

1996

The relationship between the high school senior's success in the English advanced placement course and the high school senior's success on the college English advanced placement exam

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THE RELATIONSHIP
BETWEEN THE HIGH SCHOOL
SENIOR'S SUCCESS IN THE ENGLISH
ADVANCED PLACEMENT COURSE
AND THE HIGH SCHOOL SENIOR'S
SUCCESS ON THE COLLEGE ENGLISH
ADVANCED PLACEMENT EXAM

MASTER'S PROJECT

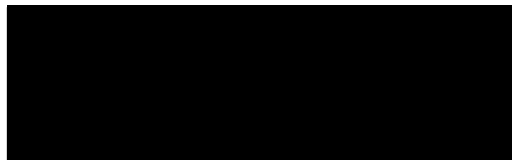
Submitted to the School of Education,
University of Dayton, in Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Master of Science in Education

by

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July 19, 1996

Approved by:



Official Advisor

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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I wish to express my gratitude to all those who contributed to the development of this study. I would like to offer a special thank you to:

My father, Darmel Steen, who spent countless hours typing, proofreading, and re-typing without a complaint.

My mother, Mozell Steen, who was my moral support when I thought I would never get through this.

My wife, Lori Steen who, without hostility, would let me hole-up in my office for hours and then patiently take care of all my other responsibilities.

DEDICATION

This master's project is dedicated to:

My loving wife Lori Lynn Steen

and

My greatest joy, my son, Bradley David Steen

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Purpose of the Study

Students have always looked for a way to achieve rewards for their endeavors. Among forms of recognition are: high grade point averages to achieve college scholarships, class recognition for clubs and activities, and, more recently, college credit for passing the A.P. exam at the end of a high school course.

The Advanced Placement courses (hereafter referred to as A.P. courses) that are taken in high school give students a chance to earn rewards not only from their high school efforts, but from college as well. These A.P. courses are taken to prepare students for the College Advanced Placement test. If students pass the A.P. test with a score of three or higher (based on a 1 to 5 scale), most colleges will grant the student credit for beginning college level courses in the field in which the test was taken (Rothschild, 1995).

The A.P tests provide two benefits to students: credit for college courses they will not have to take and a savings of dollars they will not have to spend on college courses. By taking and passing the A.P. test, the student derives many

personal benefits. What if a student takes the A.P. course in high school, but does not pass the A.P. test? If the students have done what is required of them to pass the course, the normal assumption would be that it should completely prepare them for the test. Logic suggests that if students score an "A" in the A.P. course in English, then those students should also have no problem scoring a "3" to "5" on the A.P. test.

The writer wishes to discover if the logic of a relationship of an A.P. course grade to an A.P. exam score is valid. The writer wishes to determine if a favorable relationship exists between students who do well or poorly in the A.P. test and students who do well or poorly in an A.P. class. If having A.P. courses is truly effective in helping high school students meet their goals (preparing students to pass the Advanced Placement college exam), then student performance in coursework becomes even more important.

Problem Statement

The purpose of this study is to analyze what type of relationship exists between the high school seniors' success in the English Advanced Placement course and the seniors' success on the College English Advanced Placement exam.

Hypothesis

There will be no significant relationship between a high school senior's success in the English Advanced Placement

course and a senior's success on the College Advanced Placement exam.

Methodology

The data were taken from an urban high school computer bank. The time period covered was from 1984 through 1992. Grades were taken for students who took the A.P. course during their Senior year. The A.P. test scores were taken from the school computer records for the same years.

Assumptions

In conducting this study the writer will assume the following:

1. The tests were administered and evaluated correctly for the A.P. exam.
2. All test data were recorded accurately in the computer bank at the high school.
3. The Advanced Placement course grades were given in accordance to the criteria for achieving that grade in the course.
4. All school grade records were recorded accurately in the computer banks at the high school.
5. Each year the Advanced Placement course covered what was necessary for the curriculum for that course.

