Brigham Young University
BYU ScholarsArchive

All Theses and Dissertations

2004-07-16

Advanced Placement English and the College Curriculum: Evaluating and Contextualizing Policy

Jennifer Dawn Gonzalez
Brigham Young University - Provo

Follow this and additional works at: http://scholarsarchive.byu.edu/etd

Part of the English Language and Literature Commons

BYU ScholarsArchive Citation

Gonzalez, Jennifer Dawn, "Advanced Placement English and the College Curriculum: Evaluating and Contextualizing Policy" (2004). *All Theses and Dissertations*. 215.
http://scholarsarchive.byu.edu/etd/215

This Thesis is brought to you for free and open access by BYU ScholarsArchive. It has been accepted for inclusion in All Theses and Dissertations by an authorized administrator of BYU ScholarsArchive. For more information, please contact scholarsarchive@byu.edu.

ADVANCED PLACEMENT ENGLISH AND THE COLLEGE CURRICULUM: EVALUATING AND CONTEXTUALIZING COLLEGE-LEVEL POLICY

By

Jennifer D. Gonzalez

A thesis submitted to the faculty of

Brigham young University

in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

Master of Arts

Department of English

Brigham Young University

August 2004

Copyright © 2004 Jennifer D. Gonzalez

All Rights Reserved

GRADUATE COMMITTEE APPROVAL PAGE

FINAL READING APPROVAL AND ACCEPTANCE

ABSTRACT

ADVANCED PLACEMENT ENGLISH AND THE COLLEGE CURRICULUM: EVALUATING AND CONTEXTUALIZING COLLEGE-LEVEL POLICY

Jennifer D. Gonzalez

Department of English

Master of Arts

This thesis examines the context in which Advanced Placement (AP) English policies are made, examining the political and economic realities that impact policy decisions as well as the discipline-based critiques of the AP English program which have led many writing program administrators (WPAs) and faculty to question existing credit and placement policies. Recent efforts to dramatically expand the AP program have left many questioning whether the AP English experience actually fulfills the promises suggested by the program. After reviewing current literature relating to AP English, this thesis examines the findings of an empirical study conducted at BYU. The study evaluates the outcomes of AP English based on student writing in an actual college setting, focusing on the predictive validity of AP exam scores. Conclusions are drawn from the findings of the study and the review of literature. Recommendations are made for evaluating and designing AP policies that respond sensitively and fairly to all the stakeholders while encouraging WPAs and interested faculty to actively define the role of AP English within the college curriculum.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I would like to express my sincere gratitude to my advisor, Kristine Hansen, and my committee members, Beverly Zimmerman and Gary Hatch for their continued patience, support, encouragement and guidance throughout the past two years. Special thanks to Dr. Hansen, not only for inviting me to be part of the research team and mentoring me through the process of completing this thesis, but for helping me find a really great place to finally write it. I would also like to thank the members of the research team who conducted the BYU AP English study (Kristine Hansen, Suzanne Reeve, Richard Sudweeks, Gary Hatch, Patricia Esplin, and William S. Bradshaw) for their exhaustive work and allowing me to be part of a challenging and rewarding project. Finally, to my loving parents, my siblings, and my wonderful friends—thank you for believing in me always and reminding me of what is most important in life. You do more for me than I could ever express.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Chapter 1—Advanced Placement English and The Need to Reexamine Policy 1
AP Expansion 3
AP English Exams 8
Exam Scoring 10
AP English... 12
Literature vs. Language.. 14
AP and Broader CLLHS Trends.. 15

Chapter 2—Contextualizing AP English.. 19
Financial Stakes 20
Recruitment and Admissions.. 23
Credit Hours and Curricular Coherence... 25
Definitions of “College-Level” 27
AP and Secondary Schools 29
Institutional Articulation 31
Critiques of AP English 33
Connecting Criticism and Context... 61

Chapter 3—Assessing AP English Outcomes
Through Student Writing: The BYU Study 63
Methods.. 67
Procedures 70
Major Findings 71
Discussion 74

Chapter 4—Implications and Conclusions 79
(Re)Engaging Dialogue.. 79
Implications of the BYU Study 80
Questions of Policy 81
Putting Dialogue on Paper.. 84
Acknowledging Context... 86

Works Cited 89

CHAPTER 1

ADVANCED PLACEMENT ENGLISH AND THE NEED TO REEXAMINE POLICY

In 2003, over one million (1,017,396) students, the vast majority of them college bound juniors and seniors, took over 1.7 million (1,737,231) Advanced Placement (AP) exams (College Board [CB], *AP Research and Data*). Most of these students expect to matriculate at a college or university and be awarded college credits for their performance on these exams—a belief reinforced by statements in the AP program literature published by the College Board (the non-profit entity that administers AP). According to the AP website, "Over 90 percent of the nation's colleges and universities have an AP policy granting incoming students credit, placement, or both, for qualifying AP Exam grades" (CB, *The Advanced Placement Program*). Clearly, policies and standards for credit and placement vary from institution to institution. However, the increasing volume of students participating in AP and expecting to earn credit for work done in high school has allowed AP, either by design or default, to become a significant part of the college curricula.

As an educational enterprise, the AP program attracts the interest of a wide range of stakeholders, each with their own objectives and expectations. Thus, any discussion of the AP program requires negotiating the varying interests of these stakeholders, which include the College Board, the Educational Testing Service (ETS), which develops and administers the AP exams, as well as students, parents, high school teachers and administrators, college administrators and faculty, individual college departments and

programs, and political bodies that govern education (e.g., state legislatures, boards of regents, etc.). In the case of AP English, this list of stakeholders includes college writing program administrators (WPAs) and composition faculty, since AP English credit has traditionally been used to satisfy first-year composition (FYC) requirements at the institutions where AP students eventually matriculate.

For college-level administrators and faculty, credit and placement policies, which determine if and how credit is awarded for performance on the AP exams, are the most significant means of influencing the AP program and thus defining what role AP will play in the curriculum of an individual institution or program. For the last 15-20 years, many WPAs and English faculty have been concerned that AP English courses and exams do not align with contemporary trends in teaching college-level English, and more specifically, FYC courses. In examining the issues and trends of AP English from the college perspective, this thesis focuses both on the apparent gap between AP English courses, AP English exams and FYC, and it examines the complex political and economic context in which AP English policies are developed and evaluated.

Not only does AP English involve a wide range of stakeholders, but it involves a myriad of interconnected and complex issues that significantly complicate discussions of policy. At the heart of this context are recent efforts by the College Board to dramatically expand the AP program. While the program has long had both is supporters and critics, this growth has raised significant concerns about the outcomes of the program and the level of achievement actually indicated by AP scores. Further, the specific case of AP English is also grounded in the question of alignment between AP English and FYC. That is, does achievement on an AP English exam accurately indicate that students have

successfully completed a college-level learning experience equivalent to FYC, and in doing so, have they acquired the skills and knowledge necessary to write successfully in a college environment? Underlying both of these issues are the extensive political and economic realities that often affect policy decisions far more than subject-specific discussion and debate. Moreover, this situation is troublesome for college-level stakeholders because it can ultimately undermine the curricular authority of individual departments and programs when a significant number of students substitute AP for introductory-level, general education course such as FYC.

AP Expansion

Since the early 1990s, the College Board has put significant effort into increasing *access* to AP (which effectively translates into *participation* in AP courses and exams), announcing ambitious goals and plans such as “offering AP in every school in the nation, with 10 courses in each school by 2010” (CB, *Access to Excellence: A Report* 3). But this trend is not limited to the AP program. AP, dual credit, concurrent enrollment, CLEP, International Baccalaureate (IB), and other programs that encourage college-level learning in high schools (CLLHS) are increasing throughout the nation (Johnstone and Del Genio vii). Furthermore, AP, like many of these programs, began with very different aims in mind than those that currently govern it. According to the College Board, AP began “as an academic challenge to a small, elite group of able students [which] . . . provided them an opportunity to take on college-level work while in high school, thus making their educational development more continuous” (CB, *Access to Excellence: A Report* 1). But the growing belief that CLLHS programs potentially hold the keys to such issues as education reform and the rising costs of higher education has led to a rapid

expansion of programs that purport to offer college in high school. Once programs for the academic elite, they now actively seek to include students with a far broader range of academic preparation.

As indicated, when the AP program began in the mid-1950s, the designers of the program sought to provide a way for academically advanced students at prestigious prep schools to begin working on introductory college course work in high school to avoid repetition once they matriculated at one of the partnering universities. Furthermore, participation in AP was a way for these students to improve their admissions applications by indicating exceptional academic achievement and preparation for college-level work. At its inception, the AP program followed the same basic design that it does today. Students would study college-level coursework (taught in a high school classroom by high school teachers) and then evidence their learning through performance on subject-specific, standardized exams. The AP program quickly spread throughout the nation and has become, perhaps the most dominant and widely recognized college-level learning program for high school students.

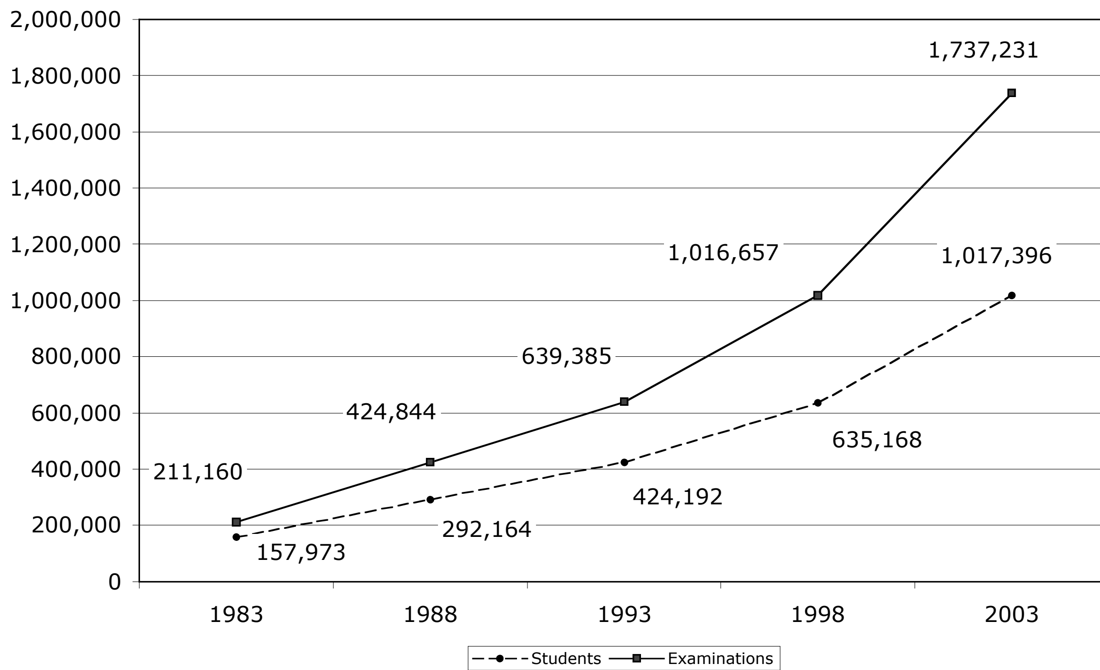
The AP program is administered by two partnering organizations: the College Board and Educational Testing Services (ETS). College Board has developed and administers the program (developing curriculum and course descriptions, providing training for teachers, advocating participation and policies at colleges, etc.). ETS, on the other hand, is hired by the College Board to develop, evaluate, administer and score the AP exams. While the College Board is a *client* of ETS, personnel involved on both sides of the program work closely together to ensure the coherence and success of the program.

Both the actions of the College Board in recent years and program statistics indicate that AP is and will continue expanding dramatically. In addition to the standard AP courses, which CB supports through professional development for teachers, CB has encouraged the development of AP Vertical Teams and offers Pre-AP teacher training. These programs are designed to align curriculum and begin preparing students for AP course work as early as the 6th grade (CB, *Pre-AP*). Furthermore, the College Board has successfully lobbied for both state and federal support of AP in the form of policies that encourage and/or subsidize AP programs. These policies include mandating course offerings in high schools; subsidizing teacher training, program costs, and exam fees; and mandating that state colleges and universities offer credit for AP performance. Currently, 27 states and the District of Columbia have such mandates in place. Additionally, the federal AP Incentive Program provides funding in 45 states, the District of Columbia, Puerto Rico, the Northern Mariana Islands, Guam and the U.S. Virgin Islands to subsidize exam fees and professional development for low-income students and districts (CB, *State and Federal Support*).

Program statistics suggest that these efforts have been successful in increasing the number of students participating in AP *exams*. The specific number of students participating in AP *courses* is unknown; however, it is suggested that half to two-thirds of students enrolling in an AP course will take the corresponding exam (Lichten, endnote 3). Conversely, students are not required to take an AP course in order to take an exam, and it is safe to assume that a number of students taking AP exams have not been enrolled in a corresponding AP course. Ultimately, the number of students taking AP exams and the number of schools and colleges involved in the program over the past 20 years indicate

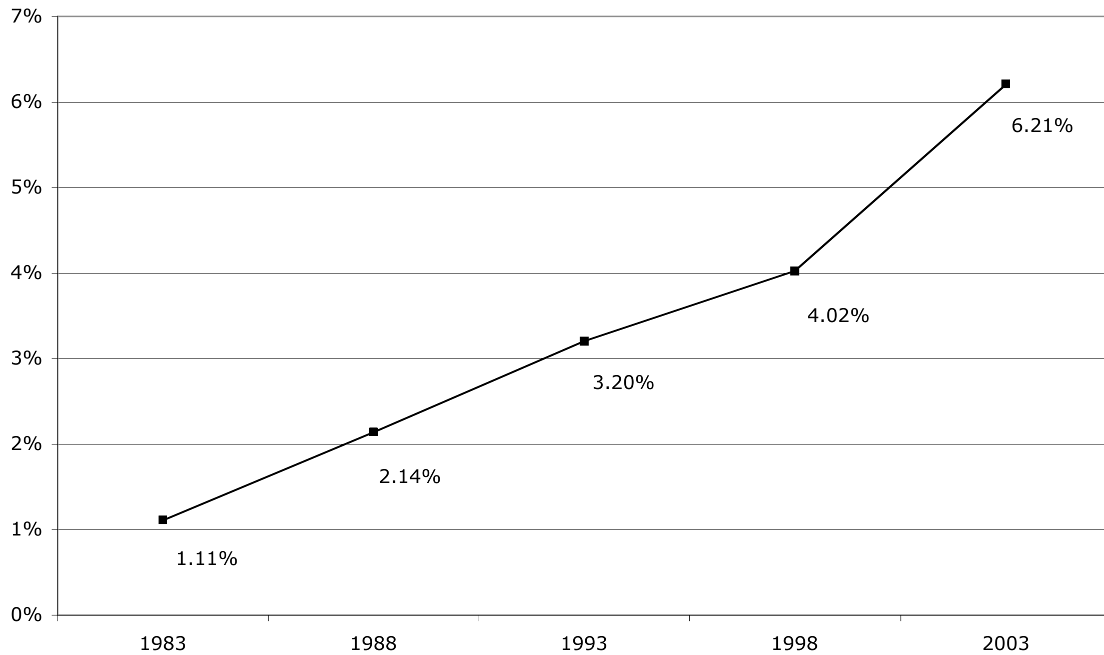
the overall growth in program participation. Below, Figure 1 shows the total number of students taking AP exams and the total number of exams taken by all students. Figure 2 shows the percentage of all high school students participating in AP (based on the number of students taking exams each year and national high school enrollment). And Figure 3 shows the number of high schools and colleges participating in AP.

