

**TAMALPAIS UNION HIGH SCHOOL DISTRICT  
Larkspur, California**

**Course of Study**

**AP CAPSTONE/ADVANCED PLACEMENT SEMINAR**

**I. INTRODUCTION: COURSE DESCRIPTION**

**Overview**

AP Capstone is a two-year program consisting of two courses: AP Seminar & AP Research, offered consecutively for juniors and seniors. AP Seminar is open to students who are interested in the program without imposing any entrance prerequisites for enrollment. AP Seminar is a two-semester, elective course (UC “g”) that aims to equip students with the power to analyze and evaluate information with accuracy and precision in order to craft and communicate evidence-based arguments. In addition, the course focuses upon relevant and contemporary, global issues that increase students’ awareness and develop their perceptions of their world. Using an inquiry framework of questioning, understanding, evaluating, synthesizing, and transforming, students practice reading and analyzing articles, research studies, and foundational literary and philosophical texts; listening to and viewing speeches, broadcasts, and personal accounts; experiencing artistic works and performances; conducting research and evaluating evidence; constructing and supporting arguments; and collaborating and communicating. Teachers, together with students, have the flexibility to select issues and themes for deep and extended exploration. Sample topics of exploration for the year include, but are not limited to: justice, innovation, revolution, sustainability, and technology. Student learning is evaluated in a number of ways, including the following three required assessments: a collaborative team project and presentation, an individual research-based essay and presentation, and an end-of-course examination. The instructor evaluates the first two assessments within the course, and the last assessment is a skills-based AP exam offered in May. The assessments are summative and will be used to calculate a final AP Score (using the 1-5 scale) for AP Seminar. Successful completion of AP Seminar is required for continuation to AP Research the following year. Upon successful completion of both courses, students are eligible for either a certificate or a diploma, depending on the number of other AP courses they take and the results of their exams.

**II. Student Learning Outcomes**

**Curricular Requirements**

The following curricular requirements are the core elements of AP Seminar.

- Students explore the complexities of one or more themes by making connections within, between, and/or among multiple cross-curricular areas and by exploring multiple perspectives and lenses (e.g., cultural and social, artistic and

- philosophical, political and historical, environmental, economic, scientific, futuristic, ethical) related to those themes.
- AP Capstone gives students the pedagogical framework (“QUEST”) to develop, practice, and hone their critical and creative thinking skills as they make connections between various issues and their own lives. Students develop and apply discrete skills identified in the learning objectives of the enduring understandings within the following five big ideas:
    1. **Question and Explore**
    2. **Understand and Analyze**
    3. **Evaluate Multiple Perspectives**
    4. **Synthesize Ideas**
    5. **Team, Transform, and Transmit**
  - Students gain a rich appreciation and understanding of issues through the following activities:
    1. reading articles and research studies;
    2. reading foundational, literary, and philosophical texts;
    3. viewing and listening to speeches, broadcasts, and/or personal accounts; and experiencing artistic works and performances.
  - Students develop an understanding of how to ethically use others’ knowledge and ideas in their own work, avoiding plagiarism.
  - Students work collaboratively with a team to identify, investigate, analyze, and evaluate a real-world or academic issue; consider options, alternatives, solutions, or resolutions; and develop a written report, multimedia presentation, and defense to communicate a conclusion or recommendation.
  - Students work independently to identify a research question based on provided stimulus material; research the issue; analyze, evaluate, and select evidence to develop an argument; present and defend a conclusion; and produce a multimedia presentation to be delivered to their peers.

## **Overview of the Curriculum Framework**

Based on the Understanding by Design (Wiggins and McTighe) model, the curriculum framework is intended to provide a clear and detailed description of the course requirements necessary for student success. This conceptualization will guide the development and organization of learning outcomes from general to specific, resulting in focused statements about content knowledge and skills needed for success in the course. The curriculum framework contains the following structural components:

- The course is organized around five **big ideas**. Tied to each big idea are several **essential questions**. These are open-ended questions that encourage students to think deeply about a topic, ask additional questions and investigate solutions, and develop the deeper conceptual understanding that the course seeks to foster.