Limitations

Several limitations are apparent in this study. The research will be conducted in an urban school setting, and, as a consequence, the findings cannot be generalized to other settings. Secondly, through the span of years, the study will cover several different teaching styles which may have been used to teach the course; those differences will affect the students' performance in the A.P. course. Finally, the fact that a few of the students who took the course did not take the A.P. test could affect the results. That is, a larger sample of students would ensure that findings are truly reflective of the test score reliabilities.

Definitions of Terms

Advanced Placement College Exam - This is a test students are able to take to receive credit for college courses in which they feel they already have the skills that are taught in the course. The grading scale runs from one, a low score, to five, being a high or perfect score.

Advanced Placement Course - The A.P. course is a high school course that students may take in preparation for the A.P. exam. There are several different fields of study in which the senior courses are offered.

High School Senior - This is a student who has successfully completed twelve years of formal schooling.

CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF THE RELATED LITERATURE

History of the Advanced Placement Exam

Advanced placement testing has been in existence in the United States for forty-two years. The idea started in the New England states with the Ivy League colleges trying to discover a way for the freshman students, who had had a very rigorous high school curriculum, to bypass the freshman entrance courses which were very much like the senior courses they had taken in high school (Rothschild,1995). Eighteen of these New England colleges got together and designed three exams: English Composition, English Literature, and mathematics. In the spring of 1954, the first advanced placement exams were given to five-hundred entering college freshman. Charlie Keller, member of the College Board, had thought the idea had merit. In 1955, the A.P. exams were assumed by the College Board with Charlie Keller as the first director of Advanced Placement. Now that the College Board had acquired control over the exam, the number of students that participated almost tripled equaling twelve-hundred students taking the exam in spring of 1955 (Curry, 1995).

Through the next several years these were the only three exams offered for college credit. In 1958, the Board decided to combine the two English exams (composition and literature) into one, because colleges were combining their freshman English courses into one class (Rothschild, 1995). Mr. Keller began looking into the possibility that classes other than English and math would be adaptable to A.P. tests. Such tests would enable students to test out of college introductory courses. In the early 1960's, Keller and the College Board developed eighteen additional A.P. tests. Some of the exams included chemistry, Spanish, and history. By 1965, 45,110 students, on the average, took at least one type of A.P. test and over twelve-hundred colleges accepted A.P. exam scores for credit (Henderson, 1996).

The seventies continued to show advancements in the A.P. testing as computers became more involved in the grading of most of the exams. This helped to speed the testing process, and it took less time to get the testing scores back to the students and the colleges (Wainer, 1994). At the same time the grading of exams was becoming more efficient, the high schools were creating A.P. courses for juniors and sophomores as well as seniors. These courses were developed to begin preparing the student earlier in high school for the A.P. exams (Rothschild, 1995).

The 1980's saw even more growth in the A.P. exam and included twenty-nine introductory college level courses in which students could be tested. Computer Science was the last A.P. exam added in 1984 (Curry, 1995). With the era of "Baby Boomers" in full swing, everyone was trying to use whatever edge they could to get a jump on college. With computer technology in full swing, the world had started to become more fast-paced than ever. A.P. classes were becoming almost mandatory for students who were moving towards higher education. The fierce competition in society was invading the high schools. Most A.P. classes were becoming weighted courses (i.e., these classes were graded on a five-point scale in comparison to other classes which were on a four point scale.) A.P. courses gave students a chance to boost grade point averages which appeared on college applications. The A.P. exam was becoming less a "high-scholars-only" test and more a necessary means by which to get ahead. The number of students taking the A.P. exams in the period between 1980 and 1990 rose one-hundred and seventy-five percent to more than 333,000 students. Eleven and four-tenths percent of all graduating seniors in the United States took the test in that period of time(Herr, 1991).