FIG. 1. AP Examinations and Students, 1983-2003



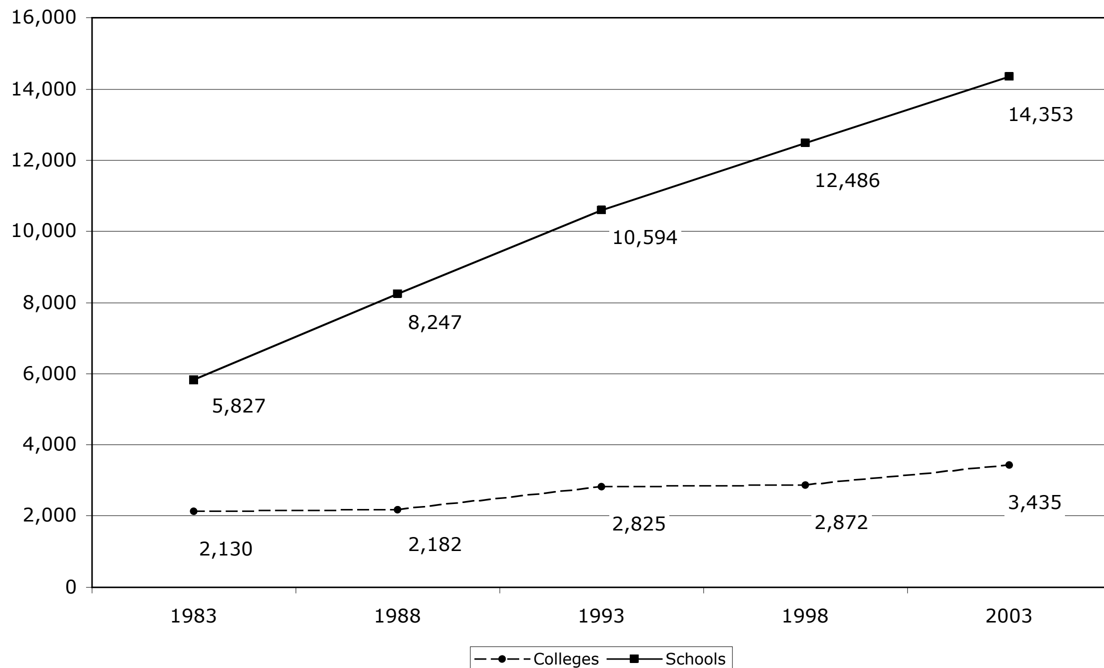
Source: College Board. "AP Research and Data: AP Annual Participation 2003." *AP Central.* 2004. College Board. 8 Jul 2004. <http://apcentral.collegeboard.com/program/research/ 1,,150-160-0-0,00.html>.

Fig. 2. Percentage of All High School Students Participating in AP, 1983-2003



Data Source: College Board. "AP Research and Data: AP Annual Participation 2003." *AP Central.* 2004. College Board. 8 Jul 2004. <http://apcentral.collegeboard.com/program/research/ 1,,150-160-0-0,00.html> and US Census Bureau. *School Enrollment.* 13 Jul 2004. <http://www.census.gov/population/www/socdemo/school.html>.

Fig. 3. Number of High Schools and Colleges Participating in AP



Source: College Board. "AP Research and Data: AP Annual Participation 2003." *AP Central.* 2004. College Board. 8 Jul 2004. <http://apcentral.collegeboard.com/program/research/ 1,,150-160-0-0,00.html>.

In addition to these statistics, it is important to note that much of the growth of AP has focused on including students from low-income districts and traditionally underrepresented demographic groups such as ethnic minorities. In general, including students from these demographic groups can be seen as a positive move away from the cultural elitism often associated with AP and related programs. However, a negative side effect of such growth is the fact that it often leads to the inclusion in AP of students who are academically unprepared for college-level learning in high school and thus "waters down" the overall achievement of the testing pool (see *CB, Access to Excellence: A Report* and Lichten).

While some are critical of this growth simply because it indicates the increasing power and influence of the College Board and ETS on the American educational system (see Vopat, *the Politics* and Owen), the more immediate issue arises from the impact of this growth on the system used for scoring AP Exams. For simplicity, I will use AP English as an example.

AP English Exams

Currently, the AP English program consists of two exams and corresponding courses: English Literature and Composition and English Language and Composition. The exams for both English programs follow the basic model of most AP exams; i.e., they are divided into two sections: a series of multiple choice questions and a set of "free-response" questions which require students to write a timed, impromptu essay. Students are generally given 60 minutes to complete the multiple-choice section (which counts for 45% of the total grade) and 120 minutes to complete 3 impromptu essays (which count for 55% of the total grade).

For the English Literature exam, questions focus on literary analysis and interpretation. Both multiple-choice and essay questions ask students to comprehend, interpret literary works and analyze the use of literary devices. According to the 2003-04 course description, multiple-choice questions "test the student's critical reading of selected passages. But the examination also requires writing as a direct measure of the student's ability to read and interpret literature and to use other forms of discourse effectively" (CB, *AP English Course Description* 46).

The English Language exam focuses more on rhetoric and discourse analysis. In this exam, multiple-choice questions are used to "test the students' skills in analyzing the rhetoric of prose passages" (CB, *AP English Course Description* 13), asking students to demonstrate their understanding of a passage and identify how various tools of language function. Likewise, free-response questions require students to construct an argumentative essay analyzing the rhetorical strategies within a given text, but the emphasis of these questions is on students' ability to write "several essays in various rhetorical modes" (CB, *AP English Course Description* 13).

After exams are scored and final grades are calculated through the process described below, they are sent to students, their respective high schools, and any colleges named by the students as ones they plan to apply to. Individual colleges can then award credit, placement, or both based on institutional policies, which may or may not follow the recommended level of qualification suggested by the AP scale. Moreover, each institution determines not only what score results in placement and/or credit, but whether or not "AP credits" can be applied toward graduation requirements. Interestingly, the College Board provides a College Search service that allows students to identify which

colleges offer credit for AP scores (CB, *AP English Course Description* 72).

Exam Scoring

As in all AP courses, exams are offered once a year. Multiple-choice sections are scored by computer, while free-response sections are scored at the annual AP Reading by a host of college faculty and secondary school AP teachers under the direction of the Chief Faculty Consultant for the respective field. (The reading process will be discussed in detail in Chapter 2.) Raw scores on both sections are combined into a composite score, which is then converted to a 5-point scale using a *predetermined distribution*. In order to compensate for the varying degree of difficulty in exams each year, this distribution remains constant from year to year. However, Lichten (and others) identifies the problematic nature of this process in the face of rapid program expansion.

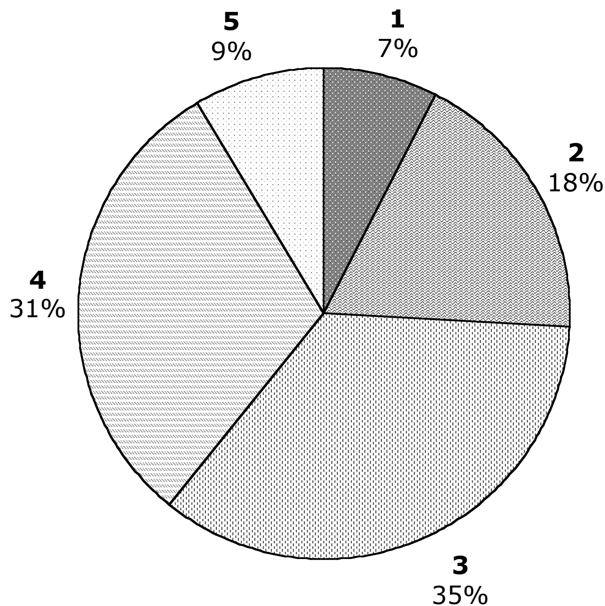
Table 1 shows the 5-point AP scale. Figures 4 and 5 show the grade distribution for 2003 in terms of individual scores and qualification status respectively. The reader will note that over 60% of all students taking the test received a qualifying score of 3, 4, or 5. If the testing pool is increasingly including students of lower academic ability, but the scoring system continues to award the same percentage of qualifying scores, it is feared that the level of achievement indicated by each score has been (and will continue to be) compromised. This is especially true for students scoring a 3 since they represent the lowest level of qualification.

Table 1. The AP Grade Scale

AP Score	Qualification
5	Extremely Well Qualified
4	Well Qualified
3	Qualified
2	Possibly Qualified
1	No Recommendation

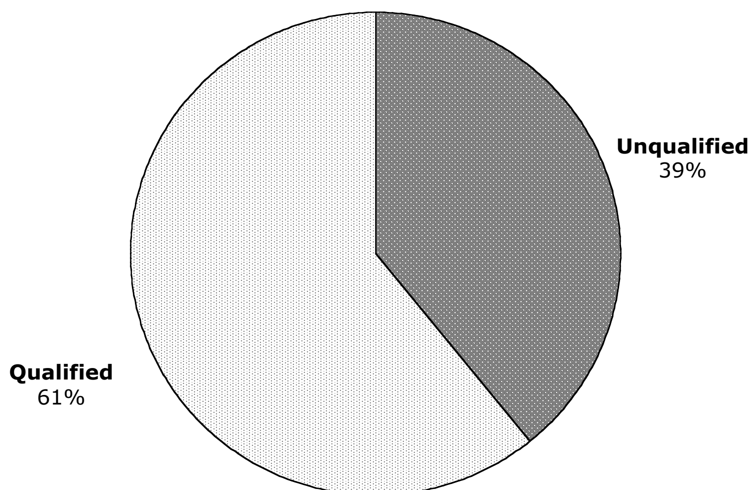
Source: College Board. “Exam Data: 2003.” *AP Central.* 2004. College Board. 8 Jul 2004. <http://apcentral.collegeboard.com/repository/ap03_grade_dist_subje_29501.xls>.

Fig. 4. Distribution of Final AP Grades for English



Source: College Board. “Exam Data: 2003.” *AP Central.* 2004. College Board. 8 Jul 2004. <http://apcentral.collegeboard.com/repository/ap03_grade_dist_subje_29501.xls>.

Fig. 4. Distribution of Final AP Grades for English



Source: College Board. "Exam Data: 2003." *AP Central*. 2004. College Board. 8 Jul 2004. <http://apcentral.collegeboard.com/ repository/ap03_grade_dist_subje_29501.xls>.

AP English

The trends and issues surrounding the AP program and its growth have specific implications for the field of English, and more specifically the teaching of college-level writing. English was the first subject offered by the original pilot program and is now the largest of all AP programs by far. In 2003, almost half of the students involved in AP (405,236) took one of two English exams (CB, *AP Research and Data*). Furthermore, since AP English scores are commonly used to award credit and/or placement for first-year composition (FYC) requirements, college writing program administrators and faculty have a vested interested in critically examining the AP English program and advocating college policies that reflect their institutional and programmatic mission and goals.

Initially, the English AP program consisted of a single exam and corresponding course: English Literature and Composition. In 1980, a second course and exam were

developed, English Language and Composition, creating the current AP English Program. According to the official course description, AP English Literature and Composition is generally designed to be the equivalent of an introductory course in English *literature*. It "invites students to explore a variety of genres and literary periods and to write clearly about the literature they encounter." Its emphasis is primarily on "imaginative texts" (i.e., fiction, drama, poetry, and belletristic essays) and literary analysis. Although the AP program provides suggestions for course syllabi, teaching strategies and reading lists, it does not prescribe explicit course structure and content beyond general guidelines, which encourage courses where students are required to "read critically, think clearly, and write concisely" in order to cultivate "a rich understanding of literary works" and acquire "analytical skills." The College Board adds, "While students should have exposure to a variety of works, it is also important to make sure they get to know several works of literary merit in depth" (CB, *AP English Literature and Composition Course Perspective*). Clearly, the study of literature is the focus of such a course, unlike FYC, which usually does not focus on literature.

In contrast, the AP English Language course is designed as an approximation of a first-year composition (FYC) course. The current course description explains that the Language course should engage "students in becoming skilled readers of prose written in a variety of periods, disciplines, and rhetorical contexts and in becoming skilled writers who compose for a variety of purposes." The course is designed to develop both critical reading and writing skills by helping students to become aware of the interaction of a "writer's purposes, audience expectations, and subjects as well as the way generic conventions and the resources of language contribute to effectiveness in writing" (CB,

AP English Language and Composition Course Perspective). It is important to note that the integration of rhetoric in the curriculum and exams for AP English Language is a relatively recent development. This change has shifted the focus of the course away from stylistic analysis to more appropriately correspond with skills typically focused on in FYC.

Literature vs. Language

Although the College Board's course descriptions designate the Literature and Composition course as equivalent to an introductory *literature* course and the Language and Composition as equivalent to a first-year *composition* course, many institutions (such as Brigham Young University) award FYC credit for either exam. In fact, 8 of the top 10 schools receiving AP grades[1] (measured by the number of exam scores sent to a given school irrespective of credit awarded) give composition credit for both the Language and the Literature exams (though the degree to which these credits satisfy the individual FYC requirement varies). In discussing the review of the AP policy at their own institution, Mahala and Vivion note that they were surprised that few members of the English faculty were aware that two exams even existed (43)—an even more surprising discovery considering the fact that their article was published *13 years after the second exam was introduced.* Presumably, other institutions have failed to recognize this key distinction in the articulation of credit and placement policies. However, the distinctions made by the AP program and the content of most first-year composition and introductory literature courses obviously attest to the fact that these two courses are designed with significantly

[1] The Top Ten Colleges and Universities Receiving AP Grades: 1) University of Texas – Austin; 2) University of California – Los Angeles; 3) University of Florida; 4) University of California – Berkeley; 5) University of California – San Diego; 6) Texas A&M University – College Station; 7) University of Illinois – Urbana; 8) University of Michigan – Ann Arbor; 9) Brigham Young University; 10) University of North Carolina – Chapel Hill (CB, *The 200 Colleges*).

different objectives in mind, and thus warrant individual review in determining what type of credit or placement, if any, is awarded.

On the question of whether the two English Exams differ much or little, and if should be treated differently in policy formation, Holladay summarizes a range of answers. On one side she quotes, Paul Smith, chief reader for the 1981-82 exam, who states that both exams have shared or similar features which "reflect the obvious fact that the formal study of ordinary language differs little, if at all, from the study of literary language" (qtd. in Holladay 78). She goes on to note, "However, Mellon, speaking for the NCTE Committee to Study the National Assessment of Education Progress refutes this position: 'Writing about literature constitutes a particular kind of rhetorical task, and students ordinarily require special instruction in order to perform it.' It seems that, to be consistent with other educational practices," Holladay concludes, "college credit should be granted for the specific area of intensive study and performance in the AP program" (78). While this explanation is notably dated, the reality of current policy trends and debates between literature and composition within English departments suggest that it is still salient. Further, following this argument, awarding FYC credit for the AP Literature exam would only seem appropriate if students at a given institution were permitted to satisfy the FYC requirement by taking an introductory literature course. But the larger issue is not which exam is more appropriate for awarding FYC credit, but whether college credit should be awarded at all in high school.

AP and Broader CLLHS Trends

While college-level learning in high school can be a positive experience for prepared students, providing a more challenging and continuous educational experience,

the expectation that these programs can effectively replace the first year or two of college raises significant concerns and issues for the various stakeholders involved in these programs (i.e., parents, students, schools, state government, colleges, etc.). In a study sponsored by the Association of American Colleges & Universities, Johnstone and Del Genio explain,

> When "college-level learning in high school" mainly meant high-achieving high-school students wanting not early graduation, but merely to get accepted into an elite college . . . and perhaps to skip over a few introductory college courses, the effect on the college curriculum was less material and there were few, if any, real issues. Now, when very many students of only moderate levels of academic preparation are carrying into college supposed "college credits" and wanting to use them for early gradation, both the teaching roles and the traditional curricular authority of the college faculty seem profoundly threatened. (viii)

Johnstone and Del Genio also note that despite the prevalence of the AP and other CLLHS programs, the phenomenon of college-level learning in high school has been minimally studied (vii). The specific literature on AP is clearly dated and little independent research has been published. In fact, one the most recent major articles published on the subject (Mahala and Vivion) was published over ten years ago. However, As Johnstone and Del Genio point out, this growing trend of CLLHS calls for renewed examination.