- Within each big idea are several **enduring understandings**. These are the long-term takeaways related to the big ideas that a student should have after exploring the content and skills. These understandings are expressed as generalizations that specify what students will come to understand about the key concepts in the course. Enduring understandings are numbered to correspond to each big idea.
- Linked to each enduring understanding are the corresponding **learning objectives**. The learning objectives articulate what students need to be able to do in order to develop the enduring understandings. The learning objectives will become targets of assessment for the course. Learning objectives are numbered to correspond with the appropriate big ideas and enduring understandings.
- For each of the learning objectives, **essential knowledge** statements describe the facts and basic concepts that a student should know and be able to recall in order to demonstrate mastery of the learning objective. Essential knowledge components are numbered to correspond with the appropriate big ideas, enduring understandings, and learning objectives.

Each of the five big ideas, along with the corresponding enduring understandings and essential questions are described below. For a chart illustrating the learning objectives and essential knowledge associated with each big idea and enduring understanding, please see the College Board's complete [AP Seminar Course and Exam Description](#).

### *Big Idea 1: Question and Explore*

Inquiry and investigation begin when students encounter information about complex issues and problems that stimulates their intellectual curiosity. They then continue the research process by developing a critical question about one or more of those complex issues or ideas. Seeking answers to such questions requires exploration of numerous, often competing perspectives; the context surrounding those perspectives; and the reliability and credibility of the perspectives. Through this exploration, students begin to develop their own perspectives, rather than simply accept those of others. They consider the purpose of their research — what is supposed to be achieved and why. Ideally, they also develop additional questions that lead to further inquiry. The intrinsic value of asking and answering questions cannot be overstated. Giving students the opportunity to dig deeper and feed their curiosity makes for meaningful discoveries and discussions.

### **Essential Questions**

- How does the context of a problem or issue affect how it is interpreted or presented?
- How might others see the problem or issue differently?
- What questions have yet to be asked?
- What voices or perspectives are missing from my research?
- What do I want to know, learn, or understand?
- How does my research question shape how I go about trying to answer it?
- What keywords should I use to search for information about this topic?

## *Big Idea 2: Understand and Analyze*

Developing understanding starts with comprehension of the concepts and perspectives under examination. Being able to summarize by identifying and explaining the salient ideas in a text is foundational. When students summarize and explain an author's perspective to others, they are building understanding. Students must comprehend a perspective or argument in order to be able to analyze it. That analysis — including consideration of the author's point of view and purpose, the reasoning and details the author selects, develops, and conveys, and the way the author chooses to situate those details — in turn leads to greater understanding of the topic or concept being explored. Students evaluate the strength of an argument by examining the line of reasoning and the quality of the evidence the author uses. This level of understanding allows students to recognize the implications and predict the consequences of an argument.

### **Essential Questions**

- What strategies will help me comprehend a text?
- What is the argument's main idea and what reasoning does the author use to develop it?
- Why might the author view the issue this way?
- What biases may the author have that influence his or her perspective?
- Does this argument acknowledge other perspectives?
- How do I know whether something is true?
- What are the implications of these arguments?
- How does this conclusion impact me and my community? Or my research?

## *Big Idea 3: Evaluate Multiple Perspectives*

Understanding the complexity of an issue, idea, or problem requires students to compare and contrast different perspectives. These multiple perspectives, which may support, oppose, compete with, or otherwise vary from one another, come together to create the conversation on the issue. Students must consider the biases and assumptions behind those perspectives in order to evaluate their relevance and importance in the conversation. Evaluating multiple perspectives and arguments allows students to better understand the complexities of an issue or topic.

### **Essential Questions**

- What patterns or trends can be identified among the arguments about this issue?
- What are the implications and/or consequences of accepting or rejecting a particular argument?
- How can I connect the multiple perspectives? What other issues, questions, or topics do they relate to?
- How can I explain contradictions within or between arguments?
- From whose perspective is this information being presented, and how does that affect my evaluation?

### *Big Idea 4: Synthesize Ideas*

Once enough information is gathered and evaluated, students synthesize their accumulated knowledge, emerging ideas, and perspectives to form conclusions of their own. In order to situate their perspectives within the larger conversation, students must consider other perspectives and points of view. Strong arguments have a clear purpose and are grounded in a logical line of reasoning supported by carefully chosen and relevant evidence. Effective arguments analyze the material and develop a perspective on it. Information from other sources should not stand in for students' own thinking. The goal is for students to think critically about the information and then add to, not simply repeat, the ideas of others. Building arguments on the ideas of others recognizes and acknowledges their perspectives while also establishing one's unique voice in the conversation.