The first half of the 1990's has shown more growth in the use of the A.P. exam. In 1990, Great Britain, Norway, and

Germany started accepting A.P. exam scores to waive introductory courses. This opened doors for many students who wished to study abroad but found it useless to invest in an exam that would not benefit them. By 1992, Fifty-five countries accepted A.P. exam scores for college credit (Lewis, 1994). Some school districts have pre-A.P. courses available for seventh grade students (Davis, 1996). In 1995, approximately 750,000 A.P. exams were given to 500,000 students comprising of twenty-eight percent minority and fifty-five percent women (Curry, 1995). Compared to five-hundred in 1954, the A.P. exam has traveled by leaps and bounds from a small advantage for a few high school students to a major bridge connecting high school and college courses.

Strategies Utilized in A.P. English Classes

Advanced Placement English has been around since the very start of the A.P. exams in the early fifties. The manner in which this course is taught has gone through few changes over those years, mostly involving adding a few new techniques or combining old ones. Through a review of the related literature, the writer has discovered several different designs which have been incorporated in teaching A.P. English courses.

Portfolios are used in A.P. classes to help gather a knowledge of the A.P. student's skills (Prentiss, 1995).

Portfolios enable the teacher to review a student's previous work to see what improvements have occurred over the progression of the courses. Students may also use this teaching instrument to their advantage by enabling them to do re-writes on material they may have produced previously to determine how they may have improved their writing skills.

A writer's daybook has always been helpful to improve student writing skills (Prentiss, 1995). It has been proven many times and reiterated by many authors that, the more you write the better your writing becomes. A writer's daybook may be used by the teacher to have students do reflective writing of the book or essay they are reading, or more simply, as to a diary. Students may write dreams of their future aspirations. Sometimes these daybooks can help create ideas for classroom discussions involving material the teacher may be covering at that particular time. A daybook could only be a helpful addition to any A.P. English course.

Classroom discussion is a must in almost any A.P. course, but it is a most valuable asset in English. First, teachers must **set** standards before they start this type of teaching **strategy**. The students must feel comfortable, expressing their opinions without repercussion. For the first few discussions teachers may have to prompt the students to get them to start asking questions that force the students to answer. Classroom

discussions usually bring about new ideas or new ways in which to see a certain literary material. The students are then able to look at different perspectives of someone's work as well as broaden their minds to different ways in which they view the author's meaning of the words. Classroom discussion will never become 'passe' in an A.P. class (Prentiss, 1995).

The mechanics of English grammar have been presented to students from the early elementary school grades. There is a definite place for the teaching of grammar usage in the A.P. classroom. More and more high school English classes are gearing themselves toward the ideas written in a student's paper than on the correctness of that student's writing skills. The graders of the essay part of the English A.P. exam do not favor this idea. The A.P. exam graders look at how the paper is written as well as the ideas on the paper. Therefore, it is extremely important for students planning to take the A.P. test not only to be able to develop good content for their papers, but to have ample grammatical skills as well (Stonebraker, 1985). The students must be able to form coherent paragraphs and know the right tenses to use. As a result, A.P. classes need to stress grammatical correctness at all times (Cone, 1992).

Another strategy important in A.P. classes is poetry analyzation (Stonebraker, 1985). The students should be able

to look at poetry of different writers and tell the rhythm and meter, whether it has alliteration, allegory, imagery, or if it was written in iambic meter. These are just a few of the characteristics to look for when reading a poem. Students in an A.P. course should be familiar with some of the techniques. Along with being able to tell the mechanics of a poem, the class should also delve into the meaning of the poem. The students should identify irony, if they find it, as well as other poetic devices which are being used.

Critical reading, writing, and thinking skills are all examples of course strategies the writer gleaned from the study of the related literature (Davis,1996). When students are reading certain material they must be able to seek certain items they are expected to be aware of. If students are asked to look at Edgar Allen Poe's poem The Raven and compare it to Robert Frost's poem A Stopping By the Woods, they must be able to look critically at both poems to discover what they may or may not have in common. When David Stonebraker(1995) states: "Students should be sharpening their awareness of language and their understanding of the writers craft as well as developing critical standards for their independent appreciation of any literary work" (pg. 20), he was reinforcing the fact that A.P. students need to be critical thinkers. In order for students who have enrolled in

the A.P. class to truly achieve their goal-- passing the A.P. test-- they must be willing to look to new insights and new ways of thinking, reading and writing.

