

Advancing Beyond APs



Durham Academy

How We Got Here

2017: Pre-k-12 Curriculum Alignment focus: *what do we want our graduates to be able to do?*

2018: Enterprise Risk Management Committee focus: *what could threaten DA's success in college admissions?*

2020: Advancing Beyond AP Task Force convenes; research focus.

2022: DA Board of Trustees endorses Advancing Beyond AP curriculum.

2022-2023: Upper School faculty professional development; focus on Advancing Beyond AP curricular architecture. Begin student/family/college admissions officers education.

2023-2024: Continued curricular development of advanced courses; structure, prerequisites, scope and sequence.

2024-2025: Fully sunset APs; initiate advanced courses.

Academic Excellence at DA \Rightarrow Thriving in College and Beyond

- An exceptional education that
 - prepares students for success in college and life
 - encourages students to discover and pursue their intellectual passions
 - helps students develop 21st century skills
- A rigorous, unique curriculum that
 - is grounded in relevant, flexible learning
 - is dynamic, interactive, authentic, and meaningful
 - better leverages the talents of our faculty and students
 - positions DA among the leaders of independent school teaching and learning
- A learning experience that helps students succeed in college admissions, college, and beyond

The Traditional AP Landscape Has Shifted

- The AP system is outdated and inflexible. Colleges and universities know it and they are giving less credit for APs with every passing year.
- Top independent schools have been advancing beyond AP for decades. This trend is accelerating.

Beyond APs is Becoming Best Practice



NEWS

Advancing Beyond AP Courses

Psychology Today

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Find a Therapist (City or Zip)



Peter Gray Ph.D.

The Advanced Placement Racket

Advanced Placement courses harm students and enrich

Opinion | Our schools will get rid of AP courses. Here's why.

By Eight Heads of Washington-Area Private Schools

June 18, 2018 at 4:39 p.m. EDT

Newsletters

The Atlantic

Brighten their holiday. Enrich their everyday. [Give The Atlantic](#)

U.S.

AP Classes Are a Scam

The College Board earns over half of all its revenues from the courses—and, in an uncertain environment, students keep being suckered.

By John Tierney

Peer Schools Have Led The Way, DA Needs to Join Them

- Agnes Irwin School (PA)
- Annie Wright Schools (WA)
- Archer School for Girls (CA)
- Athenian School (CA)
- The Baldwin School (PA)
- Beaver Country Day (MA)
- Berkeley Carroll (NYC)
- Berwick Academy (ME)
- Bosque School (NM)
- Boston University Academy (MA)
- Brearly School (NYC)
- Calhoun School (NY)
- Cambridge School of Weston (MA)
- Cary Academy (NC)
- Cascades Academy (OR)
- Cate School (CA)
- Catlin Gabel (OR)
- Choate Rosemary Hall (CT)
- Christchurch School (VA)
- Concord Academy (MA)
- Crystal Springs Upland School (CA)
- Dalton School (NYC)
- Derryfield School (NH)
- Episcopal High School (VA)
- Ethical Culture Fieldston School (NYC)
- Fountain Valley School (CO)
- Georgetown Day (DC)
- Germantown Friends (PA)
- Holton-Arms (MD)
- Haverford School (PA)
- Horace Mann (NYC)
- Kiski School (PA)
- Lakeside School (WA)
- Landon School (MD)
- Lawrenceville School (NJ)
- Lick-Wilmerding (CA)
- Lincoln School (RI)
- Loomis Chaffee (CT)
- Maret School (DC)
- Marin Academy (CA)
- McDonogh School (MD)
- National Cathedral (DC)
- New Roads School (CA)
- Nightingale-Bamford (NYC)
- Nueva School (CA)
- Packer Collegiate Institute (NY)
- Park School (MD)
- Phillips Academy Andover (MA)
- Phillips Exeter (NH)
- Pingree School (MA)
- Poly Prep CDS (NYC)
- Pomfret School (CT)
- Potomac School (VA)
- Riverdale Country School (NYC)
- Sandia Prep (NM)
- Sidwell Friends (DC)
- St. Albans (DC)
- St. Ann's (NYC)
- St. Luke's School (CT)
- St. Mark's School (MA)
- St. Paul Academy and Summit School (MN)
- St. Paul's School (NH)
- Spence School (NYC)
- University Liggett School (MI)
- Urban School of San Francisco (CA)
- Western Reserve Academy (OH)
- Westtown School (PA)
- William Penn Charter (PA)
- Wooster School (CT)

APs Limit Teaching

“My AP Environmental Science class changed its content and **we couldn’t explore the social and economic consequences of important issues** like urban decay, suburban sprawl and redlining policies — all readily evident right here in Durham.”

“I’d love to spend more time exploring a variety of resources and build bigger projects around them, but I couldn’t under the **AP time crunch.**”

“There’s **not enough time or flexibility** to be able to delve into complex topics.”

*Upper School Faculty Feedback

APs Limit Learning

What gets left out and left behind:

- Student inquiry
- Independent problem-solving
- Deep and enduring understanding
- Application of knowledge and skills to relevant situations
- Research
- Authentic demonstrations of learning

Sacrificing Real-World Relevance: AP European History

Students crave one thing from their educational experience — RELEVANCE.