While the general concept of AP English suggests a myriad of benefits for many stakeholders and in fact has many supporters, it is not without its critics. Moreover, the rapid expansion of the AP program in recent years has left many questioning whether the AP English experience actually fulfills the promises suggested by the program. Recent efforts to dramatically expand the program have raised more serious concerns amongst both secondary and college educators and administrators. Furthermore, issues raised by the presence and expansion of AP intersect with other discussions such as secondary school reform, continuity of education from secondary to post-secondary education, the rising cost of college education, and the increase in numbers of students transferring college credit as a result of greater student mobility.

This thesis seeks to contextualize the current literature and critiques of the AP English program from a perspective that encourages college writing program administrators and faculty to effectively formulate and evaluate AP English credit and placement policies. Of primary concern is the fact that policy decisions are rarely made by WPAs or English department faculty. At most institutions, AP policies are instead determined by institutional administrators or governing entities (i.e., state legislatures) and are highly influenced by the efforts and claims of the College Board. In fact, Mahala and Vivion note that "the economic and political forces" that result from the combined interests of such diverse stakeholders "are likely to continue to shape the development of AP programs and policy more than departmental debate unless WPAs and other well-positioned educators do more to inform colleagues about AP" (Mahala and Vivion 44). Thus, an underlying assumption in this thesis is that college English departments and postsecondary institutions (rather than the College Board) ought to determine the role AP

plays in their curriculum. In order to examine the issues that affect the formulation of policies, this thesis will closely examine an empirical study conducted at Brigham Young University intended to evaluate the predictive validity of AP exams. Conclusions will be drawn from this study to suggest how a policy can be formulated that responds sensitively and fairly to all the stakeholders.

Chapter 2

Contextualizing AP English

Formulating, evaluating, and advocating AP English policies that challenge long-accepted assumptions requires a clear understanding of the complex and tightly interwoven context in which such discussions take place. While Chapter 1 explored the trends and issues surrounding current discussions of AP English policies, Chapter 2 seeks to place those discussions within the more complex context of political and economic forces that affect higher education as well as the discipline-specific critiques of the AP English exams and courses. While most literature generated within the discipline acknowledges all aspects of this context, few if any studies outline in depth the full spectrum of these arguments and discussions. Thus, this chapter reviews existing literature relating to AP English, seeking first to identify the expectations and investments of various stakeholders outside the discipline. Second, it explores the critiques of the exams and courses that have led many WPAs and faculty to question existing policies and the College Board's recommendations for granting credit and/or placement.

As noted in Chapter 1, evaluating and changing institutional policies requires the consideration and negotiation of the demands of a complex set of shareholders and the constraints of the political and economic realities that influence higher education. Other stakeholders do not necessarily approach AP policies from the same context as discipline-

specific faculty and administration. As Foster, Vopat, Metzger and others are quick to acknowledge, AP English is surrounded by a myriad of political and economic assumptions and realities that influence not only credit and placement policies at institutions of higher learning, but the growth of the AP program itself, how the program is implemented and supported in secondary schools, and what attitudes and expectations are developed by students, parents, administrators and various political entities involved in education. I will discuss six of these significant factors: financial stakes, recruitment and admissions, credit hours and curricular coherence, definitions of "college-level," AP and secondary schools, and institutional articulation.

Financial Stakes

Altruistic and educational motives aside, the AP program involves significant financial stakes. Vopat, citing Gettleman points out, "'AP testing is a million dollar business.' Actually, it is a multimillion-dollar business [and] the economic issues surrounding AP English cut in a number of directions" (*Politics* 62). For the sponsoring organizations of the AP program, exam revenues can be substantial. Foster notes, "It seems to have been taken for granted then (as it apparently still is) that, in the words of a recent AP pamphlet 'many young people can, with profit and delight, complete college-level studies in their secondary schools.' But for whose delight and whose profit?" (4). Critics such as Owen, Nairn and Vopat (*Politics*) point out that the non-profit status of ETS, the organization which administers the exam, has come under considerable scrutiny. These issues aside, the 1.7 million exams being administered at $82 each add up to significant revenues for both ETS and the College Board.

Furthermore, in the face of rising educational costs, the $82[2] per exam is a paltry price for students and their parents to pay for 3 to 6 semester hours of university credit. When students can receive up to a year's worth of credits through AP Exams, effectively entering college as a sophomore, the financial benefits can become even more substantial. Vopat perceptively points out, "Not surprisingly, the promotional materials for Advanced Placement stress economic incentives as much as academic enrichment" (*Politics* 62). Students, Iorio further points out, "have been turned into eager consumers by the promise that they will take advanced courses, perhaps receive college credit. . . and be spared the agonies and boredom of freshman English" (144).

Thus, demand for AP is very much driven by market forces. However, the College Board also puts substantial effort into marketing their product. An internal report explains, "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" (*Access to Excellence: A Report* 6). Furthermore, the College Board actively lobbies at both state and federal levels to encourage government mandates and support for AP in high schools and liberal credit/placement policies in colleges and universities. Foster notes, "While AP is not one of ETS's financial cornucopias, it does profit and delight them: it puts an ETS program directly into high school curricula and college catalogs, it enlists the eager cooperation of secondary and college faculties, and it maintains a visibility within the academic

[2] According to the College Board, students with "acute financial need" can qualify for a $22 fee reduction. In such cases, the individual schools administering the exam forego the $8 rebate they normally receive. Additionally, in more than 40 states, and many US territories, federal and state funds are used to supplement this fee reduction from $10 to $49; however, in these cases, the College Board still receives the reduced fee amount of $60 per exam. (CB, *State and Federal Support*)

community crucial to ETS's continued flourishing" (5). Likewise, the College Board presumably shares in both the revenues and recognition generated by AP.

Furthermore, both college administrators and the political entities that oversee such institutions see AP as a means of reducing time to graduation, which has become a growing concern at many colleges. If students can enter college with up to a year's worth of credits, the argument goes, they will presumably graduate in a more timely matter, if not ahead of schedule. This is particularly appealing to state legislators, and boards of regents who oversee and subsidize state schools. "If performance is what matters, according to this view. . . . why not give [ambitious high schools students] the college credential and get them 'on their way'?" ask Johnstone and Del Genio. "The possibilities that 'getting them on their way' might save parents some tuition, might also save taxpayers some of the costs of accommodating students in public colleges, and might further save some students a semester or two and get them more expeditiously into the real adult labor market are thought, by some, to be the further benefits of enhanced college-level learning in high school" (vii).

These expectations may hold true for some students; however, there is little evidence that the majority of AP students use these credits to shorten their time to graduation. Cusker explains, "This claim seems to have an appealing logic. Students entering college with enough credits would have fewer to complete and would therefore finish more quickly. However, despite more than 40 years of AP history, the evidence is sporadic and not convincing" (*The Use of Advanced Placement Credit*). Furthermore, BYU's internal statistics echo Cusker's findings, indicating that the time to graduation

for students entering the university with substantial AP credits does not vary significantly from that of the average students without such credit.

A number of factors seem to influence this phenomenon. First, AP credits do not always apply to graduation requirements. Even when credit is given for a required course, often AP scores result in additional "empty credits" being awarded as colleges and universities follow the recommendations of the College Board and award 6 credits for a 2-semester course that culminates in a single exam (AP Central). For example, at Brigham Young University, students can receive up to 12 credits if they take both AP English exams and score a 3 or higher. However, only three of these credits are counted toward the university's FYC requirement. The remaining 9 are labeled elective credit and essentially have no bearing on progress towards graduation. Conceivably, a student can in fact be granted "sophomore standing" on the basis of AP exams, but in terms of actual course work completed, they have only fulfilled a semester's worth (or less) of their graduation requirements.

Beyond the mathematics of credits and graduation progress, many AP students use their advanced standing to pursue more challenging courses of study—adding more electives, a second major, or additional minors to the standard degree requirements. Arguably, this is perhaps the most beneficial result of AP credits; however, it reduces the validity of the argument that AP actually results in reduced educational costs.

Recruitment and Admissions

These factors aside, pressure to retain liberal AP credit policies often originates from admissions officers who see them as a means of recruiting exceptional students. The American Federation of Teachers explains, "Colleges and universities are in competition

with each other for students, and setting higher standards is not usually seen as enhancing a college's competitive position" (5). Johnstone and Del Genio corroborate this finding, arguing, "There are possible benefits to the colleges and universities where students carrying college credits earned in high school may matriculate. The rationale for accepting credits earned in high school is simply to meet a student expectation within a marketplace where the reluctance to grant credit—and especially graduation credit—may lose an otherwise desirable student prospect to a competing college or university that will" (30-32).

On the flip side, students accurately perceive AP courses (and in some cases exam scores) as a means to a more competitive college application. Johnstone and Del Genio argue that the increasing competition among at least the more able and competitive high school students to get into a selective college or university is a background theme for college-level learning in high school issues (25). Furthermore, the American Federation of Teachers explains, "Through their admissions policies, colleges and universities exert a powerful influence on the content of the public school curriculum and on the courses taken by students who aspire to a college education" (1).

Surveys of college admissions policies indicate that such a strategy is indeed advantageous to college-bound students. Herr and Hershey both indicate that a large majority of institutions reward AP participation in the admissions process (often irrespective of grades or test scores). Herr reports:

> In response to these expanding programs [AP and honors in HS], 75% of the colleges surveyed have developed specific policies for dealing with such advanced coursework. Twenty-five percent of the admissions

> committees award an extra grade point for advanced classes, while 45% accord applications with considerable AP or honors credit priority processing, and 66% give special points for such work when ranking applications. . . .While the official policies treat AP and honors coursework alike, it was clear that admissions officers do not believe them to be academic equivalents. . . . Admissions officers place significantly more confidence in the academic preparation students receive in Advanced Placement than parallel honors coursework. (53)

While it seems appropriate to reward students for ambitious high school coursework through college admissions policies, the preference granted AP courses over other forms of honors work can be problematic since different schools offer different opportunities. On the other hand, using liberal AP policies to attract ambitious students may potentially devalue the educational experience of both AP and the subsequent college courses.

Credit Hours and Curricular Coherence

AP issues are also closely related to broader discussions of the meaning of credits in relation to broader institutional aims—especially in considering the ever-evolving identity of general education programs. Shoenberg explains that the creation of credit hours as the "standard unit of academic currency" in the early 20th century was originally designed to bring integrity to a higher education system "then rife with diploma mills" (2). However, as student mobility increases, the credit system once designed to ensure curricular integrity has led to a type of commodification in higher education that now often works against the broader goals of curricular coherence. Shoenberg posits:

> The convenience of the credit hour as common currency has driven out the better but far less fungible currency of intellectual purpose and curricular coherence. How easy it is to define a baccalaureate degree as 120 credit hours . . . . And how easy to plug each course into a formula linking class hours . . . to units of credit. But what do these hours mean in terms of the educational intentions of the courses and the connections among them? Do they cohere n the minds of individual professors and students? When added together, do they comprise a meaningful whole? (2-3)

While Shoenberg's discussion focuses primarily on credit transfer and student mobility, the issues he raises are salient to discussions on college-level learning in high school and specifically AP. In short, the more students bring credits with them to a given institution, the less likely the intuitions will be able to enforce a strong sense of curricular coherence. Johnstone and Del Genio explain,

> Much of the criticism of college–level learning in high school touches upon two issues: *credit*, i.e., Is this learning truly college level and what can this mean given the enormous range of academic standards in American higher education? Or *turf*, i.e., Which is to say, what standards should be [set for awarding] college credit, [by whom,] and to what degree are the answers corrupted by less-than-legitimate considerations of self interest? (11)

While many institutions could conceivably argue that attending classes on a college campus as a fully matriculated student is key to the definition of "college-level" learning, those institutions which identify themselves as having a particularly unique

academic and/or social identity are more likely to object to students fulfilling general education courses in another setting. If a general education program is designed around a specific set of cohesive objectives conceived as a foundation for advanced coursework (rather than just a broad sampling of introductory courses), allowing students to carry credits from other institutions becomes increasingly disruptive to those objectives. Furthermore, for highly selective schools, that means losing to some degree, the sense of exceptionality that often defines their programs (let alone, justifies their costs). Johnstone and Del Genio explain, “Those who view a high school learning experience as inherently different . . . than a college experience are likely to resist the substitution of college-level learning in high school for, say, *their* freshman-year experience” (2). This explains the trend noted by Lichten of highly selective colleges and universities raising AP standards and/or eliminating credit for AP completely.

Definitions of “College-Level”

When credits are carried, not from another college, but from a high school experience, criticism increases and the debate over the definition of “college-level” broadens. For many institutions and frequently for writing programs that sponsor FYC, course objectives go beyond a discrete, quantifiable set of skills. Johnstone and Del Genio further explain:

> The more fundamental criticism of college-level learning in high school, . . . is the belief that ‘college-level’ ought to signal something more than mere content mastery, however assessed and by whomever taught. Rather, some would claim, college-level ought also reflect learning that comes from the association with young (and no-so-young) adults in the college or

> university setting, as well as contending with the kind of independence and absence of structure associated with college and university academic life and generally absent in the high school setting. A variation on this theme is based on the principle underlying some undergraduate general education programs that a critical component of a required general education core goes beyond the content to the shared learning experience itself. (Johnstone and Del Genio 13)

Often FYC courses are designed with such aims and objectives in mind. For many students, FYC is not just a class in writing, but facilitates the critical transition from high school to college that is difficult, if not impossible, to duplicate in a high school setting. As many composition scholars have noted, first-year writing classes are often more than just a forum for writing instruction. They provide a setting where students can learn to challenge their ways of thinking and communicating as they prepare for more challenging academic demands across the curriculum. Furthermore, the often small class size and workshop pedagogy can serve as a meaningful transition point as students move from a high school to a college environment.

While the curriculum of an AP classroom can potentially recreate the curriculum of FYC, it is questionable whether or not it can serve the boarder purposes of FYC, in part, because it is often viewed by students as a terminal educational landmark, rather than a transitional experience. While some students may be able to make this transition on their own, Henderson's research and that of others suggests that these students are in the minority. Henderson explains, "The kind of thinking encouraged in high school differs from that expected in universities. Although both want to encourage critical

thinking . . . in college, students are expected to develop and demonstrate much deeper faculties for analysis and critical reflection" (331). While AP English can be an excellent *preparation* for college, there is reason to question its ability to adequately prepare all students for the demands of writing in a university environment.

AP and Secondary Schools

Beyond college level politics, much of the support and encouragement for AP programs comes from the high school level where the AP program is seen primarily as a mark of excellence for individual schools and a significant force for educational reform. "Although Advanced Placement is most common in schools with a large segment of college-track students," Foster explains, "it is given an honored position in most school curricula, attracting the best-motivated students and, usually, the best prepared senior teachers. High school administrators also find AP attractive since it can increase the visibility of college-bound students and thus enhance the school's prestige with respect to the schools in the area" (4). Iorio, like Vopat, points out, however, that a degree of elitism is associated with the program that can have both good and bad consequences:

> The pressure of prestige is also present. Principals look to AP courses to raise standards or to decorate a lackluster curriculum. Schools like to announce the number of students who have gone on to advanced courses in college. Teachers vie for AP courses, knowing that being anointed as Advanced Placement teachers and assigned courses more sophisticated than the general run of the mill offerings confers upon them an enviable aura. (Iorio 144)

To educational reformers, however, “AP and other forms of college-level learning in high school are leading the way toward a more rigorous high school curriculum and higher standards. . . . [They are] the new ‘gold standard’ of high school curricular quality and learning standards” (Johnstone and Del Genio viii, 1). Because of the potential to provide a clear mark of achievement amidst fragmented debates on standards at state, federal, and local levels, AP is highly valued by secondary school teachers and administrators. In turn, this accounts for a great deal of support by state and federal governments. Crooks found that “State interest in college-level learning was found to be motivated most often by curricular improvement rationales (59 percent).”

Ironically, such support is sometimes to blame for the “watering down” of the AP talent pool described by Lichten. In some cases, state mandates and subsidies result in sweeping policies that require all students to take AP exams on the off chance that they may score high enough to receive credit. In other cases, mandates that require AP to be offered in all schools can cause schools without appropriate resources and preparation to offer ineffectual classes filled with unprepared students (Lichten).