The writer believes there may be more, if not better, teaching strategies for English Advanced Placement courses. The review of the literature was overwhelming in this area. The writer chose the best strategies that coincided with the writer's personal experience in the English A.P. classroom.

Advantages of A.P. Exams and Courses

The Advanced Placement College Test and the A.P. courses give students several distinct advantages during high school and college years. These advantages are sometimes widespread through many school districts or solely located at one. But the main reason for the A.P. exam and course to come into existence was one very favorable advantage to the students: the ability to receive college credit for taking one exam.

Colleges in the 1990's are becoming more costly. Student's credit hours range from fifty dollars to three-hundred dollars per credit hour in the state of Ohio (Herr,1991). Therefore, for students to be able to afford college, they have to find ways to economize on the costs. The A.P. exam is one method of doing that. The students who take and pass the A.P. exam may receive anywhere from three to ten hours of credit, thus eliminating the need to take an

introductory course in that subject. That could read as a savings of up to three thousand dollars (Brodenhausen, 1989). This is one of the major advantages for enrolling in the A.P. program.

Many districts have noticed an advantage from the program they had not expected: teacher moral has sky rocketed. Teachers of A.P. courses are usually handed some of the most intellectually challenging students in the school. Teachers are discovering what it is to enjoy teaching again as the students challenge them mentally and eagerly want to learn more. Arthur Steller(1996) observed an urban school where an A.P. program was initiated and noted:

Referring to themselves as Born Again, teachers enthusiastically attended workshops, compared notes, rewrote old lectures, and talked about the positive changes in the classroom. Education had become a serious, exciting business and excellence in teaching was being recognized and appreciated by students, parents, and administrators (p.101).

The A.P. program has revitalized teachers and given them a new attitude towards teaching. Most school districts are accepting only the best teachers to teach A.P. courses, and offering incentives other than the internal ones that teachers experience for teaching the class.

Oklahoma City started an incentive program in 1995. This program offered bonuses to A.P. teachers based on their students' performance on the A.P. exam. A teacher would receive a one-hundred dollar bonus for each student who received a three, two-hundred dollar bonus for each student receiving a four, and a three-hundred dollar bonus for each student receiving a five on the A.P. test. These students who scored these points on the A.P. exam would get a college scholarship grant equaling the teacher's bonus (Steller, 1996). This did great things for both students' and teachers' morale. The students were benefiting not only by receiving college credit, but the opportunity to receive additional money for college. The teachers received additional compensation for how well they prepared their students.

The last advantage the writer felt important enough to include in the review of the literature relates to the weighted grading scale. In the late 1960's and early 1970's students felt it was unfair for students enrolled in the A.P. programs who earned an "A" to receive the same point average value as a student who earned an "A" in a non-A.P. course. The students were dropping in class rank because they were not all receiving "A"s in the A.P. course, with its more challenging work. Their peers, on the other hand, were taking easier courses and received an "A" in a course that was not as

difficult. Administrators came up with the weighted grading scale as a solution. In a typical grading scale an A is worth 4.0, a B is worth 3.0 and so forth. In a weighted grading scale, an A in an A.P. class is given a value of 5.0, a B is given 4.0 and so forth (Herr, 1992). This encouraged students to go ahead and take the A.P. courses without fear of class rank repercussions. In Norman Herr's(1992) study he quoted from a teacher from New Jersey as to how he expressed students' feelings toward weighted grading scales: "It encourages 'rank'-oriented students to take more challenging courses. It also prevents less able students who get "A"s in 'Mickey Mouse' courses from placing first in the class" (p. 86). The writer's personal experience in dealing with this type of scale in high school interpreted it as a way to correct a faulty design.

