolino, April 21, 1995.
96. Bulletin for Students and Parents (New York: College Entrance Examination
Board, 1995), 14, 16.
97. A Propos AP, 6.
98. The Advanced Placement Challenge, 12-13. A second, somewhat related con-
cern has been expressed by Harold Howe, one of the Advanced Placement Program’s
founders. “There is some tendency,” Howe commented in 1995, “to have the classroom
emphasize the test instead of having a really interesting course. Teachers who fall for that,
tend to diminish the program.” He added that “it would be surprising if it hadn’t
happened.” Author’s conversation with Harold Howe, April 21, 1995.
College Entrance Examination Board, 1994), 25; College and University Guide to the
Advanced Placement Program, 14.
100. Norman Edward Herr, “Perspectives and Policies of Undergraduate Admis-
sions Committees Regarding Advanced Placement and Honors Coursework,” College &
University (Fall 1991): 49.
101. Highsmith, “The Advanced Placement Program,” 117; author’s conversa-
tion with Carol Thorne, April 21, 1995.
103. Advanced Placement Program: Program Plan 1994-96, 22, 10; 1994 AP Year
Book, 18.
104. Willingham and Morris, Four Years Later, 24.
## APPENDIX I
### Advanced Placement Information

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