However, in most cases, AP is seen as advantageous not only for the students, but also for teachers. Prestige aside, AP provides professional development opportunities high school teachers rarely have access to. The National Commission on the High School Senior Year notes, “Unlike university professors, high school teachers have little time or opportunity to keep abreast of new knowledge or to interact with their colleagues” (9). However, teachers involved in AP are invited to summer workshops and provided other training materials. Furthermore, for those involved in the annual AP English Reading, the event often serves as a vital opportunity to communicate with colleagues and college

faculty across the country. Moreover, being involved in a national organization can provide insight and guidance helping teachers to cut through the often confusing and limited scope of state mandated standards. AP provides teachers with a national yardstick by which to measure their own students' achievement. To some, this broad, often unchecked influence of ETS and the College Board is troubling; however, as one high school teacher remarked to me during an informal conversation, for many teachers, it's the best set of standards they have to ensure they are preparing their students for success in college and beyond.

Institutional Articulation

For the AP program, the enthusiasm of high school faculty is crucial to their success. However, the College Board also recognizes that this enthusiasm often masks a dearth of college faculty involvement. In a recent report, the commission to study the growth of the AP program writes, "We recommend that the College Board aggressively recruit and involve even more college faculty in all aspects of AP" (CB, *Access to Excellence: A Report* 13).

Ultimately, the discussion of AP exposes the lack of institutional articulation between the secondary schools and colleges (see American Federation, Johnstone and Del Genio, Kellogg, Kirst, and National Commission on the High School Senior Year). This fact is mentioned in several studies on the high school senior year and educational continuity. One study notes that K-12 and postsecondary systems "operate independently of each other, each with its own governance and finance mechanisms, its own politics, goals and objectives, and even institutional culture. In many states, leaders of the two systems rarely, if ever, meet and may even have incentives not to do so because their

interests in such matters as public funding, often conflict" (National Commission on the High School Senior Year 5). Ironically, while debates over AP often lead to various stakeholders effectively talking past one another, AP is also seen as a meeting ground for parties with diverse but overlapping interests. Kirst notes, "In recent years, a number of policy makers and educators have questioned the premise that the policies guiding K-12 schools and higher education ought to be totally distinct. They consider this assumption to be anachronistic and an impediment to educational improvements at both levels" (iv).

Both as a means of eliminating curricular overlap for students, and as a point of contact for faculty, AP can serve as a bridge between secondary and higher education. However, as many of these arguments point out, often decisions involving AP policies are made by those with limited information and expertise. The American Federation of Teachers argues,

> Politicians [and often administrators] of all stripes have a tendency to embrace quick fixes and fads, and, when these don't work, to resort to another quick fix or name-calling. Regional accrediting agencies, which have little faculty union input, set one set of standards; state agencies set other standards; academic disciplinary organizations and specialized accrediting agencies set still others. Too few institutions in authority are willing to allow faculty to take the lead in devising and implementing reform strategies. (5)

Critiques of AP English

College faculty often express attitudes towards AP English ranging from mild skepticism to disparagement. While high school-level stakeholders are overwhelmingly supportive of AP, many scholars in various fields voice concern that the program, openly and forcefully pitched as college-level learning, does not necessarily align in theory, content, or pedagogy with equivalent college courses. In the case of English, these critiques focus first on the exams, but more importantly they focus on the influence of the exams on the learning experience in both the AP classroom and subsequent college courses.

In reviewing the existing literature relating to AP English, it is important to remember a few key qualifications. First, little has been published in the last 10 years, making most critiques somewhat dated. Second, the available literature tends to be lacking in both quantity and scope. Few empirical studies have been published and most recent studies have been sponsored by either ETS, the College Board, or both. Furthermore, much of the remaining literature relies on anecdotal evidence.

This being said, many of the concerns raised in these critiques are provocative and are often repeated by enough authors to warrant continued attention. At the very least, the existing literature suggested the need for continued exploration and questioning of the assumptions and claims underlying AP English. After outlining the process used to develop AP courses, I will discuss critiques concerning the theoretical foundations of the exams, multiple-choice questions, essay questions, the exam scoring process, predictive validity of exam scores, exam impact on course pedagogy, and cognitive development and writing instruction.

Course Development

The AP program is based on the assumption that AP courses are essentially introductory, college-level courses. That is, the program assumes that AP course have the same general objectives, present the same information, and develop the same skills as their college counterparts. Consequently, AP exams purport to measure adequately and accurately the same knowledge and skills evaluated in the equivalent college classrooms. In designing exams and course materials, the College Board relies on trends and subject-specific guidelines articulated by scholars and professional organization within a given field since the diversity of curricula offered at various institutions prevents AP courses from being exact replicas of their college equivalents. However, the College Board puts significant effort into designing courses and exams that reflect what is happening at most institutions. Furthermore, "The College Board and the Educational Testing Service. . . take pains to assure that the examinations not only test what colleges and universities are teaching in their introductory course, but that grading standards do indeed reflect what the comparable examination performance would have earned for a matriculated college student in a counterpart college course" (Johnstone and Del Genio 15).

According to the College Board, the continued development of any course relies on two key components. First, surveys are periodically sent to colleges and universities that offer the course to determine the general content. Second, the College Board selects a Development committee, composed of six or seven "highly qualified secondary school and college teachers" (AP Central). The committee determines the specific content of the course and is heavily involved in the writing and testing of the corresponding exams. It is important to note that course and exam development is an ongoing process, and periodic

reviews of each course and exam are used to ensure that materials reflect changes and trends within individual disciplines.

Theoretical Foundation

Despite the efforts of the College Board to review and revise course guidelines and exams, many critics argue that the principles, theories and practices that inform AP English deviate significantly from those in both composition specifically and English studies in general. Perhaps the most significant questions to be asked of AP English (or any AP program) involve the fundamental claim that AP courses represent the equivalent of introductory college courses. In the words of Mahala and Vivion, "Do the exams that lead to the granting of credit reflect mastery of the same knowledge, the same critical thinking abilities, and the same academic competencies as the courses for which they substitute?" (43).

A handful of scholars, including Foster and Mahala and Vivion, have examined the implicit theories of composition, language, and literature expressed in the AP English exams and related program literature (i.e. teacher and student guides, course descriptions, etc.). In reviewing these critiques, it is important to note that over the past few years, significant adjustments in the course descriptions, exams and training materials manifest apparent attempts to more accurately align AP English with contemporary trends in the teaching of introductory college English. However, many elements of the exams—elements that the majority of scholars see as inherent limitations in the exam design—continue to concern critics of AP English.

The Problems of Multiple-Choice

Until recently, the Language and Composition course consisted of three types of questions: multiple choice sentence transformations, multiple-choice critical analysis of short passages, and free-response essays. Most troublesome for critics for the exams have been the sentence transformation questions which asked students to recast sentences in order to achieve a stylistic improvement of some kind. Although these types of questions have been removed from the exam format in the last couple years, a substantial amount of literature identifies why they are problematic. Further, this literature reflects the significant lag of the AP exams behind contemporary writing assessment practices. Foster cites two examples from a 1986 course description, arguing that while some questions require students to revise in order to create a tighter, more coherent sentence, others require arbitrary, unjustifiable changes (9-11). Furthermore, James Vopat cites examples of questions that not only require unjustifiable, decontextualized sentence revisions, but often require syntactical changes beyond those indicated by the available answers. The validity of such questions is problematic since exam instructions explicitly tell students to only make changes indicated by the directions (*Politics* 55).

Beyond the inconsistency and ambiguity often present in these questions, of greater concern is the reinforcement of a mechanistic, decontextualized view of writing that stems from this type of question. Foster notes that the arbitrary and superficial revision exemplified by sentence transformation questions on the AP Language and Composition exam reinforces behavior associated with inexperienced freshmen writers. He explains, "Such questions, requiring students to edit small pieces of discourse, discourage the readiness for holistic revision that is at the heart of current writing

pedagogy. And when the required changes appear [pointless], . . . student test takers will read the message clearly: college writing must be a matter of fixing mechanics, words and sentences. . . in order to conform to arbitrary expectations" (10). In addition to reinforcing this view of writing and revision, implicit in sentence revision questions is a distinctly arhetorical view of language. Mahala and Vivion argue that such questions imply that "sentences are presumed atoms of meaning about which stylistic decisions can be made in isolation from a writer's communicative intentions" (48).

In the current course description for AP English Language and Composition (and presumably the corresponding exam), this type of multiple-choice question has been eliminated. However, the remaining multiple-choice questions, and to a lesser extent the essay questions, continue to reinforce theoretical perspectives that most scholars find reductive and outdated. The majority of current multiple-choice questions require student to analyze short passages either in terms of comprehension and inference, or identification of rhetorical devices, elements, and modes. Mahala and Vivion argue that in the latter type, rhetorical elements "are presumed to be universal ingredients of arrangement or style" (48). Certainly, sample questions from the 2003-2004 course description suggest that test developers have made efforts to respond positively to these critiques. Compare the two sample questions below. The first, cited by Mahala and Vivion is taken from a 1987 exam, while the second is from the most recent course description.

Example 1

Question from the *1987 AP English Language and Composition Exam*

The first and second paragraphs of the passage both present

A. elaborate metaphors

B. series of parallel constructions

C. extended definitions

D. concessions to opposing viewpoints

E. cause and effect relationships. (qtd. by Mahala and Vivion 48)

Example 2

Question from the *2003-2004 AP English Course Description: Language and Composition*

In relation to the passage as a whole, the statement in the first sentence presents

A. a metaphor that introduces the subject of the passage

B. a list of the various views that the passage will analyze

C. an anecdote that illustrates the main theme of the passage

D. an antithesis, both sides of which are commented on in the passage

E. an assumption against which the rest of the passage argues. (15)

Clearly, an attempt has been made to see the text, if not within a specific rhetorical context, at least as more than a simple collection of rhetorical tools. However, other questions from the same course description indicate that many multiple-choice questions continue to risk reducing rhetorical analysis to decontextualized identification of nomenclature, as the following example illustrates:

Example 3

Question from the *2003-2004 AP English Course Description: Language and Composition*

> In lines 32-38 ("And thus. . . honour of our writings"), the speaker employs which of the following rhetorical strategies?
>
> A. Argument by analogy
>
> B. Appeal to emotion
>
> C. Understatement
>
> D. Shift in point of view
>
> E. Euphemism. (15)

The effect of such questions, according to Mahala and Vivion and corroborated by Foster's and Vopat's analysis, is a sharp focus on the form of passages in isolation from content. "Questions like these reduce rhetoric to a repository of preconceived formal patterns that are mechanically analyzed by readers and, presumably, applied by writers . . . . They derive from positivist rhetorics. . . that see language mainly as a passive medium secondary to the generation of ideas, a mechanical tool for transmission of message" (Mahala and Vivion 48). Markham presents a similar argument, "Clearly, words, language, and tests are all filled with ambiguity. The variety of interpretations that a text offers is both maddening and wonderful—examining ambiguity is at the heart of solid English pedagogy. If we agree with this, then isn't an 'objective answer' test fundamentally at odds with our teaching?" (19).

Multiple-choice questions on the Literature exam reflect a similar perspective, asking students to identify the implicit meaning of phrases or identifying formalistic elements of a passage. As several critics have pointed out, these questions embrace a mechanistic, decontextualized approach to literature associated with New Criticism. As with the Language exam, recent sample questions from the Literature exam reflect an

effort to embrace a more complex view of language and literature that reflects contemporary literary theories; however, the very nature of a multiple choice exam places stringent limitations on these efforts. Markham argues that multiple-choice questions further diminish the focus of the communicative and social implications of a text that he argues are fundamental to the teaching of English.

> The AP English exams demand that students demonstrate the ability to analyze texts atomistically as well as holistically; yet, they do little to assess whether students have scrutinized the basic premises of a text in regard to 'truth' and what the implications of a text could be on a personal and global level. In other words, the tests focus on only half (at best) of what we English teachers should be teaching. (18)

Despite the instructions on exams and admission within course materials that multiple interpretations of a given text can be considered valid (thus, students are asked not for the *right* answer, but for the *best* answer), the very format of the test "demands that meaning must be located in snippets of texts and that experts are authorized to determine without argument the 'best' meanings" (Mahala and Vivion 50). In short, given the nature of multiple-choice questions, most college English faculty simply find them an inappropriate means of evaluating learning, let alone awarding credit (Mahala and Vivion 45). Ironically, a report published by the National Commission on Writing (a commission sponsored by the College Board), also argues that in most cases, multiple-choice tests are inappropriate measures of writing ability (29).

It is important to recognize that such concerns are detached from the reliability and effectiveness of the actual assessment. Clearly, ETS puts substantial effort to ensure

the reliability of their assessment tools. However, as the only completely standardized element of the AP program, exams clearly influence both teacher and student perceptions as well as classroom content and practice (see "Exam Impact on Pedagogy" in this chapter). Thus, the claims made by the College Board about the nature and outcomes of AP English impact the role of the exam developed by ETS. The exams, therefore, cease to be isolated assessment tools and, in turn, play an active role in shaping the program and its outcomes.

Therefore, the contradiction between what the College Board asserts about writing assessment in the AP exams and in the report produced by their own Commission on Writing is troublesome. The gap between the Commission on Writing's recommendations and the AP exam format suggest that the motives behind the design of the AP exam are far more centered on efficiency (and perhaps, cost effectiveness), than on promoting learning at the college-level—a slightly disturbing notion given the significant financial benefits of the AP program for both the College Board and ETS. Presumably, a program driven in part by demands of the market would have the means to invest in developing exams more aligned with discipline-sanctioned assessment measures. Scholars, such as Jones, have consistently advocated the restructuring of exams to eliminate multiple-choice questions. So the question remains, why, in the face of extensive criticism, do the multiple-choice questions remain a significant portion of the exams?

Free-Response Questions and Impromptu, Timed Essays

Like the multiple-choice questions, essay questions on the AP English exams can convey the false notion that there is an absolute right or wrong answer in rhetorical

analysis, composition, and literary interpretation. That is not to say that prompts are consciously designed to convey this impression; in fact, the opposite is probably true. Most seem clearly worded to avoid such implicit messages. However, critics such as Metzger, Markham, Aarons, and others are quick to point out that the methods of scoring these questions, the nature of timed impromptu writing assignments, and the social, economic, and political pressure that encourages a significant amount of ‘teaching to the test” in AP classrooms creates a circumstance that can encourage formulaic, simplistic, and arhetorical writing.

The result is a clear split between the product of writing and the process of writing—a separation adamantly rejected in contemporary composition theory and practice—which is exacerbated in a timed, impromptu testing environment. Mahala and Vivion argue, “As many composition scholars have noted, in fact, the kind of writing such an exam calls for is inimical to the emphasis of modern literature and composition pedagogy on the epistemic functions of language and the development of complex ideas” (46). Citing Bartholomae and Petrosky, they continue, “Highly complex ideas, which frequently call for highly complex and therefore easily mistaken syntax, are perhaps too risky for this [exam] situation” (46).