In summary, Advantages such as teacher incentives for teaching A.P. courses, college credit for a passing score on the A.P. exam, and weighted grading scales for students in A.P. courses have helped the A.P. program to expand over these past forty plus years. The writer found only one disadvantage in the writer's review of the literature. According to Herr's (1992) research some students were taking A.P. courses to enhance their grade point average not intending to take the A.P. exam. This worried some of the teachers because students

were taxing themselves with a heavy courseload for the wrong reasons. Some students were taking as many as three different A.P. courses in a year. Herr's 1992 research mentioned a way this has has negative results on students. Because of the accelerated pace and heavy workload of these A.P. courses students grade point averages would actually lower because they could not keep up in the numerous A.P. courses therefore their grade point average actually dropped instead of increasing. The advantages of the A.P. program far outweigh the disadvantages. The review of the literature has only strengthened this writer's belief in the A.P. program.

CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY AND DATA ANALYSIS

Statement of the Purpose

The purpose of this study is to determine if a relationship exists between the success of high school seniors' in the A.P. English course and the success of high school seniors' on the College English A.P. exam.

Subjects

The subjects of this study included eighty-one twelfth-grade students of mixed racial background who took the Advanced Placement course and test between the years of 1984 and 1992. These subjects took the A.P. course in the same high school although the course was taught by three different teachers during those years.

The twelfth grade students were approximately fifty-two percent caucasian, forty-three percent African-American, three percent Latin-American, and two percent Japanese-American. Twenty-five percent of the students in this study were male and seventy-five percent were female.

None of the subjects were identified as learning disabled or developmentally handicapped throughout the course of their educational years.

Setting

School. The study was conducted in an urban school setting in a mid-sized city school district in mid-eastern Ohio. The school district is composed of two high schools, five middle schools, and fourteen elementary schools. The high schools contain classes for ninth through twelfth grade; the middle schools contain classes for sixth through eighth grade; and the elementary school buildings contain classes for kindergarten through fifth grade. The student population of this district in the 1995-1996 school year was approximately 12,000. Students are allowed to transfer to a different school within the district if it improves the racial balance of the school building or is in the best interest of the student. Otherwise students attend the school closest to their residence. Students are bussed if they live more than one and one-half miles from the building they attend.

Community. The community is a mid-sized city with a population of 70,000, governed by a mayoral political system with a city council. The community population is employed primarily by a large truck manufacturing plant located in the city along with many service-oriented jobs throughout the community. The city has five recreational parks, one large, and several small shopping malls. The community has thirteen cinemas and one large auditorium where live productions are presented

year-round. There is also a small amphitheatre for summer productions in one of the parks. The city has several low income housing projects and at least one-fourth of of the population accepts some type of government financial aid.

Data Collection

The Advanced Placement English course grades were obtained from the high school's student files which were on microfiche. Only the final course grade in the A.P. course was taken from each individual's permanent record to be included in the data. The student's grade was used in the study only if the student had taken the Advanced Placement College English Exam.

The Advanced Placement College English Exam test scores were obtained from the high school principal's files at the school. The test is administered only in the spring of each year. The students base score from the exam is the only one used for the study. The exam scores provide an indication of whether the individual will be able to receive college credit for the test.

Presentation of Results

One hypothesis was investigated in this research study. The study focused on the relationship between students' course grade in an A.P. class and their grade on the A.P. college exam.

The statistical analysis for the hypothesis was conducted using chi-square. Scores achieved in the A.P. English high school course and the A.P. English college exam were employed. The hypothesis was tested in null form, with a null hypothesis that no relationship existed between students' A.P. course grade and students' A.P. college exam scores.

Table I represents the number of students who had taken both the A.P. English course and the A.P. English college exam along with their scores. One of the two variables is the A.P. English course grade. It expressed as grades A,B,C,D, and F--"A" being the highest grade and "F" being the lowest. The other variable is the A.P. English college exam grade. This variable is expressed as scores 5,4,3,2, and 1. "5" being the highest score and "1" being the lowest. Refer to Chapter II, definition of terms, for explanations of A.P. English course and A.P. English college exam.

