

Classes

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rebate figured in, for the AP students to take the tests.

Students who register but miss their exams without a legitimate excuse will have to reimburse the district.

Juniors and seniors in the accelerated or gifted programs may sign up for the AP program, provided they have at least a 3.0 average, are able to work independently and have a recommendation from their teachers in the subject areas in which they wish advanced placement.

"Some students take them for the prestige," Griffiths said. "Others take them because college placement offices like to see them on students' transcripts. Colleges will often allow students achieving a 3, 4 or 5 on the tests to skip these courses their freshman year, saving them some money. Accepted AP courses also reduce the number of required courses in college, leaving the students more room for electives."

"Usually students take one or two AP courses," Griffiths said. "Very few take three. Because Dallas doesn't have gifted or honors programs, students can take these courses instead."

AP's not an automatic advantage

Equivalent to courses required of many college freshmen, Dallas's AP courses are taught on the college level with extensive in-depth study. "Less than one percent of the students fail the courses," Griffiths said.

At the end of the course, AP students may take an advanced placement test for college credit, although the colleges don't have to accept them.

"The students' grades on the AP exam may not be high enough for their college to accept," Griffiths said. "Some colleges have stricter requirements for AP credit than others, but they are impressed by students who take AP courses, even if they don't take the AP tests."

AP courses help a student's college application stand out. The value is in the eye of the beholder.

School board member Dr. Richard Coslett, a product of an AP program, likes the AP program but sees problems in the course prerequisites.

"Not all of the requirements are consistent for all of the courses," he said. "We need more consistency - different teachers have different requirements."

He is also concerned about the extra .5 per course automatically added to AP students' grade point averages.

"Possibly we should add the extra points only after they take the advanced placement credit test," he said. "Otherwise, it looks like the most important thing about the courses is simply having them on your transcript."

Coslett said he had recently spoken with the parents of a former Dallas AP student who is now a semester ahead of his college class because he took AP courses in high school.

"He saved enough space on his college schedule to be able to take extra courses, including a few on the graduate level," Coslett said.

What students say

Greg Nadzan, Abby Russin and Ken Chappell, who graduated last

year, took AP courses which they say have helped them in college.

None took the AP tests. All three highly recommend the AP courses to upcoming students.

"I took AP calculus and biology," said Chappell, who is majoring in accounting at the University of Scranton. "When the university accepted me, I had to take a placement test and because of my scores could have skipped the first three semesters of math."

He chose to skip only one course, taking the others to help reinforce his knowledge.

"My background from Dallas has been a great help," he said. "There's a noticeable difference between what I learned and what my classmates learned in high school."

Nadzan, a freshman at Yale, is considering a major in biology with an eye to going into research after graduation. He studied AP English and calculus at Dallas but took human physiology and chemistry II in high school instead of AP biology.

Some of his classmates took more AP courses, he said.

The AP English helped me with grammar and writing tips, especially when I'm writing term papers.

Greg Nadzan

Dallas graduate, now at Yale

"The AP English helped me with grammar and writing tips, especially when I'm writing term papers," he said. "I didn't take the calculus exam because it wouldn't have helped me much. Yale accepts only a 4 or a 5. I want to take college calculus so I don't miss out on anything."

Russin, a freshman at Colgate University, said she enjoyed her high school AP English and calculus classes.

"Although I got a lot out of calculus in high school, I signed up for first year calculus at college," she said. "I could have gone right into second year calculus, but I didn't want to miss anything."

AP English has helped her with the large amount of writing required in college, she said.

What colleges say

Each college has a different way of looking at incoming students who have taken advanced placement courses.

"The most important factor is the student's entire transcript, grades 9 through 12, especially their final grades in major subjects," said Marge Esopi, admissions counselor at the Penn State Wilkes-Barre campus.

Penn State also considers each prospective student's honors or AP courses, SAT scores and class rank.

Although AP exam scores don't affect a student's admission, they can affect their credit for certain freshman courses, Esopi said.

Students can skip freshman calculus, physics, chemistry or English literature and composition if they score at least a 3 on an AP exam.

Students scoring a 4 or higher on AP exams can skip freshman

history, psychology, biology or English language and composition.

Wilkes University also pays the most attention to the students' high school records, especially the courses that will affect their college major, according to dean of admissions Emory Guffrovich.

"For example, students who plan to major in engineering or pre-med should have taken many science courses in high school," he said.

"I would rather see a solid high school academic background than anything. If they take the AP tests and score a 3 or better they can skip those freshman courses, but some take both the tests and the course anyway."

AP courses can also be substituted for elective courses outside the students' majors, he said. For example a history major can substitute his high school AP English for a freshman course.

"AP courses are a great help to the students - they show the students have a strong academic background," he said.

Lake-Lehman has link to Penn State

Lake-Lehman also offers an advanced placement program, consisting of eight courses, according to guidance counselor Flossie Finn.

English has 28 students, biology has 17, American history has 26, Spanish has 10 and calculus has 14 students, she said.

"We also offer chemistry, computer science and European history, but don't run them if we don't have a large enough enrollment," she said.

Lake-Lehman students may also apply for scholarships to study at nearby Penn State, Finn said. Students may take any course they wish, as long as college courses don't conflict with the students' high school schedules and aren't simply substitutions for courses offered at Lake-Lehman.

The district doesn't include grades for Penn State courses in the students' averages but notes them on student transcripts, Finn said.

If a student scores a 3 or higher, the district picks up the tab.





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