Certainly, AP materials give weight (or at least pay lip service) to teaching writing as a process. Course materials discourage instructors from limiting writing assignments in the AP class to timed writing. Furthermore, the materials encourage instructors to teach the writing process and argue that activities such as peer coaching, editing in small groups, and producing multiple drafts enhances students’ overall abilities. However, still Mahala and Vivion argue that “the exam gives credence to the

assumption frequently made in such [positivist] rhetorics: that ‘the writing process’ is a universal set of cognitive operations that does not change significantly even in radically different rhetorical contexts” (48). There is obvious truth in the assertions that a process-based approach to writing can improve overall abilities that may be reflected in impromptu writing assessments; however, there is little reason to assume that in a timed AP exam, all students will accurately represent in their essays that they have acquired these skills. Foster outlines his own process of attempting to respond to an AP prompt. After reading and analyzing an actual prompt in preparation for writing an essay in 40 minutes, he notes,

> These prewriting notes took me ten minutes to compose. Now I have barely half an hour to write the essay, and I have to use a pencil, not the word processor I usually write on. With so little writing time, I must follow the pattern my outline dictates and be careful to develop only enough examples to please the readers without deviating from my chosen organization. If I go on a tangent, I’m lost because I don’t have time to explore it and to refocus or reshape my argument. My first thoughts freeze my thinking into a pattern I dare not abandon. I cannot revise. All that I have learned about composing evaporates as I watch the clock on the wall mark the waning minutes. (11)

While this experience is obviously anecdotal and may not represent the experience of all test takers, it certainly raises questions about the reliability of timed, impromptu essays to measure overall writing abilities. Furthermore, the enforced composing process Foster describes seems to directly contradict the recommendations of the College Board’s

National Commission on Writing: “Students need enough time to plan, produce, revise, and edit a single piece of written work under test conditions. While the amount of time required may vary depending on the assessment itself, without adequate time, students cannot provide an accurate picture of their abilities” (22). Again, the contradiction between the Commission on Writing’s recommendations and the practices of the AP exams is troubling

Many scholars also note the propensity of all students (and more frequently, AP students) to develop formulaic strategies for writing. Aarons notes, “The achievement oriented student is easily lulled into believing that learning the correct form for essays results in effective prose . . . . The writer is no longer thinking but rather ‘plugging’ in ill-defined, obfuscated, and misleading terms.” Aarons continues:

> This way of looking at form has significant consequences for the problem of writing. It does so for this reason: standardized tests, like the AP English test, promote a conception of knowledge based on a standard of correctness. . . . Given the weight such tests carry in a student’s potential success in the academic hierarchy, this standard of correctness affects the way students perceive success “in English,” including the successful creation of essays. (128)

Vopat corroborates this argument, drawing on his own experience as an AP reader. He references the tradition of collecting “howlers”—essays that follow the expected form, but have significant factual errors. “For me,” Vopat argues, “howlers represent a truth concerning much of the AP student essay writing. Given the time constraints of this type of standardized test, writing by necessity becomes mechanistic. . .

. The difference between howlers and [responses presented as examples of effective essays] is that in the blanks of the latter, the learned clichés are filled in a way that draws less attention" (*Politics* 60). Metzger further asserts that the nature of the AP exams' timed, impromptu essays provides little information about students' overall writing ability. "More likely, the test provides a measure of the student's ability to read and write under pressure—a pressure that at once excludes ambiguity and reflection and encourages vague generalities" (24). Jones also echoes these concerns, advocating the revision of the exams to include revised writing such as would be found in a portfolio rather than an individual essay question.

Responding to general criticism of timed, impromptu writing, White counters some of the augments made by these authors. He points out that many critics of timed essay exams overlook the obvious fact that unlike multiple-choice exams, essay exams at least require students to produce actual writing. White is one of the few scholars weighing in on the issue that offers a counter perspective. However, in doing so, he makes a clear distinction between impromptu timed essays used by individual departments for placement and the AP program, arguing that in the face of financial constraints, timed essays are a far better option that multiple-choice exams. White further cites Mahala and Vivion's objection to multiple-choice portions of the exam, agreeing that these "do seem to be out of touch with current views of literature and rhetoric"; however, he counters their assertions that the assumptions about writing in the essay portions of the exams are "at odds with our writing program's curriculum" because, according to White, "that argument makes the common mistake of confusing a curriculum with an assessment; the exam is seeking information about students who do

have conscious control of their writing process and can show it on an essay test. Only such students deserve credit," he argues, "the rest will appropriately enough go through the curriculum" (37). In an endnote to his statements, White agrees that the AP English exam "clearly needs revision along the lines suggested by Mahala and Vivion," though he supports the potential strengths of the program as a whole (45).

Exam Scoring

Assuming that scores on the AP exam correlate with actual writing abilities, White's final argument is significant. However, compounding criticism of the theoretical foundations of the exams are accusations that far too often the process of scoring the exams and calculating the final score rewards mediocre performance. The AP program literature emphasizes the fact that on both the AP English exams, the multiple-choice section is weighted less than the essay section in calculating the final grade. (multiple choice: 45% vs. essay: 55%). When viewed from this angle, this breakdown places the emphasis on student writing in evaluating overall performance.

However, some criticize that the scoring breakdown still overemphasizes multiple-choice over essays when considering the relative amount of time spent on each portion of the exam. Mahala and Vivion argue that students generally spend only one hour on the multiple-choice section (33% of the test time), but 2 hours on the essays (67% of the test time) (45). The contrast with the 45% weighting of the multiple-choice section becomes more troublesome from this point of view, further supporting accusations that the exams devalue writing. "For those who believe that the measure of education should be the ability to deal with complex ideas in speech and writing," write Mahala and Vivion, "this extra weighting of the multiple-choice section delivers a

harmful message to students; in the overall scheme of things, writing is not worth the time it takes" (45).

Furthermore, the process used to convert composite scores to the 5-point scale seems, in the minds of many critics, to increasingly identify unprepared students as "qualified" to receive college credit. One factor influencing this phenomenon is the rapid expansion of the AP program that inevitably increases the number of unqualified students taking the exam, as mentioned in Chapter 1. Lichten argues that as the number of students participating in the exams increases, the overall quality of work represented by a given score, in turn, decreases. Specifically looking at the English Literature program, he explains that in an effort to increase access, the rapid and broad expansion of the AP program has resulted in less qualified participants instead of the highly motivated students the program initially intended to serve. Citing Haag and Camara, Lichten explains:

> From Haag's (1985) data, the average PSAT-verbal score of test takers in 1982 was an estimated 62 (recentered scale), far above average. By 1997, from Camara's (1997) data, the average had declined 9.5 points to 52.5, which is close to average (approximately 50 for the PSAT), an exceptional loss of selectivity. . . To claim that quality could be maintained in the face of such dilution of the examination taker pool would be incredible. (13)

While the College Board and ETS have adamantly argued against this accusation (see Camara, et al.), their own internal report acknowledges the challenge of maintaining quality during rapid growth. "Pragmatically, maximizing both equity and quality may not be possible in the short term" (CB, *Access to Excellence: A Report* 5). Furthermore, in an

article in the *Chronicle of Higher Education* which reported Lichten's study, the AP program director, Lee Jones, also acknowledged that "as AP has expanded, the pool of students has grown to include many who may be less talented or motivated" (Ganeshanathan A45).

Looking at how raw scores translate into the final 5-point scale, James Vopat argues that an exam receiving the final score of 3, which according to the AP scale is 'qualified' to receive college credit, "will have missed half of the multiple-choice answers and written an essay formally defined as lacking in detail, support and appropriate focus" (*Politics* 58). There seems to be an emerging gap between what the College Board defines as "qualified" and what college faculty argue constitutes college-level achievement worthy of advanced placement, let alone credit. Appropriately, Lichten notes, citing a recent survey by the Education Trust, that "the fastest growing courses in high schools are college level (AP) [but] the biggest growth in college courses has been high school level, remedial courses" (13). Lichten argues "only a minority of students are capable of doing college-level work in advance. Otherwise, standard introductory college courses would be unnecessary" (13). While this may seem an obvious statement, the growth of AP and the achievement reflected by AP scores in English suggest that many students, parents, teachers, and policy makers may be taking other factors into consideration (which will be discussed later in this chapter) when supporting AP and, thus, overlook this observation.

Of equal or greater concern to most critics, however, is the practical and political context of the annual AP reading, which many have accused as being the primary reason that AP scores often reward mediocre (or even unacceptable) performance. Essays are

scored holistically, using a 9-point rubric and sample papers as benchmarks. For a period of two years prior to the administration of the exam, the test development committee develops, test and refines standards for scoring individual prompts. After the exam is administered, the Chief Reader works with other experienced readers in selecting appropriate anchor papers. At the actual reading, readers are first trained in practice sessions to ensure that scoring is consistent. Then, readers are placed at tables of six or seven readers with a table leader who is responsible for checking readers to ensure they are consistently applying the standards (Holladay 67-76). Readers score essays for seven straight days, about seven hours each day.

ETS and the College Board argue that the practice sessions are designed to reach reader consensus and establish a sense of community. However, many critics who have participated in the readings point out the paradoxical nature of the claim that readers can develop a consensus on standards established by the development committee and chief reader. Holladay summarizes the criticism echoed by others:

> In any large reading of essays, especially one such as the AP reading, chief readers and assistants may cut off discussion on scoring and make dogmatic statements in the interest of time and efficiency. Furthermore, some readers may be so intimidated by the size and prestige of the scoring process that they go along with criteria as presented without raising reasonable points of disagreement. And we might wonder if a consensus of over 300 people with diverse backgrounds, experiences and biases is advisable or even possible. (76).

Vopat argues similar points, stating that the economics and politics of the annual reading leave the validity of scores questionable in his mind. "The grading of the examination booklets is endless and fatiguing. . . . I myself admit that each year by days 4, 5, and 6 I hardly know what I am reading. Or care." (*Going APE* 289). While ETS takes measures to ensure that scoring is reliable from day to day, Vopat continues that these measures may not always be as effective as ETS claims. In the past, essays were scored multiple times (although, they are now only scored once). To prevent previous scores given to an individual essay from influencing later readers, the scores were covered by a white label. Vopat recounts that many readers begin peeling back the label to verify their own scores. "And I have watched many an initial grade crossed out and changed after such a clandestine consultation" (*Going APE* 289). While this process has changed, Vopat sees such practices as "label-peeking" as symptomatic of the political factors that influence the AP evaluations. "For various academic/political/personal/social reasons, readers want to be invited back to the next year's grading. They certainly do not want to be singled out by the ETS computers as erratic, eccentric or out-of-step. To be invited to return is especially crucial for the high-school advanced placement teachers—to an extent, their jobs depend on it" (*Going APE* 289-290). Vopat points out that other issues affect the scoring process as well. Because one essay is open-ended (allowing students to select a text to base their essay on), many readers end up scoring essays on texts they have never read, on texts with limited literary value, and even movies. However, Vopat, Owen, Holladay and most critics of the process also point out that despite the intrinsic and troublesome limitations of this system, it is probably the best way to reliably score thousands of essays. As Crossman points out, "Given the

mission—to test thousands of elite high school students for possible college credit. . . could we think of a better way to produce that result? I couldn't" (qtd. in Owen 27).

Predictive Validity

Looking beyond immediate issues surrounding the exam, most policy makers ultimately question the predictive validity of the exam. That is, with all its potential limitations, do the exams accurately and adequately identify students' ability to handle advanced course work and thus justify either credit or placement based on scores? Interestingly, there is little substantial research—particularly independent research—focusing on the predictive validity of AP English scores for student success in college. Few studies have been performed during the last ten years, and some are twenty years old or more.

The studies that exist fall into three main categories. The first examines correlations between AP participation and performance and overall college performance as measured by time to graduation, courses taken, academic achievement (for example, GPA), and the like. The findings of these studies vary. For example, Chamberlain et al., Creech, and Willingham found that AP students complete more credit hours per semester, have a higher percentage of upper-division credits, and have a higher overall GPA than non-AP students. Additionally, Creech concluded that students who take AP courses (regardless of whether they receive college credit) perform better in college than those who do not participate in AP. Cusker and LeMy's work indicated that students earning AP credit were more likely to pursue more ambitious programs (such as double majors and additional minors).

The second type of studies compares performance of high school and college students on AP exams and is the only method that includes a measure of writing; essays are part of the exam, and they are assessed using only the exam rubric. This is one method recommended by the College Board to institutions evaluating their own AP policies. Some studies compared various samples of high school students (Bodenhausen, Dvorak), while one compared AP high school students with college students in equivalent courses (Modu). The findings of these studies vary with the study design, but they all support the claim that AP students perform as well or better than non-AP students including college students in equivalent college courses. Significantly, to my knowledge, no studies have been published that evaluate predictive validity based on assessment of essay writing *not* associated with the AP exam.

The third category, exemplified by Morgan and Ramist's study, evaluated validity of individual exams by comparing grades of AP and non-AP students in subsequent English courses. Richardson's 1978 study looked specifically at AP English scores and grades in the first college English course taken. More recently, Bridgeman and Lewis compared grades in a variety of subjects, including English. All of these studies concluded that AP English exam scores correlated significantly with grades in subsequent college English courses, and that in many cases, AP English participants actually received *higher* grades than non-participants in subsequent English courses (see also Mercurio, Mercurio et al., Burnham and Hewitt). This method is attractive for its relative simplicity and is recommended in the AP literature as a means of testing validity at individual schools.

However, using grades as a measure of predictive validity is problematic. Composition courses are not always designed to be contiguous or even to build directly on each other, so the grade in a second course may not directly reflect learning that did or did not take place in earlier writing courses. Furthermore, criteria for assigning grades vary from teacher to teacher and include, in addition to performance on writing tasks, variables such as attendance, class participation, reading quizzes, and completion of homework exercises. Thus, grades are a highly suspect means of comparison; what would be an A in one teacher's class might be a B in another's. Finally, if grades are examined from an upper-division course, it is possible that several semesters, if not years, have elapsed between the AP course and the course used in the study. In such a case, it is likely that any earlier differences that were present between AP and non-AP students have "flattened out," either because both groups have forgotten some of what they knew about writing or because intermediate learning, maturation, and experience have helped students compensate for writing deficiencies that might have been present earlier (Hansen, et. al.).

Exam Impact on Pedagogy

Ultimately, criticism of the AP exams reflects a deeper concern about the degree to which these exams influence the pedagogical practices in the AP English classroom. Foster argues

> As part of the general pattern of Advanced Placement, the AP examinations must, like the AP course they accompany, be justified by the quality of the learning experience they provide. We must ask, then, whether what the examinations teach is really what we want students to

> learn about writing and literature. . . . [We must question] whether the tasks that the examination requires are appropriate to the ways we want students to learn about writing and literature. (20)

In other words, critiques of the exams themselves, valid and problematic as they seem to many critics, are only secondary to the specific concerns over what actually happens in the AP courses.

Generally speaking, AP teachers are often considered among the best in their respective schools, and the College Board provides substantial professional development opportunities as well as suggested course materials to help them implement an effective college-level curriculum. What the College Board does *not* provide is a standardized curriculum. While this may hold many significant benefits, the one major limitation it produces is a lack of consistency amongst AP classrooms. While some teachers may provide an in-depth and enriching experience on par with an excellent college experience, others may be reductive and overwhelmingly dominated by focused test preparations instead of actual academic inquiry. All the teaching resources provided by the AP program are “meaningless,” Metzger argues, “if a teacher’s central aim is the limited forum of the AP exam rather than the development of a student inquiry and the larger understanding such inquiry leads to. . . . A lack of inquiry—of open-ended discussion rooted in knowledge of the text and its historical context—was, I’m grieved to say, the norm rather than the exception in my observation of the AP classroom” (23).

Teaching to the Test. Metzger argues that even the best teachers find it impossible to avoid the pressure to teach to the exams. “The cultural, economic, and social pressures that parents, school administrators, and legislators face lead them to believe that holding

teachers accountable for what their students achieve will keep them safe from ‘failure’ . . . . So the percentage of students who pass the final AP exam becomes the measure of how well students and teachers alike have done” (23-24). Aarons echoes this concern, “Hit from all sides, high school teachers become ultimately responsible, not only for achievement on the AP exam, but also for acceptance at a chosen college and success in the freshman year” (127). Foster also explains that teaching to the test at some level is unavoidable. “Although they are free to organize their own courses, only by incorporating many of the exam-oriented strategies can AP teachers give their students the best possible preparation for the exam. Indeed, the limits of this standardized final exam, over which teachers have no control, constrain the entire AP learning experience” (6).

