



## WESTRIDGE SCHOOL

### **Advanced Courses Town Hall Q&A Follow-up**

Thank you to all who came out to Monday's Advanced Courses Town Hall. We were thrilled with the turnout and look forward to future conversations. In the meantime, the following Q&A provides answers from the Town Hall's chat that we didn't have time to directly answer and that can be addressed appropriately in this format.

Additional information on the program will be shared at the Curriculum Night events over the next week, and we will host future meetings on this topic. As always, feel free to contact Gary Baldwin, director of Upper School, and refer to the expanded FAQ on the Advanced Courses webpage at [www.westridge.org/advancedcourses](http://www.westridge.org/advancedcourses).

#### **Will teachers be given support to develop the new curriculum?**

Yes—curriculum development is a collaborative effort within departments and with the academic leadership of the school. The process is based in defined standards of rigor for Westridge Advanced Courses generally as well as for individual fields of study. All curricula must be approved by the academic leadership team and the faculty Curriculum and Academic Standards Committee. After that, all Advanced Courses will be submitted to the University of California for its honors designation.

#### **Will you still have Honors Courses in addition to Advanced Courses?**

Yes.

#### **Will math and science courses change to Advanced Courses?**

Yes, but not in the first phase/year.

#### **What traditional AP courses will still be offered in 2022-2023 school year?**

With the exceptions of AP European History, AP Spanish, and AP Latin, all current APs will be offered in the 2022-2023 school year.

**Since Westridge will administer exams for the AP courses offered over the three-year transition to Advanced Courses, will the College Board still send the results to colleges, or will that change because Westridge is moving away from their program?**

Yes. The College Board will send scores wherever the student directs them to be sent.

**I still don't know if I understand the difference between AP and Advanced Courses. If they're equally rigorous, why do we need to de-weight the grades?**

Our decision to move to unweighted grades is not related to the rigor of courses but to the philosophy of deeper learning. Removing grade weights removes the incentive to select courses primarily to inflate GPAs. We want to encourage students to take courses they connect with personally that will help them discover their interests, passions, and clearer picture of who they are as a learner.

**Will Upper School students keep their current weighted GPAs, or will they be retroactively unweighted?**

Grades for honors and AP courses taken before fall of 2022 will be weighted on students' transcripts. Transcripts will also note the change in our policy beginning 2022-2023 so that colleges understand the change in GPA policies between the school years.

**When a college re-weights grades, will they re-weight a grade in an "Advanced" class with the same weight that they would weight a grade in an AP class?**

Although colleges don't provide specific information on the formulas they use to re-weight GPAs, our Advanced Courses will be weighted by colleges as the most advanced courses available to our students, as APs have been until now.

**Does Westridge report class rank to colleges along with GPA?**

No. This has been standard practice at Westridge for decades.

**It sounds like the rationale for moving away from weighted grades (irrespective of via an AP course or otherwise) is that many colleges de-weight or re-weight the grades. Why not just keep weighting them and if the college ignores it, so be it? Isn't that safer than just assuming it won't matter to the schools we may decide we want to pursue?**

The rationale for moving away from weighted grades is to encourage students to take courses they connect with personally that will help them discover and pursue their interests and passions regardless of the impact on their GPA. Doing so will allow the distinguish themselves in the college admission process by presenting a clearer picture of who they are as students, while removing the incentive to select courses primarily to inflate GPAs. Westridge Advanced Courses are being thoughtfully designed to provide the types of content and skills development that colleges are looking for.

We have been consistently told by colleges that they are accustomed to receiving transcripts from both schools that weight grades and school that don't weight and that they evaluate transcripts in the context of each school's program. Students' weighted GPA is compared to their high school's highest possible GPA, which is always reported to colleges on our school profile form sent with each student's application.

**Will grades for AP courses be weighted until APs are phased out?**

No. Beginning fall 2022, no student grades will be weighted. (Grades for honors and APs courses taken before fall of 2022 will be weighted on students' transcripts.)

**What will a transcript look like for students who have taken AP and honors classes before the change to unweighted grades? Will the transcript show weighted versus un-weighted?**

Yes, transcripts for students who have taken honors or APs classes through this year will show both weighted and un-weighted grades, and our transcripts and school profile, which go out to all colleges to which our students apply, will explain the change.

**In the Advanced History Courses, which all students are enrolled in but may then opt for different levels of challenge, will the classes be separated after the selection of advanced levels?** *(Note: This only applies to Advanced History Courses, which will follow a challenge by choice model where students can opt into advanced level work.)*

No. The concept of the "challenge by choice" model is that within a single class, students have the choice to participate in different or additional activities that count toward Advanced Courses designation. It recognizes that different projects and goals pose different challenges to different students.

**How will you measure success as you transition to this new curriculum?**

We constantly review our curriculum and individual classes to ensure they are meeting our goals for students. This will be the case with our Advanced Courses, and we will, of course, be focused on this as the program is phased in. We have developed clear standards for rigor and deep learning outcomes generally and for individual fields of study, which will guide ongoing curricular review. In addition, student learning outcomes are being built into the new courses.

**Any thoughts to slowing down the implementation given we are emerging from a global pandemic and getting a new head of school this July with the retirement of Mrs. McGregor?**

The three-year phasing in of Advanced Courses allows us to take a measured and thoughtful approach to our rollout. Andrea Kassar, who will become head of school

in July, is very supportive of this initiative and will indeed add a great deal to its development and evaluation as someone who currently leads an Upper School program that moved away from APs quite a few years ago.

Regarding the impact of the pandemic, remote learning forced us to try things academically that would have taken significantly longer under normal circumstances. This provided great clarity about what is essential to curricula, what are transferable skills, and the importance of being more creative and thoughtful about assessment, among other things. This learning both informed the development of our Advanced Courses and reinforced our belief in the critical importance of moving to them to promote even deeper learning for our students.

**Would it make sense to phase the unweighted GPA with the phasing of the Advanced Courses?**

It would not because the unweighting of grades is not directly tied to ending AP courses, but rather to the philosophy of providing opportunities for even deeper learning.

**What is the positive/negative impact of taking AP tests outside of the Westridge curriculum?**

Though many colleges are moving away from awarding credits based on AP exam scores, some colleges still give college credit for certain AP exam scores and some international programs still require APs as part of their applications. For students interested in these opportunities, advisors and college counselors can help guide them.

**How can you ensure these advanced classes are viewed by the colleges as being as rigorous as an AP course? There are over 25,000 high schools in the US—how can the admissions officers compare students on an apples-to-apples basis?**

Colleges know us and trust us and have the highest possible appraisal of our program and our teachers as we prepare students for college exceptionally well. In addition to the other benefits of this move, it will allow us to take better advantage of our reputation and history in the college process.

In addition, college admissions officers are skilled at evaluating a vast range of transcripts and courses, including IB, AP, mastery transcript, and advanced courses. Our college counseling team is in regular communication with colleges updating them on our program. This year and throughout the introduction of Advanced Courses, the college counseling team will spend a great deal of educating colleges about the new program so they understand the level of rigor in the classes and have any questions answered.