#### **Essential Questions**

- How do I connect and analyze the evidence in order to develop an argument and support a conclusion?
- What line of reasoning and evidence would best support my argument? Is my reasoning logical?
- Are there other conclusions I should consider?
- What am I taking for granted? How do I acknowledge and account for my own biases and assumptions?
- What is the best way to acknowledge and attribute the work of others that was used to support my argument?
- How can I avoid committing plagiarism?

### *Big Idea 5: Team, Transform, and Transmit*

Collaboration, communication, and reflection are skills that provide opportunities for students to develop their learning. When collaborating, students draw upon their own strengths and the strengths of teammates to achieve a common goal. An argument is effectively communicated when its purpose is clear, it is tailored to a specific audience and context, and it is conveyed through a medium appropriate and appealing to the intended audience. Adhering to standard language conventions and engaging delivery techniques establishes a writer's or speaker's credibility with his or her audience. Whether working alone or in a group, students reflect on their work and learning processes, which can lead to personal growth as well as even more effective inquiry, learning, and collaboration.

#### **Essential Questions**

- How can I best appeal to and engage my audience?
- What is the best medium or genre through which to reach my audience?
- What common misconceptions might my audience have?
- How might I adapt my argument for different audiences and situations?
- How might my communication choices affect my credibility with my audience?
- What contributions can I offer to a team?
- What is the benefit of revision?
- How can I benefit from reflecting on my own work?

### III. Instructional Approaches

#### *Organizing the Course*

##### **Inquiry and the Academic Conversation**

While the AP Seminar course develops core skills for academic success, it also challenges students to learn to think critically about complex issues and form their own perspectives about them. For this reason, the course is organized around topics, themes, or issues chosen at the local level by teachers, together with students. Helping students move from reviewing literature to building an argument through inquiry is a key goal of the AP Seminar course.

Critical inquiry focuses on the creation of new ideas, perspectives, and arguments. Teachers must help students understand that the research process is not simply about collecting evidence or facts and then piecing them together. Instead, the research process is about inquiry — asking questions and coming to solutions and conclusions through serious thinking and reflection. The researcher seeks relevant information in articles, books, and other sources and develops an informed perspective built upon, but not merely derivative of, the ideas in the examined material. As a result, the research process is recursive, meaning that the researcher regularly revisits ideas, seeks new information when necessary, and reconsiders and refines the research questions, topic, and/or approach.

Facilitating students' entrance into academic or real-world conversations about complex issues is another key goal of the AP Seminar course. AP Seminar provides the forum for students to examine multiple, diverse perspectives on issues in order to better understand and appreciate their complexity. Students' cultural backgrounds and experiences provide a rich foundation from which to begin. By considering and evaluating the multiple perspectives of others, students develop their own individual perspectives and add their personal voices to the larger conversation.

All in all, the AP Seminar course aims to build independent, critical thinkers by empowering students to develop the skills and traits necessary for future academic study.

##### **Course Content**

#### *Topics and Themes*

Teachers have the flexibility to choose one or more appropriate themes that allow for deep interdisciplinary exploration based on:

- Concepts or issues from other AP courses
- Student interests
- Local and/or civic issues
- Academic problems or questions
- Global or international topics

## *Possible Themes*

These themes are possible starting points. Within these themes, issues can be identified for exploration and investigation.

- |                  |                |                               |
|------------------|----------------|-------------------------------|
| ▶ Aesthetics     | ▶ Identity     | ▶ Power                       |
| ▶ Belief         | ▶ Immigration  | ▶ Protest                     |
| ▶ Communication  | ▶ Innovation   | ▶ Representation              |
| ▶ Courage        | ▶ Intelligence | ▶ Revolution                  |
| ▶ Culture        | ▶ Justice      | ▶ Rights and responsibilities |
| ▶ Democracy      | ▶ Language     | ▶ Social media                |
| ▶ Discovery      | ▶ Leisure      | ▶ Space                       |
| ▶ Discrimination | ▶ Liberty      | ▶ Sustainability              |
| ▶ Diversity      | ▶ Media        | ▶ Technology                  |
| ▶ Education      | ▶ Modeling     | ▶ Theory                      |
| ▶ Environment    | ▶ Myth         | ▶ Traditions                  |
| ▶ Evolution      | ▶ Networks     | ▶ Transformation              |
| ▶ Food           | ▶ Opportunity  | ▶ Utopia                      |
| ▶ Freedom        | ▶ Patterns     | ▶ War                         |
| ▶ Government     | ▶ Peace        | ▶ Wealth and poverty          |
| ▶ Health         | ▶ Perception   | ▶ Work                        |
| ▶ Home           | ▶ Place        |                               |