Vopat argues that often the effectiveness of classroom instruction is judged by student performance on the exam, which in turn, places enormous pressure on the AP English teachers to consistently ensure student success:

> The effectiveness of the classroom instruction is measured by [performance on the exams]. . . . If the high school student performs poorly on the yearly AP exam, who is going to be blamed for this failure? Not the students because the AP student has already been designated as gifted. Not the test because it has been enshrined by the College Board and is replete with ‘quality controls;’ Indeed, it would be highly unrealistic for the AP teacher not to have the student run through the rubrics, memorize basic test strategies, scrimmage some sample test questions, and replay sample essays from the previous year’s exam. (*Politics* 57)

As a result, AP classrooms often embrace, albeit often unconsciously or reluctantly, the theoretical foundations critics identify in the exams. Metzger explains that the emphasis of the AP English exams "on deducing the most likely answer among four possibilities and the value of quick, pointed essays, diminishes the likelihood of teacher and students engaging in the slow and uncertain work of holding each other accountable to the lives and art at hand" (27). Iorio agrees with this assessment, arguing that "teaching for the test is reductive, self-defeating, and ultimately a betrayal of educational integrity and student development" (143). He points out a secondary issue as well, noting that the nature of the AP exam often subverts the expressed aims of the program. That is, instead of being an opportunity for students to get an effective "jump-start" on introductory courses and thereby grant them more time and freedom to delve into more substantial, advanced study, the AP exam becomes "a conduit to educational rewards and prestige" and often "gives students and teachers the illusion of being the goal of education" (143).

Devaluation of Writing and Writing Instruction. In the context of AP English as a substitute for FYC, Holladay argues that focusing on the exam limits writing instruction and the teaching of rhetorical principles. "The current AP program clearly emphasizes literature more than it does rhetoric; naturally, the majority of AP teachers will tend to do the same. Nevertheless, many college students would profit from more intensive study of effective writing in areas other than literary analysis" (79). In the end, the devaluation of writing and reductive approach to teaching English can negatively impact student perceptions of college English classes. They may see the class as redundant, believing they "already know how to write" and often perceive writing instruction as a hoop to jump through rather than an integral element of their university training.

Mahala and Vivion note that the sheer volume of students participating in AP English exams suggests that many "students are understanding undergraduate 'English' as one of the easiest subjects to 'test out of' in the university" (46). Furthermore, as composition studies shifts from the paradigm of teaching basic skills as a prerequisite to college studies, to one where the composition classroom becomes an integral part of acculturating students into the academic and intellectual culture of the university, the ease with which students seem to "test out" of FYC seems to perpetuate a reductive and often remedial view of writing instruction.

Cognitive Development and Writing Instruction

Beyond merely developing dismissive attitudes toward FYC courses, replacing the FYC experience with AP can have long-term effects on student development. This can be seen not only in AP students' approaches to writing instruction itself, but to their overall philosophy of education. Henderson, relying primarily on anecdotal evidence, reports that AP students find themselves in FYC for a myriad of reasons, from not taking the exam to being exempt from one of a two- or three-course sequence. She presents her informal observations of AP students in her own classes over several years of teaching FYC, noting that they correlate with the anecdotal experiences of her colleagues with AP students in FYC. Despite an AP background, she observes, the writing of these students is "often not outstanding or even satisfactory" (325). Furthermore, many exhibit resistant behaviors to learning more about writing although their work in FYC indicated that they clearly needed improvement in order to write effectively at the college level.

Spear and Flesher present similar arguments with the findings of their study of a small group of AP students who did not take FYC at Florida State University. Using in-

depth, focused interviews of 20 students that fell into four categories, they describe AP students without FYC "as extremely confident in their writing abilities, although when asked about their AP experience, they tend to not see writing as an essential part of the AP program. Even more disconcerting is the observation that all these students manifest a sense of closure towards writing—that what is to be known about writing is limited to mastery of skills, and they have mastered them" (40). Furthermore, these students were openly critical of discussion in the classroom and objected to working with peers they deem "not as smart" as they are. "The self-confidence these students express," Spear and Flesher argue, "has served more as an impediment than a guide to making learning the intrinsic and self-motivating challenge that it is for AP students who continue their academic work in writing" (40). Ultimately, AP students who avoided FYC in Spear and Flesher's study give "the strong and disturbing impression of being developmentally stuck" (41).

In both Henderson and Spear and Flesher's studies, the authors identified the students' perceptions of the AP experience as the primary cause of their resistant behavior. More than just a "bad attitude," Henderson identifies the resistant behavior of her AP students as symptomatic of impeded cognitive development, using Perry's scheme of intellectual development as a foundation. Henderson explains, "My AP students were not so much resistant or obstructive as they were confused and distressed by the intellectual demands for which their AP English coursework, good as it was, had not prepared them" (325).

Spear and Flesher explain that AP students often see themselves as "static objects of academic achievement" (40). Iorio further argues that AP, in many cases, often results

in “misplacement instead of advanced placement and [allows] some students to pass who sorely need a college-level course. It contributes to the negative, even cynical attitude of students,” he continues, “who believe that circumventing courses and hard work is the mark of high acumen. In the end, students may discover that what has been circumvented is their own education” (145).

Spear and Flesher emphasize that “students’ intellectual development and. . . writing development continue dramatically throughout the first two years of college” (45-46). An FYC course that appropriately challenges AP students can affect both cognitive development and writing proficiency. Henderson notes that “taking an honors or advanced writing course can allow students to participate in a challenging class with stimulating classmates and instructors, a class that can help them think and move past their limited ideas about writing, while recognizing their potential and their talent” (331). Spear and Flesher’s study further corroborates this argument. Of AP students who choose to take FYC, they observe, “This group seems comfortable self-identified as college students . . .These are the students idealized by the writers of freshman English texts and liberal arts statements of purpose. . . .[Additionally], although they seem more mature than the nonAP freshmen, they remain fundamentally egocentric [like students in other freshmen groups]” (33-34).

Sophomores who took both AP English and FYC are described by Spear and Flesher as “the older brothers and sisters of the freshmen just out of AP. . . . [Furthermore, they] contextualize their responses in much larger, more abstract ways. . . .They have developed a habit of generalization that allows them to see connections between various disciplines, between writing and learning more generally, between

college and their lives beyond, and between their own lives and the world" (36-37). Interestingly, they are also more apt to see their AP experience not as a terminal point in their education, but as an appropriate gateway to more challenging work. They also more openly embrace the epistemological role of writing in education and readily accept that their writing can constantly be improved (36-39). In short, AP students who take FYC develop an appreciation for writing as an essential element of effective learning. They seem to understand a truth that echoes the admonition of the College Board's Commission on Writing: "If students are to make knowledge their own, they must struggle with the details, wrestle with the facts, and rework raw information and dimly understood concepts into language they can communicate to someone else. In short, if students are to learn, they must write" (9).

In sum, the limited research on cognitive development in AP English students potentially suggests that when AP is seen as a replacement for FYC, it can lead to the development of antagonistic student attitudes future writing instruction. These findings are provocative, however, they rely on an extremely small sample of students and further inquiry would be advisable before drawing general conclusions about the affect of AP English on cognitive development. Interestingly, however, both Spear and Flesher's study and Henderson's research suggest, when AP students enroll in a FYC class that appropriately challenges them, these students tend to overcome the tendency to become "developmentally stuck" and have an easier time becoming acculturated into a college/university discourse community than comparable groups of students. That is, the value-added of the FYC classroom (especially for AP English students) goes beyond

development of writing ability and can potentially contribute to overall success in a college/university environment.

Connecting Criticism and Context

Generally, the critiques of AP English present a rather pessimistic view of the program. However, I would posit that the outcomes of AP English can be shaped not only by the exams and program materials, but also by the implicit messages sent through college-level policies. That is, as WPAs, English departments and interested faculty work to shape policy, they can encourage the positive outcomes of the program (such as encouraging participation in AP English as enhanced preparation for FYC) and help shift some of the more troublesome assumptions and attitudes associated with the program. Furthermore, by actively defining (and limiting) the role of AP English in the college curriculum, policy can pressure the College Board and ETS to take additional measures to align course and exam design with contemporary trends in composition pedagogy and writing assessment. Additionally, policy can also encourage the College Board to carefully examine (and possibly reevaluate) the level of achievement indicated by AP exam scores.

At this point, Mahala and Vivion's conclusions regarding AP English and college writing programs becomes most salient: “Unfortunately, the economic and political forces we describe in this paper are likely to continue to shape the development of AP programs and policy more than departmental debate unless WPAs and other well-positioned educators do more to inform colleagues about AP” (Mahala and Vivion 44). In real terms, this means that the economic and political context described in the first half of this chapter may be more effectively negotiated as additional efforts are made to

corroborate the critiques of the exam, courses and program outcomes and share those findings with the appropriate stakeholders in a way that appeals to their own interests.

Discussions about the influence and role of AP English are ultimately tied to policies at colleges and universities. And the common practice of awarding FYC credit for the AP English exams places writing program faculty in a key position to advocate polices that reflect their own concerns about writing and student preparation for advanced coursework. However, in all circumstances, new policies have implications far beyond an individual program. Negotiating the political and economic context surrounding these policies requires not only strong discipline-based arguments, but also solid empirical evidence. This requires scholars to reach beyond established methods of evaluation and find new ways of substantiating their claims to administrators and policy makers.

CHAPTER 3

ASSESSING AP ENGLISH OUTCOMES THROUGH STUDENT WRITING:

THE BYU STUDY

When WPAs and other faculty perceive a gap between the achievement and abilities of AP students and their own program objectives, formulating a policy with regard to giving college credit for AP scores requires the negotiation of the myriad of issues described in Chapter 2. The study described in this chapter represents an attempt by a team of administrators, faculty and graduate students to reevaluate and advocate changes to a single institution's AP English policy that has remained unchanged for 40 years. Arguments grounded in contemporary theory and pedagogical practices—significant as they are—often hold minimal sway against the broader economic and political forces involved in AP English discussions unless those arguments can be backed with strong empirical evidence. This is often difficult, since little independent research exists to validate both the implicit and explicit claims of the College Board and ETS. Moreover, the majority of research regarding the predictive validity of the AP English exams—the measure of most interest to many administrators—is not only sponsored by the College Board and/or ETS, but all the published studies I have found follow the models suggested by the College Board (i.e., comparative grade studies or comparative AP exam performance).

As mentioned in chapter 2, the validity of grade studies is questionable in many circumstances because, in short, grades can reflect numerous variables that can mask the actual outcomes of student AP participation. And the method of comparing performance on sample AP exams can also be problematic since, as Foster explains, the process of using AP exams to compare the abilities of AP high school students and their college counterparts "suggests the delightfully circular logic of the testing ethos: design a test featuring certain tasks, then design a course around those tasks, then test those finishing the course . . . . If students are carefully selected for the course and adequately prepared for the tasks, they will do well on the test. . . . Not surprisingly, they will do these things better than students who have not taken an AP course" (12).

As Hansen, et al. explain, WPAs and composition faculty at BYU have been concerned for several years that many students who have used AP credit to fulfill the FYC requirement lacked the necessary writing skills to write successfully in a university setting. In particular, writing program administrators and faculty (many of whom have participated in scoring AP English exams) agree that students earning a 3 would benefit substantially from taking FYC. Since at least 1990, WPAs and chairs in the English department have argued strenuously that credit should no longer be awarded for scores of 3. While AP policies involve several variables, the research team and other supporters of the proposed policy change chose to focus on the credit status of 3s because of the significant number of students that fall into this category (approximately 800 students in each freshman class) and the realization that the abilities of this subgroup of AP students appear increasingly questionable (see Lichten).

However, for several reasons, not the least of which is the cost of adding about forty sections of FYC to accommodate the large number of new students who would need take the course, administrators were reluctant to consider policy changes. Citing two comparative grade studies conducted at BYU, (one of which was part of the Morgan and Ramist study completed in cooperation with ETS, the other an internal study which reported similar findings), administrators argued that since these studies found no difference in the average grades of advanced writing students who had taken FYC and those who had bypassed it with AP credit, FYC apparently added no value to students' educations and its absence did no harm to AP students. Therefore, they found no empirically valid reason to raise the standard for awarding credit for AP test scores.

The issue came to the forefront when a faculty member from a science department, long concerned with the quality of student writing, realized that a large percentage of BYU students did not take an FYC course because they were awarded credit for AP English. It seemed to him contradictory that the writing of most of his students suggested the need for additional writing instruction when a large percentage of the student body at BYU were being summarily exempt from that requirement. In an unpublished institutional study of incoming freshmen at BYU conducted between the years 1987 and 1999, over one third of students entered with AP English credit (meaning a reported score of 3, 4 or 5). Of those students, a majority (60 percent) opted out of the composition requirement during their freshman year, in spite of university advisement urging them to enroll.[3] The remaining 40 percent of students overwhelmingly chose to enroll in honors or advanced freshman composition offerings. Interestingly, the survey

[3] The Fall 2003 class schedule tells students: "We *strongly* encourage you to take a First-Year Writing course even in you have received AP credit for English, because the skills taught in these courses are essential to a successful university education" (original emphasis)

found that students scoring a 3 on the AP exam were most likely to bypass the FYC requirement entirely.

These issues, in connection with concern that the continued expansion of the AP program has made the level of achievement indicated by the exams questionable, motivated a study to assess the actual writing abilities of AP students. This study is described in detail in an article scheduled for publication in the Fall 2004 issue of *WPA: Writing Program Administration* (see Hansen, et al.), and therefore, this thesis will not seek to report all aspects of the study in extensive detail. However, after outlining the methods and procedures of the study, this thesis will focus on the major findings and conclusions, as well as exploring tentative conclusions from unpublished data. (The latter information is primarily summarized from an article by Reeve et. al., currently in preparation).

The research committee of which I was a member, believed that the two most widely used models of direct assessment of predictive validity produced skewed results. Therefore, our committee sought to assess actual student writing outside the context of the AP exams. As we designed the study reported here, we determined that we should study the writing of students early in their college career. We believed students with AP scores of 3 would feel most keenly the effects of having missed instruction in college writing during or soon after the freshman year, as they tried to complete writing assignments in other courses for which their high school skills were inadequate. The research team further believed that although differences between AP and non-AP students might not be evident in the senior year, that should not justify a policy that may

contribute unnecessarily to students' floundering about in the first two or three years of college.

Accordingly, we focused the study on sophomore students, defined by credit hours in residence at the university. We also determined not to use grades as the dependent variable, but to use direct measures of students' writing ability. We compared the writing of three groups: (1) students who had AP credit but nevertheless took a first-year writing course (AP+FYC); (2) students who had AP credit and chose to bypass first-year writing (AP, no FYC); and (3) students who did not have AP credit and therefore took a first-year writing course (no AP, FYC).[4]

Methods

Participants

Four teachers agreed to cooperate in the study, all of whom taught a sophomore-level general education course on the history of civilization. One of the teachers taught a very large section (approximately 180 students) of Humanities 201. Another taught two small sections of Humanities 201 (40 students each) and a large section (180 students) of History 201. Two of the teachers taught small honors sections of Humanities 201 (30 to 35 students each). These classes were chosen because we knew they were likely to have sufficiently large enrollments of sophomores in the three groups we were interested in. The honors sections were included because the BYU Honors Program does not allow exemptions from first-year writing regardless of AP credit, and we wanted to study the writing of some students who had taken first-year writing even though their AP scores would have otherwise allowed them to bypass the requirement. Composition courses

[4] In the sample of students we studied, only four students had no AP credit and had not taken FYC. Because the number was so small, we determined not to compare this group to the other three groups.

themselves were excluded because we wanted to study the *effects* of having taken or bypassed FYC; additionally, we wanted to analyze writing produced in an academic setting where formal writing instruction was not given.

All of the teachers agreed to allow us to write the prompts for two papers they would assign, and they agreed to give the students course credit for these papers so that students would be motivated to do their best. The amount of course credit to be awarded was left to each teacher's discretion. The students understood that these papers would be used in a research study; however, they were also informed that their teachers had helped design the assignments and would also read what they had written. (A comparison of mean essay scores between sections indicated that the methods and personalities of the teachers were not confounding variables.) In all, the history of civilization classes enrolled 497 students, among whom were 214 sophomores—students with between two and four semesters in residence at BYU. Of these sophomores, 182 (8 percent) wrote both essays and returned all required materials. These 182 students became the major focus of the study.