TABLE I
ANALYSIS OF STUDENTS' A.P. ENGLISH COURSE GRADES AND
STUDENTS' A.P. ENGLISH COLLEGE EXAM SCORES

		Student scores on A.P. exam					
		1	2	3	4	5	Totals
Student Grades On A.P. Course	A	1	5	7	4	3	20
		(1.72)	(9.62)	(5.67)	(1.97)	(.98)	
	B	1	19	9	3	1	33
		(2.85)	(15.88)	(9.37)	(3.25)	(1.62)	
	C	3	11	7	1	0	22
	(1.90)	(10.59)	(6.24)	(2.17)	(1.08)		
D	0	3	0	0	0	3	
	(.25)	(1.44)	(.85)	(.29)	(.14)		
F	2	1	0	0	0	3	
	(.25)	(1.44)	(.85)	(.29)	(.14)		
Totals		7	39	23	8	4	81
$\chi^2 = 30.50$		df = 16		significant at .05 level			

The chi square required for significance at the :05 level is 26.30 (df=16). Since $30.50 > 26.30$, it was concluded there is a significant relationship between students' A.P. English course grades and Students' A.P. English college exam grades. The null hypothesis was rejected. The results of this study appear to be due to conditions other than chance.

Discussion of Results

The null hypothesis was rejected. The findings were significant at the .05 level but not at the .01 level. A relationship exists between students' A.P. English course grades and students' A.P. English college exam scores.

The writer was unable to find a comparable study as expressed in the review of the literature. The results of this study are backed by the fact that students who do well in courses that are geared toward a test usually do well on that test (Lukhele,1994).

The findings from this study are limited by several factors. One major factor may have been that the analysis was completed with only eighty-one students. This is not a large enough subject population to use. Another factor that could have made a difference in the results is that not all the

students who enrolled in the A.P. English course took the A.P. English exam. These "additional" students could have made a difference in the findings.

The community setting of this study makes the results only useful when looking at urban school with this type of population. The study was a success in its findings and the results were significant enough for further study.

CHAPTER IV

SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Summary

The importance of Advanced Placement programs has grown significantly over the past forty years. Students who just a few years ago would have never thought of taking an A.P. course now discover it is almost a necessity as part of the college bound curriculum in high schools. The writer's concern was that the A.P. programs that were in place at the high school level were not doing the job they were designed to do: prepare students to take and pass the A.P. college exam for college credit.

The purpose of this study was to analyze what type of relationship, if any, exists between the high school senior's success in the English Advanced Placement course and the senior's success on the College English Advanced Placement Exam.

One hypothesis was generated. It was: There will be no significant relationship between the high school seniors' success in the English Advanced Placement course and the senior's success on the College English Advanced Placement exam.

The subjects of this study included eighty-one twelfth-grade students of mixed racial background who took the

English Advanced Placement course and college exam between the years of 1984-1992. In order to be included in the study, each subject must have completed the English A.P. course as well as having taken the College English A.P. exam. The study was conducted in an urban school setting in a mid-sized city school district in mid-eastern Ohio. The statistical analysis was conducted using scores from students' final grade in the A.P. English course and students' score on the College English A.P. exam.

A significant relationship did occur between the scores of Students' A.P. exams and the grades they received in the A.P. English class. In the analysis, the number of students getting a successful grade in both the A.P. class and the A.P. exam was enough to warrant a significant finding.

Conclusions

A relationship does appear to exist between the success of students in the A.P. English course and the success of students on the College English A.P. exam.

Recommendations

The writer supports the belief that A.P. courses do make a contribution to the students' preparedness for the A.P. exams. Styles of teaching these A.P. courses are very important as well as the course of study integrated into these

A.P. programs. The A.P. programs give students an ideal opportunity to get a "head start" on college.

Further studies, encompassing larger groups of students and the inclusion of different types of school districts (rural setting as well as urban), should be conducted.

Studies of undergraduate (freshman through junior) A.P. courses and their effect on exam scores should also be given consideration.

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R002637908

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