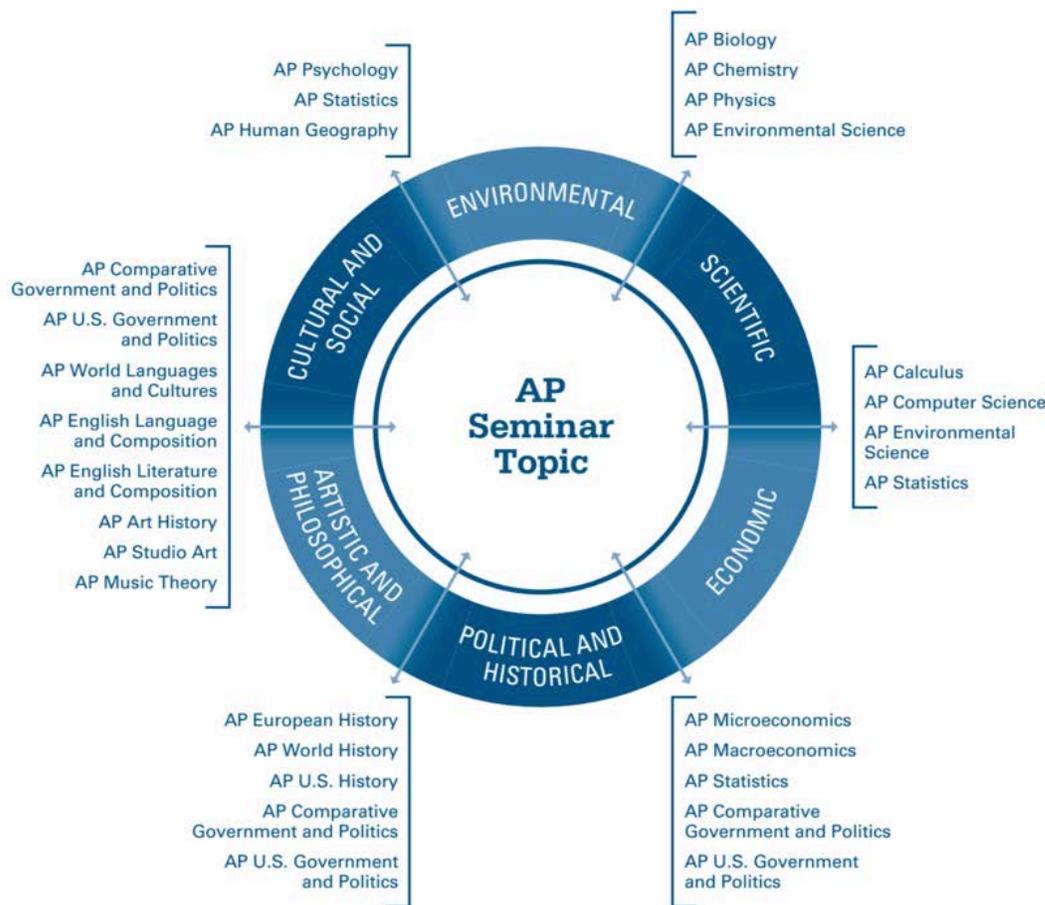
## *Multiple Perspectives and Interdisciplinary Connections*

Exploring different points of view and making connections across disciplines are fundamental components of the AP Seminar experience. Students consider each topic through a variety of lenses and from multiple perspectives, many of which are divergent or competing. Analyzing topics through multiple lenses aids in interdisciplinary understanding and helps students gain a rich appreciation for the complexity of important issues. Teachers should encourage students to explore a topic through several of the following lenses:

- Cultural and social
- Artistic and philosophical
- Political and historical
- Environmental
- Economic
- Scientific
- Futuristic
- Ethical

## Making Connections within AP

Some teachers may wish to make cross-curricular connections with other AP courses, although there is no specific requirement to do so. The graphic below illustrates possible cross-curricular connections. The AP Seminar course topics can be viewed through different disciplinary lenses which relate to courses in the AP Program. Two additional lenses, Ethical and Futuristic, are not shown in the diagram below but have potential links with many AP courses.