Materials

Two writing prompts were created with the advice and approval of the teachers involved. The first prompt was based on Arthur Miller's "Tragedy and the Common Man." This prompt asked students to read Miller's essay and, with reference to a tragic text they had read in class, discuss whether they would agree with, disagree with, or modify Miller's claim that "tragedy implies more optimism in its author than does comedy." The second prompt was based on an essay entitled "The Need Beyond Reason," by Edward Hart. This prompt asked students to agree with, disagree with, or

modify Hart's claim that the value of the humanities lies precisely in their non-utilitarian nature, and to use as evidence for their position examples from their study of the humanities in the course in which they were enrolled.

The research team also created a scoring rubric for each prompt, using a nine-point scale and descriptors of the kind of essay that would merit each score on the scale. The rubrics are very similar to those employed in the AP scoring, and the writing prompts were also somewhat similar to those used in the AP exams. This imitation was deliberate on our part. While we knew this decision might actually favor the students who had taken AP courses, we were willing to run that risk because we believed that the prompts asked students to read and think critically and to produce a kind of writing that is commonly assigned at the university. More importantly, however, a prompt of this design served as a kind of control: it helped eliminate differences between prompts used in the AP exam and those used in our study as a confounding variable. Differences in writing performance could then more easily be interpreted as being due to the poor predictability of the AP exam, not to differences in the essay assignments.

In addition to the prompts and rubrics, the research team devised or adapted several instruments to collect additional information from the students: (1) a writing process questionnaire that students filled out upon submission of their essays to indicate what they did in planning and producing each essay; (2) an adapted version of the writing self-efficacy questionnaire developed by Shell et al. to measure students' confidence in their ability to write in various genres; (3) the Daly-Miller Writing Apprehension survey; and (4) a general questionnaire about students' past experiences writing at home and in school.

Procedures

For each prompt, students were given one week to write a three-page, word-processed essay and submit it to their teacher; the preparation period was the same for every participant regardless of course or section. Additionally, while the essay prompts and rubrics mirrored those used on the AP exam, the time frame of the assignment avoided imposing the limitations of timed, impromptu writing often criticized in the AP exams. Thus, the virtue of this format is that we probably gained an authentic sample of each student's writing ability. The potential weakness is that some students may not have done their own work. Our best evidence that this was not a significant problem comes from the students' responses to our questionnaire (mentioned above) about the process they used in writing: it was rare that students reported even having asked another person to read a draft of their work. Our strong impression is that the essays were written without collaboration.

Teachers assigned the first paper in late September or early October and the second paper in late October or early November of 2002. The research team collected and photocopied the essays for later scoring. Identification numbers were given to each essay so that students would remain anonymous. Two members of the research team read dozens of essays to assess the range of performance on each prompt and to find suitable essays to use in training raters.

Twelve raters were chosen from the ranks of experienced adjunct faculty and graduate students who teach first-year and advanced writing. They were trained on two separate occasions using essays representing a range of performances on each prompt. A generalizability analysis was conducted to assess the reliability of the ratings and to

determine to what extent the reliability was decreased by (1) interrater inconsistencies, (2) intrarater inconsistencies, (3) intratask inconsistencies (differences in the relative difficulty of the writing prompts), or (4) the various interactions among these potential sources of extraneous variance.

After obtaining satisfactory measures of interrater reliability, the scoring began. All essays written by nonsophomores were rated once. The 364 essays written by the 182 students in the sophomore group were each rated once by two different readers. For forty-two essays (about 11 percent) the judgments of the first two readers varied by three or more points (for example, 5 and 8). These essays were read an additional time (total of three independent readings), and outlying scores were discarded. For purposes of this study, the independent readers' scores were averaged on each essay; these scores were then averaged again across essays to create one score for each student. No scores were rounded, so no variation in scores was introduced by the research team.

Major Findings

In our analysis of the data, we made several comparisons of mean essay scores. First, we looked at essay scores by AP status, comparing the performance of students in our three main subgroups (AP+FYC; AP, noFYC; noAP, FYC). Then we compared essay scores of AP students with different AP grades. The performance of students who had received a 3 on the AP exam were compared with those who had scored greater than 3 (i.e., 4 or 5). These groups were further subdivided into those who had taken FYC and those who had not. In addition to evaluating essay scores, we also looked at additional data collected in the three questionnaires. Of particular interest were the reports of

writing apprehension and self-efficacy as well as those evaluating high school writing instruction and individual writing processes used on the study essays.

Essay Scores by AP Status

Those students receiving AP English credit *and* completing a freshman composition course (AP+FYC) scored fully a point higher than either of the other two groups on the 9-point scale. Thus, there appears to be a significant gain contributed by the experience in a university writing course for AP students. Scores from students without AP English credit who complete a freshman composition course (no AP, FYC) were not statistically different from those of students with AP English credit who bypassed the composition requirement (AP, no FYC).

Essay Scores by AP English Scores

Analysis reflects significant difference in writing ability between the students who completed a freshman composition course and those who did not. Furthermore, there is also a significant difference in writing ability between students who passed the AP English exam with a score greater than 3 (i.e., 4 or 5) and those who obtained a 3. Finally, the performance of students scoring a 3 is not significantly different from the group of students who lacked AP and took FYC, though both groups' performance indicate an unacceptably inferior level of writing skill as the mean score was 5, or "limited proficiency." These findings suggest, first, the tendency to low performance by students who scored a 3 and bypassed the FYC requirement. Second, they suggest that neither the AP experience alone, nor FYC alone adequately prepares students to write in a university setting.

Writing Apprehension and Self-Efficacy

The survey of writing efficacy indicated no significant difference between the three AP groups, except that students with both AP and FYC had less apprehension about writing than (no AP, FYC). This difference corresponds with our expectation, since writing apprehension could be expected to prevent some students from either enrolling in an AP English course or taking the AP examination. Further, the mostly uniform, relatively high self-efficacy ratings are not in agreement with the significant disparities in actual writing competence. Thus, our students tend to overestimate their ability and probably do not have a realistic sense of their writing limitations. While this may echo conventional wisdom about most students, it is particularly troubling that those students who scored the lowest seemed place their writing abilities on par with those who scored the highest.

High School Background in Writing

The general questionnaire revealed significant gaps in students' high school writing experiences as 72% of these students seemed satisfied with their high school writing instruction, indicating that it prepared them either "adequately" or "very well" for college writing. However, the actual experiences students reported having with writing seem in many aspects sadly deficient.

- On the average, high school English teachers taught grammar, spelling, and punctuation less than once or twice a week, focusing heavily instead on literature.
- 55% of students wrote research papers only once a year or not at all.

- The most heavily assigned types of writing were five-paragraph essays, book reports, comparison and contrast papers, and answers to questions about reading assignments; 87.3% of these assignments required three pages of writing or fewer.
- 79% of students spent five hours or less per week on writing assignments for all their high school classes.

We did not see significant deviations from these patterns when analyzing the data in the sophomore AP groupings described above. According to these survey responses, both the mechanics of writing and the development of thoughtful writing beyond short, 3-page assignments are being seriously neglected in high school instruction, at least for the sample of students studied.

Writing process

Significant disparities were reported in time spent on planning and drafting between AP groups on the first (Miller) essay assignment. Students in the (No AP, FYC) group spent significantly more time on these stages than students with (AP, no FYC), suggesting that the first-year composition course was successful in teaching and/or reinforcing these skills. No differences were observed among the three groups in time spent revising. On the second (Hart) essay, no significant differences were seen between the groups in any of the time categories. This may be attributed in part to the later stage of the semester in which this essay was assigned (i.e., students may have felt rushed, with less time to devote to this assignment). In addition, students probably perceived the task posed by the Hart essay to be more straightforward than Miller, since it required a more personal and less analytical response.

Discussion

Admittedly, the experiment design could be improved in several ways (see Hansen, et. al.). However, the findings of this study suggest that measuring writing outcomes directly through student writing beyond AP exam essays can reveal information not detected in existing research. It is clear that in the evaluation of AP English outcomes, additional, independent research needs to be done. Furthermore, other experiment designs, including modified versions of our design, are particularly needful, considering the discrepancies between existing empirical studies and subjective critiques.

As indicated by the limited abilities of students scoring a 3 on the AP exam, it seems inadvisable to award credit for 3s. This finding seems consistent with Lichten's arguments. Although it is uncertain whether the apparent trend in universities of not accepting scores of 3 for credit reported by Lichten is due to declining quality in performance on the exams or to changes in college requirements, it seems likely that the score of 3 does not represent a desirable level of achievement at many institutions, including BYU.

The apparent lack of difference between the (AP, no FYC) group and the (no AP, FYC) group—both groups having unacceptably low mean scores—indicates that FYC courses at BYU, in particular the standard 100-level course option, is in need of improvements if it is to adequately prepare students for the demands of university writing. Furthermore, the superior performance of (AP+FYC) students indicates that AP students who enroll in an FYC course can benefit significantly. In fact, it seems to support the conclusion that AP can be an excellent preparation for college-level course work and improve the FYC experience. In is important to note that an overwhelmingly

large majority of students with AP credit who chose to enroll in an FYC course, chose a non-standard, advanced or honors FYC courses. This further supports the argument voiced by Henderson that AP students are best served in more challenging FYC courses that acknowledge their existing abilities and potential and push them beyond their AP experience (330).

The benefit of FYC for AP students is further substantiated by the results of the self-efficacy survey. The discrepancy between actual student performance and self-efficacy scores on the survey further substantiates Henderson and Spear and Flesher's assertion that AP students who choose to exempt themselves from FYC may have inflated conceptions of their abilities as writers. Their average scores in our study indicate that they write at a level defined as "limited" or "unbalanced" by our holistic rating scale. Furthermore, they spend significantly less time on their writing than other groups of students. In addition to idiosyncratic weaknesses exhibited by these students, they share what seem to be global deficiencies in understanding revision processes. While the immediate cause of this trend is uncertain, it seems to indicate that the AP experience alone can result in writing processes and attitudes that can inhibit future educational progress in some students. Furthermore, the self-reported high school writing experience suggests that high school English courses (including both AP and non-AP courses) are in need of significant improvements in terms of teaching writing.

Perhaps the most significant implication of this study is the potential for additional research, and specifically for new types of empirical research, to provide concrete support for arguments that scholars and critics of AP English have been making for many years. However, the most immediate implications for this study are the specific

policy changes which the research committee has begun to advocate as a result of its findings. These changes are discussed in Chapter 4. While the findings of this study may not guarantee immediate acceptance of those proposed policies, a positive response by the broader academic community to continue to challenge policy assumptions through additional studies certainly adds validity to the existing data and conclusions, thus supporting revision of existing policies.

CHAPTER 4

IMPLICATIONS AND CONCLUSIONS

AP English is, and clearly will continue to be, a growing program that affects the college-curriculum. It is clear that this growth, in conjunction with the changing role of composition in college general education programs, indicates a need for institutions to reevaluate long-standing credit and placement policies. At the heart of the issues discussed throughout this thesis is the reality that AP English policies will always be highly influenced by political and economic realities. As a result, discipline-specific critiques, valid as they may be, are not always an effective means of changing policy. While they certainly raise awareness of salient issues, criticism of the AP program seems limited in its ability to efficiently induce major change. Furthermore, many of the criticisms of AP overlook or diminish the interests of other stake holders including the significant (and for the most part, positive) influence the program has had on the secondary school system.

(Re)Engaging Dialogue

In a discussion of the changing marketplace of college writing, Hansen advocates the need for educators to adopt "a grander view of education, one that includes the more intangible effects we want to have in students' lives, both individual and collectively." She continues, "In order to do this, we must view the educational system as a whole, rather than simply focusing on the level—primary, secondary, or postsecondary—and the

field of education we find ourselves engaged in" (263). Hansen, referencing Shoenberg's advocacy of defining curricula by broad, inter-institutional purposes and objectives rather than individual course and credit requirements, explains that to do so "would require dialog among all the institutions within a system to agree on the nature of curriculum requirements and on the student outcomes that would demonstrate mastery of those requirements. . . .[Furthermore], this shift to outcome-based learning, rather than simply accumulation of credit hours, would do much to ensure that students are actually acquiring an education worthy of the name" (264). Negotiating AP Policy review and revision calls forth such dialogue and requires critics, supporters, and other stakeholders in the AP English program to seek new ways of addressing long-standing concerns and criticisms.

At BYU, the study described in Chapter 3 was undertaken in an effort to convince the administration that the standard for AP credit should be raised from a 3 to a 4. While many of the writing program faculty have argued for other policy changes (such as not offering composition credit for the Literature exam), the proposal that grew out of the study findings focused specifically on the former issue. However, as mentioned in Chapter 3, the most significant result of the study was the realization that new methods of evaluating the outcomes of AP English can reveal new dimensions of the program and help substantiate many long-held concerns of WPAs, faculty and program critics, thus providing new grounds for dialogue and discussion.

Implications of the BYU Study

The study suggested two major issues that needed to be addressed. First, students scoring a 3 on the exam should no longer be exempt from FYC. Accordingly, we argued

that the bar should be raised to a 4. Second, in order to accommodate the nearly 800 students who would be affected by this policy change, and taking into consideration existing research conclusions from other authors, the FYC program needed to expand existing honors and advanced freshman writing courses. While the study also suggested that the existing 100-level FYC course also needed improvement, the course falls under the direction of the existing writing program and therefore curriculum changes would not directly impact, nor be impacted by, a proposed changed to the AP standard. Since the process of developing, writing, and presenting the new proposal would take several months, it was suggested that registration materials could be updated to urge students to take FYC regardless of their AP standing, and the university administration was willing to do so.

Together, the findings of the BYU study and the existing literature on AP English and related issues suggest questions that must be addressed throughout the evaluative process. Further, it is clear that scholars and faculty at the university level must take steps to influence the development of the AP English program, since there is little indication that it will cease to play a significant role in the shaping of the college curricula—if for no other reason than that it will continue to shape the nature of incoming students' preparation for college-level work in English.

Questions of Policy

While the idea of "policy" has generally been approached in abstract terms to this point, it is important to realize that policy comes in more sizes and shapes than a simple yes or no to the question of awarding FYC credit for AP Exam performance. Generally speaking, policies must address several fundamental sets of questions.

- What type of credit, if any, should be awarded for AP English? Should students be given literature credit, composition credit, elective credit, or no credit for AP English? Further, which type of credit should be awarded for each of the two exams? Should students be allowed to apply this credit towards graduation requirements?
- How much credit, if any, should be awarded? Should the institution follow the recommendations of the College Board, awarding 6 credits for both the literature and language exams? Should there be a limit on the number of AP credits awarded in a given subject or for a given exam? If credits do not apply directly to a given course or requirement, should universities award "empty" credits simply to comply with CB recommendations?
- How is "placement" defined? If the FYC requirement has 2 courses, should students be exempt from one, both or neither? Can students be moved to an honors or advanced FYC course in order to fulfill the FYC requirement while still rewarding AP performance? Should students be required to complete some other task or course work prior to being awarded credit (such as an existing placement exam, library research seminar, etc.)?
- For what score should credit/placement be given? The CB scale identifies a 3 as "qualified" to receive college credit. Should this recommendation be followed or should the bar be raised? One foundation for the CB's recommendation is the assertion that AP scores should correspond with grades in equivalent courses (i.e., 5=A, 4=B, 3=C, etc.). Does awarding advanced

placement for a C performance correlate with the institutional identity and objectives?

- How can AP participation be encouraged through admission policies? Often, it is argued that the potential for credit is the primary reason students take AP courses; however, many institutions also reward participation in the exams and/or courses through admissions policies. If credit is not awarded for courses, will admissions policies sufficiently encourage able students to take challenging courses in preparation for college-level work? If only courses taken in the junior year of high school appear on transcripts submitted with admissions applications, will students still be motivated to take demanding courses in the senior year as well?
- If students with AP experience are required to take FYC, does the current FYC program provide a sufficiently enriched experience to merit the requirement? Both the BYU study and Henderson's article suggest that while AP students may not benefit from FYC exemption, they generally are better served by more challenging FYC courses (i.e. Honors or Advanced). Does the program provide this option and are there sufficient offerings to accommodate AP students?
- If policies award credit/placement for a given score, should students be given an avenue to appeal their credit/placement standing if they do not meet the required score? If the standard for credit is raised (from a 3 to a 4 or 5), should students receiving a 3 who believe the exam doesn't reflect their actual abilities be given the option to challenge their placement? How? At what cost?

