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The up and downside of AP courses

By Elizabeth LaScala, Ph.D.



Elizabeth LaScala, PhD personally guides each student through each step of selecting and applying to well-matched schools for undergraduate and graduate school study. Over the past two decades, Elizabeth has placed hundreds of students in some of the most prestigious colleges and universities in the U.S. The number of clients taken is limited to ensure each applicant has personalized attention. Contact Elizabeth early in the process to make a difference in your outcomes. Write elizabeth@doingcollege.com; Visit www.doingcollege.com; or Call: 925.385.0562.

Depending on how your particular school treats AP classes, an AP class can be worth a full grade higher than the regular track class (that's how some students push their GPAs beyond the `perfect' 4.0). And even if your high school does not inflate AP grades, many college admissions offices do it for you.

Good AP scores may reduce your eventual college course load and this could result is a shorter time in college. Generally, a high score on an Advanced Placement exam will equate to one semester of a college course. A high score is often a four or five out of the five-point scale used to score an Advanced Placement test. While it is theoretically possible for you to bypass an entire semester of college by taking several AP classes (which can save you thousands of dollars), it is not common. Many colleges do not accept AP scores for course credit. Others may require you to take its version of a similar course. The rationale offered is so you learn the material in a way that provides a proper foundation for the university's particular academic curriculum. Other colleges my offer you the chance to take an assessment exam before accepting an AP score for course credit. The assessment exam is usually quite comprehensive and a passing score can be difficult to achieve, unless you have reviewed and studied the material. Your brain loses a great deal of content over time. Even then, the assessment may be the final for that course, and it is likely to be difficult to pass. For example, one of my daughters scored a solid five on an AP biology exam in her senior year of high school, but MIT would not accept the course for credit until she passed their introduction to biology course for bioengineering majors. The passing grade was a 70 percent and she scored 68 percent, not making the cut for MIT. On a more optimistic note, our University of California system is often quite willing to accept AP courses in high school for college credit. One of my clients graduated in 3.5 years because UC Berkeley accepted all five of her AP classes for course

credit.

Admissions often view AP classes as one indicator of your intellectual vitality and willingness to take the initiative to challenge yourself in high school. Since AP coursework is taught at the college level, good grades in these classes and strong scores on the exams can prove you are ready for college success.

As you ponder the question of taking one or more AP classes, it is important to weigh the pros and cons and make a decision that provides reasonable balance. One way to do this is to limit the AP classes you take to those subjects that resonate with your interests and possible majors or career paths.

It is important to weigh carefully the potential bump in GPA and the beneficial effect on college admission outcomes with the fact that AP classes do take more time. It is not uncommon for one AP class to involve two or more hours of homework each weeknight. That's time you might spend studying for your other classes, preparing for standardized tests and pursuing your extracurricular activities - not to mention getting some much needed sleep. And that, too, would be time well spent!

Reach the reporter at: info@lamorindaweekly.com

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