## Texts and Materials

Because people share their perspectives through many different types of media, teachers and students are encouraged to draw upon a wide variety of texts. These texts can include printed and online articles, speeches, interviews, and personal narratives, artistic works and performances, or other kinds of texts — anything that conveys a perspective and can be examined.

When selecting texts for study, teachers should challenge students to engage with and analyze complex and scholarly sources. Helping students with the identification of scholarly materials requires a discussion of peer review, which differentiates scholarly from non-scholarly sources in an academic, research community. Students should be

invited to find and contribute texts for study, providing them opportunities to make connections of their own. For research purposes, students will have access to District-provided EBSCOhost Research databases via the Redwood High School Library, which include:

- Academic Search Premier
- Advanced Placement Source
- eBook on EBSCOHOST
- Education Research Complete
- ERIC
- History Reference Center
- Library, Information Science & Technology Abstracts
- Library, Information Science & Technology Abstracts with Full Text
- Literary Reference Center Plus
- MAS Complete
- Newspaper Source Plus
- Science Reference Center
- TOPICsearch

Access to a variety of print and online style guides, writing and argumentation handbooks, databases, and other reference materials is essential to equip students and teachers with the tools necessary for research and communication. The AP Capstone program does not require or specify a specific style guide. However, students should maintain the conventions of a single style guide in an individual project.

Specific book-length texts, including style guides, writing and argumentation handbooks, readers, and fiction and nonfiction texts, assigned for required course readings are subject to prior Board approval in compliance with the District's textbook adoption policies. Examples of such texts include, but are not limited to:

*The Bedford Researcher*, Palmquist  
*Patterns for College Writing*, Kirsznner and Mandell  
*Joining the Conversation*, Palmquist and Wallraff  
*Race, Class, and Gender in the United States (a Reader)*, Rothenberg and Mayhew  
*Between the World and Me*, Coates  
*Just Mercy*, Stevenson  
*No Place to Hide*, Greenwald

### **Bridging to the AP Research Course**

Upon class completion of the assessment tasks for the AP Seminar course, teachers should provide students with a preview of the skills, goals, and timelines of the next course in the AP Capstone program: AP Research. Students who will continue on to the AP Research course should be given the opportunity to:

- develop a list of topics and high-level questions to spark their interest in engaging in an individual research project;

- identify potential consultants or expert advisers to guide them in the planning and development of their research project;
- identify potential opportunities (if they are interested) to perform primary research with a mentor during the summer, via internships or summer research projects for high school students offered in the community and local higher education institutions; and
- discuss research project planning skills and ideas with students who are currently taking the AP Research course.

If students will begin preparing for the AP Research course during the summer, the AP Seminar and AP Research course instructors should provide AP Research students with additional instruction, assignments, and avenues for continued communication to guide them through the research planning process during the summer months.

#### IV. Assessment

In addition to/in conjunction with teacher-administered, in-course formative and summative assessments used to determine progress and semester grade reports, students are assessed with two College-Board-required through-course performance assessment tasks and one end-of-course exam. All three assessments are summative and will be used to calculate a final AP score (using the 1–5 scale) for AP Seminar.

- **Team Project and Presentation — 25%**  
Students work in teams of three to six to identify, investigate, analyze, and evaluate an academic or real-world problem, question, or issue. Each team designs and/or considers options, alternatives, and approaches; develops a written report and multimedia presentation to communicate its conclusions, solutions, or recommendations; and provides a defense to questions posed by the teacher.
- **Individual Research-Based Essay and Presentation — 35%**  
The College Board’s AP Program will annually release cross-curricular stimulus material (texts) representing a range of perspectives focused on a single theme. Students will use these texts to identify a research question of their own; conduct research; analyze, evaluate, and select evidence to develop an argument; and present and defend their conclusions. The final paper must refer to and incorporate at least one of the provided sources.
- **End-of-Course Exam (3 Hours) — 40% (College Board Scored)**  
During the AP Exam administration window, students will take the AP Seminar End-of-Course Exam. The exam consists of five items (three short-answer and two essay questions). The three short-answer questions assess analysis of an argument in a single source or document. The first essay question requires the students to perform a close reading of two documents and perform a comparative analysis and evaluation of the authors’ arguments. The second essay question assesses students’ skills in synthesizing and creating an evidence-based argument.