- How much influence do WPAs and English faculty have on existing AP policy? Recognizably, broad institutional AP policies or agendas often limit which factors the university administrators are willing to let departments address and decide on. Some schools may mandate the scores for which credit is received, but allow departments to determine what kind of credit is given; others may grant exclusive power to the departments and some may grant no power at all. In the end, all concerned stakeholders musk ask, how can existing influence be leveraged to create policies that adequately address the needs of all stakeholders involved?

Putting Dialogue on Paper

Mahala and Vivion argue that "the acceptance of AP credit should be based on principled answers" to questions concerning the implicit theoretical foundations of the exam compared to those espoused in individual departments (44). This requires WPAs and other influential faculty to become acutely aware of both the perspectives that inform their program (which, presumably most have), as well as those that inform the AP English exams. More than simply relying on existing scholarship, this requires additional analysis and familiarity with the exams themselves. Further, as more and more scholars find opportunities to weigh in on the AP English questions through published articles and research, a growing dialogue that transcends institutional boundaries can lend weight to individual policy advocacy and ensure that administrators outside English departments and writing programs accurately understand the arguments being made.

In short, as college-level faculty actively define the role of AP English in their own curricula, the negative impact of the program so often critiqued can be minimized

and the potential for it to improve overall student writing and education can be enhanced. However, as Mahala and Vivion argue, "The economic and political forces [that have been identified] are likely to continue to shape the development of AP programs and policy more than departmental debate unless WPAs and other well-positioned educators do more to inform colleagues about AP" (44). More than simply a call for more criticism of the AP program, there must be a conscious effort to engage in a rich, developed dialogue that acknowledges the complexity of the issues involved. Further, it is not enough to rely on already stated arguments and opinions. This conversation must acknowledge the changes currently happening in the AP English exams and program itself.

Within the context of this dialogue, it has become imperative that arguments and critiques be substantiated with independent, empirical research. Currently, the College Board and ETS hold a near monopoly on studies that question the validity, outcomes and foundational assumptions of the AP English program. However, the small number of existing independent studies (such as Hansen, et al. and Spear and Flesher) suggested that research by the sponsoring institutions overlooks, diminishes or ignores significant data that is often seen anecdotally by concerned faculty and scholars. New research must challenge the foundational assumptions of existing research. That is, new questions must be asked and new study methods developed that look beyond the self-validating nature of AP exam performance studies and the reductionism of comparative grade studies. For too long, scholars have relied on the recommendations of self-interested research without seriously questioning the methods and assumptions of that research.

As the experience of the BYU research team illustrates, AP English studies can be costly and complicated. Thus, scholars must search out existing and new resources to assist in their efforts. Furthermore, they must seek to make AP English studies an integral part of existing research agendas. In addition to gaining departmental and programmatic support, this means reaching beyond those spheres to interested faculty, scholars and research in other fields. In the case of the BYU study, much of the authority of the study came from the active involvement of non-English, non-composition faculty involvement. Just as writing programs have often found institutional strength by defining themselves as integral parts of broad curricular goals, AP policies and research (for English and other programs) can gain broader support if they acknowledge the inter-disciplinary nature of both the "AP Question" and concern for student writing.

Acknowledging Context

Advocates for AP English Policy changes must, in short, acknowledge the complex context in which such decisions are often made and leverage support from diverse sources. Johnstone and Del Genio note that, above all, institutional identity and purpose has one of the greatest impacts on polices regarding CLLHS programs such as AP. Because of this, WPAs must seek to understand the political and economic context in their own institutions. Furthermore, they need to identify forums where they can share their strategies for negotiating these contexts with colleagues from other institutions.

In doing so, they must further seek to understand the real impact that AP English has on their individual programs—identifying how many students enter their institutions with AP experience, what the ultimate consequences are in terms of learning experiences missed, as well as the economic and practical impact of accommodating additional

students in an existing FYC program and the political implications of creating a policy that will potentially alienate some parents and students by contradicting their existing expectations.

Finally, I would argue that it is time to move past the somewhat polarized stances that seem to dominate the existing discussion. Clearly, the AP English program is in need of improvement and revision. Clearly, for many institutions, the guidelines and claims made by the College Board and ETS about the exam and its meaning do not align with many institutional and programmatic objectives. However, for college-level faculty and administrators—a community with unique access to existing scholarship and trends in the teaching of writing—it would most likely be ineffective to rely on an adversarial approach to the AP program. Theoretical and pedagogical concerns aside, a large constituency of educators and policy makers see AP in terms of positive impact on students in some circumstances. Instead of simply condemning AP English as contrary to current approaches in the teaching of English and composition, college-level faculty must seize the opportunity to advocate policies as a means to influencing the AP program itself. The College Board and ETS rely heavily on the support of college faculty to lend credibility to their efforts. Because of this, there is much that college faculty can do to leverage that reliance to reshape the AP program and its perception by students, parents, and other stakeholders. In short, in the face of AP English's almost certain continuation and growth, it must not only be improved, but it must be shaped so that it is seen as excellent preparation for college level writing courses, but not necessarily the best substitution.

Furthermore, there is a need for more college-level involvement in the AP program. Participation on the Development Committee, the annual AP exam Reading, and other professional development programs can open opportunities for college faculty to positively impact the growth and development of AP English so that it more closely aligns with current trends within the discipline. Ultimately, given the rapid growth and widespread acceptance (and even championing) of the AP program by many stakeholders (most concerned more with its positive impact on secondary schools), it may be in this direct involvement that WPAs and faculty can most immediately and significantly impact the role AP English plays in the college curriculum.

WORKS CITED

Aarons, Victoria. "The AP Dilemma: Formula or Process?" *Journal of Teaching Writing* 6.1 (1987): 127-32.

American Federation of Teachers College-School Task Force On Student Achievement "Closing the Circle: Making Higher Education a Full Partner in Systemic Reform."

Bodenhausen, Judith. "Do Public and Private Schools Differ in the Performance of Their Students on Advanced Placement Tests?" 1989. ERIC Document Reproduction Service, ED 312 279.

Bridgeman, Brent and Charles Lewis. "The Relationship of Essay and Multiple-Choice Scores with Grades in College Courses." *Journal of Educational Measurement* 31.1 (1994): 37-50.

Burnham, Paul S. and Benjamin A. Hewitt. "Advanced Placement Scores: Their Predictive Validity." *Educational and Psychological Measurement* 31 (1971): 939-945

Camara, Wayne, Neil J. Dorans, Rick Morgan, and Carol Myford. "Advanced Placement: Access Not Exclusion." *Education Policy Analysis Archives* 11.25 (1 Aug 2003) 6 Aug 2003. <http://epaa.asu.edu/epaa/v8n40.html>.

Chamberlain, Philip C., et al. "Does Advanced Placement Continue Throughout the Undergraduate Years?" *College and University* 53 (1978): 195-200.

College Board. “AP English Language and Composition Course Perspective.” *AP Central*. 2004. College Board. 8 Jul 2004. <http://apcentral.collegeboard.com/article/0,3045,151-165-0-4356,00.html>.

----. “AP English Literature and Composition Course Perspective.” *AP Central*. 2004. College Board. 8 Jul 2004. <http://apcentral.collegeboard.com/article/0,3045,151-165-0-4499,00.html>.

----. “AP Research and Data: AP Annual Participation 2003.” *AP Central.* 2004. College Board. 8 Jul 2004. <http://apcentral.collegeboard.com/program/research/1,,150-160-0-0,00.html>.

----. “Exam Data: 2003.” *AP Central.* 2004. College Board. 8 Jul 2004. <http://apcentral.collegeboard.com/repository/ap03_grade_dist_subje_29501.xls>.

----. “Pre-AP.” *AP Central.* 2004. College Board. 13 Jul 2004. <http://apcentral.collegeboard.com/pre-ap/0,3060,175-0-0-0,00.html>

----. “State and Federal Support.” *AP Central.* 2004. College Board. 8 Jul 2004. <http://apcentral.collegeboard.com/program/support/1,3061,150-159-0-0,00.html>.

----. “The Advanced Placement Program.” *AP Central.* 2004. College Board. 8 Jul 2004. <http://apcentral.collegeboard.com/program/0,3060,150-0-0-0,00.html>

----. *Access to Excellence: A Report of the Commission on the Future of the Advanced Placement Program.* Princeton, NJ: College Board, 2001.

----. *AP English Literature and English Language 2003-2004 Course Description.* Princeton, NJ: College Board, 2001.

Creech, Joseph D. and Southern Regional Education Board. “Challenging Students to Higher Standards Through Advanced Placement.” 1995. ERIC Document Reproduction Service, ED 387 753.

Crooks, Kimberly A. “State Enhancement of College-level Learning for High School Students: A Comprehensive National Policy Study and Case Studies of Progressive States.” Diss. State U of New York at Buffalo, 1998. UMI: AAT 9833590.

Cusker, Elaine Roberta. “A Study of the Use of Advanced Placement Credit by Undergraduates Entering Binghamton University in 1990 (New York).” Diss. State U of New York at Buffalo, 1999. UMI: AAT 9931474.

Cusker, Elaine Roberta. “The Use of Advanced Placement Credit by Undergraduates Entering Binghamton University in 1990: Conclusions and Implications." 13 Jul 2004. <http://www.gse.buffalo.edu/org/LPN/news/cusker.html>.

Dvorak, Jack. “Journalism Student Performance on Advanced Placement Exams.” *Journalism and Mass Communication Educator* 53.3 (1998): 4-12.

Foster, David. “The Theory of AP English: A Critique.” Eds. Gary A. Olson, Elizabeth Metzger, and Evelyn Ashton-Jones, eds. *Advanced Placement English: Theory, Politics, and Pedagogy.* Portsmouth, NH: Boynton Cook, 1989.

Ganeshananthan, Vasugi V. “AP Program Faces New Criticism Over Its Testing Standards.” *The Chronicle of High Education* 14 July 2000: A45-46.

Hansen, Kristine. “Consuming Composition: Understanding and Changing the marketplace of College Writing.” *Market Matters: Applied Rhetoric Studies and Free Market Competition.* Ed. Locke Carter. Cresskill, NJ: Hampton P, 2005.

Hansen, et. al. "An Argument for Changing Institutional Policy on Granting AP Credit in English: An Empirical Study of College Sophomores' Writing." *WPA: Writing Program Administration*, publication pending.

Henderson, Sarah. "Why Do I Have To Be Here? The Advanced Placement Student in First-Year Composition: Problems and Issues in Cognitive Development." *Journal of Secondary Gifted Education* 7.1 (1995): 324-32.

Herr, Norman Edward. "Perspectives and Policies of Undergraduate Admissions Committees Regarding Advanced Placement and Honors Coursework." *College and University* 67.1 (1991): 47-54.

Hershey, Susanne W. "College Admission Practices and the Advanced Placement Program." *Journal of College Admissions* 128 (1990): 8-11.

Holladay, Sylvia A. "AP and the Problems of Testing." Eds. Gary A. Olson, Elizabeth Metzger, and Evelyn Ashton-Jones, eds. *Advanced Placement English: Theory, Politics, and Pedagogy.* Portsmouth, NH: Boynton Cook, 1989. 65-82.

Iorio, John. "Preparing Students for the AP Examination: Dangers and Opportunities." Eds. Gary A. Olson, Elizabeth Metzger, and Evelyn Ashton-Jones, eds. *Advanced Placement English: Theory, Politics, and Pedagogy.* Portsmouth, NH: Boynton Cook, 1989. 142-150.

Johnstone, D. Bruce and Beth Del Genio. *College Level Learning in High School: Purposes, Policies, and Practical Implications.* Washington, DC: Association of American Colleges & Universities, 2001.

Jones, Joseph. "Recomposing the AP English Exam." *English Journal* 91.1 (2001): 51-56.

Kellogg, Alex P. "Colleges Urged to Play Role in Ending 'Senior Slump' at End of High School." Washington, DC: Institute for Educational Leadership, 2001.

Kirst, Michael W. "Overcoming the High School Senior Slump: New Education Policies." *Perspectives in Public Policy: Connecting Higher Education and the Public Schools.* Washington, DC: Published by The Institute for Educational Leadership and The National Center for Public Policy and higher Education, 2001.

LeMy, M. "Academic Achievement of Students who receive AP Credit." *College and University* 60 (1985): 155–59.

Lichten, William. "Whither Advanced Placement?" *Education Policy Analysis Archives* 8.29 (24 Jun 2000). 23 Jan 2003. http://epaa.asu.edu/epaa/v8n29.html>.

Mahala, Daniel and Michael Vivion. "The Role of AP and the Composition Program." *WPA: Writing Program Administration* 17.1-2 (1993): 43-56.

Markham, Jeffrey C. "Hidden Dangers of the AP English Exams." *English Journal* 91.1 (2001): 18-19.

Mercurio, Joseph A. "College Courses in the High School: A Four-Year Follow-Up of the Syracuse University Class of 1977." *College and University* 58 (1982): 5–18.

Mercurio, Joseph A., et al. "College Credit Earned in High School: Comparing Student Performance in Project Advance and Advanced Placement. *College and University* 59.1 (1983): 74-86.

Metzger, Mary Janell. "'The Villainy You Teach Me…': Shakespeare and AP English Literature." *English Journal* 92.1 (2002): 22-28.

Modu, Christopher C. "The Validity of the Advanced Placement English Language and Composition Examination." *College English* 43 (1981): 609-620.

Morgan, Rick and Len Ramist. *Advanced Placement Students in College: An Investigation of Course Grades at 21 Colleges.* Unpublished Statistical Report. Princeton: Educational Testing Services. February 1998. Report No. SR-98-13.

Nairn, Allan. *The Reign of ETS: The Corporation that Makes Up Minds.* The Ralph Nader Report on the Educational Testing Service. Washington, DC: Nairn, 1980.

National Commission on the High School Senior Year. *The Lost Opportunity of Senior Year: Finding a Better Way. Summary of Findings.* 14 Jul 2004. <http://www.woodrow.org/CommissionOnTheSeniorYear/Report/CommissionSummary2.pdf>.

National Commission on Writing in America's Schools and Colleges. "The Neglected 'R': The Need for a Writing Revolution." Princeton, NJ: College Board, 2003. <http://www.writingcommission.org>.

Owen, David. *None of the Above: The Truth Behind the SATs.* New York: Bowman & Littlefield, 1999.

Richardson, Mary W. "Educational Usefulness of the Advanced Placement English Course in New York State." 1978. ERIC Document Reproduction Service, ED 163 037.

Shoenberg, Robert. "'Why Do I Have To Take This Course?' Credit Hours, Transfer, and Curricular Coherence." *General Education in an Age of Student Mobility: An Invitation to Discuss Systematic Curricular Planning.* Washington, DC: AAC&U, 2000.

Spear, Karen and Gretchen Flesher. "Continuities in Cognitive Development: AP Students and College Writing." Eds. Gary A. Olson, Elizabeth Metzger, and Evelyn Ashton-Jones, eds. *Advanced Placement English: Theory, Politics, and Pedagogy.* Portsmouth, NH: Boynton Cook, 1989. 25-51.

Vopat, James B. "The Politics of Advanced Placement English." Eds. Gary A. Olson, Elizabeth Metzger, and Evelyn Ashton-Jones, eds. *Advanced Placement English: Theory, Politics, and Pedagogy.* Portsmouth, NH: Boynton Cook, 1989. 52-64.

Vopat, James B. "Going APE: Reading the Advanced Placement Examination in English Composition and Literature." *College English* 43.3 (1981): 284-292.

US Census Bureau. *School Enrollment*. 13 Jul 2004. <http://www.census.gov/population/www/socdemo/school.html>.

White, Edward. "Apologia for the Timed Impromptu Essay Test." *College Composition and Communication* 46 (1995): 30-45.

Willingham, Warren W., Margaret Morris, Educational Testing Service, College Entrance Examination Board. "Four Years Later: A Longitudinal Study of Advanced Placement Students in College." (College Board report, No. 86-2). 1986. ERIC Document Reproduction Service, ED 280 358.