An advanced curriculum freed from the constraints of teaching to a test opens the doors to discussions about:

- Russia's Invasion of Ukraine
- China's COVID-19 Lockdown Protests
- Iranian Anti-Government Protests
- Brittney Griner Prisoner Exchange

Students Want and Deserve Better

“The competitive side of ‘How many APs do you have?’ That’s toxic. It should be, ‘How much do you love your classes? What suits your interests best?’”

“APs are really holding back the school...[they] are not a proxy for great classes.”

“In some ways, we have to dumb ourselves down to do well on the AP exams.”

“I wish we did more hands-on work.”

“In every AP class, there are moments where you want to dive deeper in something but the schedule doesn’t allow it.”

“I love the idea of getting rid of APs and gearing classes more toward creativity than just getting through the curriculum.”

“There should be more passion in the classes.”

Colleges Support This Move

- Fall on-campus visits: **67 college admissions officers** surveyed during their DA on-campus visits support this move. Only one (Tulane University) did not.
- Fall survey of DA's 5-year matriculation list: **consistent support** from college admissions officers who have responded.

Colleges Reps Who Visited DA This Fall: Thumbs Up

Agnes Scott College

American University

Amherst College

Bowdoin College

Brandeis University

Brown University

Butler University

Case Western Reserve University

Centre College

Colby College

College of Charleston

Dartmouth College

Davidson College

Dickinson College

Duke University

Elon University

Emory University

Fairfield University

Fordham University

Franklin & Marshall College

Furman University

George Mason University

George Washington University

Georgetown University

Grinnell College

Guilford College

Harvey Mudd College

High Point University

James Madison University

Kenyon College

Lafayette College

Macalester College

Middlebury College

Northeastern University

Oberlin College

Princeton University

Queens University of Charlotte

Rice University

Rhodes College

Roanoke College

Sewanee - The University of the South

Skidmore College

St. Lawrence University

Swarthmore College

Syracuse University

Texas Christian University

Tufts University

*Tulane University**

University of Alabama

University of Chicago

University of Miami

University of North Carolina-CH

University of North Carolina-Charlotte

University of North Carolina-Greensboro

University of Notre Dame

University of Pittsburgh

University of Southern California

University of Vermont

University of Virginia

Vassar College

Villanova University

Virginia Commonwealth University

Wake Forest University

Washington and Lee University

Washington University in St. Louis

Wofford College

Xavier University

*Colleges highlighted are among DA's most highly-attended schools

DA Five-Year College List Survey: Thumbs Up

“DA provides a great school profile, so I don’t see any issues. DA is a known quantity here and we are highly confident that your students will come to Williams prepared for success.”

Williams College

“Duke knows DA well enough that this won't be an issue.”

Duke University

“We do not have any concerns over the changing curriculum.”

Harvard University

“No concerns — we evaluate each student within their individual high school context.”

Bowdoin College

“I have seen more schools make this transition and it has not hurt students in the admissions process..”

Kenyon College

“No [concerns]. We evaluate students based on the context of their school's offerings.”

Rochester Institute of Technology

“We do not [have any concerns].”

Elon University

“No [concerns]. They wouldn't be able to transfer the credits to SU if they took the tests.”

Syracuse University

“So long as a school profile is provided which indicates the courses offered and the relative rigor, we will have sufficient information.”

Olin College of Engineering

“More and more schools are going away from APs, and we're cool with that.”

Middlebury College

Question: Do you have any concerns about the transition from AP to advanced curriculum? Why or why not?

Colleges Understand and Value the Benefits of Beyond AP

Flexible, challenging, relevant courses:

- “[DA teachers/students] **won't be beholden to AP curricula** or exams.” - Duke University
- “Students should take (and teachers should design) the **courses of most interest to them.**” - Middlebury College
- “The **interdisciplinary nature** of these types of courses are usually well-matched to our liberal arts curriculum.” - Harvard University
- Students truly only have **the goal of learning** in the forefront of their learning.” - Williams College

Depth of learning vs. teaching to a test:

- “**Deeper exploration** of the material” - Kenyon College
- “**Thinking at a wider level** and a deeper level in subject areas” - Xavier University
- “Broad thinking and a **tolerance for academic experimentation**” - Olin College of Engineering

Well being and balance:

- “**Having a healthy school/life balance in high school is critical** for setting the stage for college. In environments that push a large number of AP courses, students learn to over-commit and exhaust themselves.” - University of Georgia
- “It could **relieve some pressure** for students to try and take as many [APs] as they can, **while still challenging** themselves in a sustainable way.” - Oberlin College
- “Hopefully allows for **less stress and rigidity** of courses.” - Bates College

Question: What do you see as the potential benefits of moving beyond APs for students coming to your college or university?

Durham Academy is Known and Respected Nationally

“We love Durham Academy! We know the challenge and rigor you all provide academically, but you also shape your students into wonderful members of society.”

Kenyon College

“We are confident students from DA can transition to our curriculum with and without added support.”

Harvard University

“Excellent”

Duke University
Syracuse University

“Strong school, offers strong academic program”

James Madison University

“Strong”

Boston University
Elon University
Olin College of Engineering
Rochester Institute of Technology
University of Georgia

“DA is a known quantity here for sure, and we are highly confident that your students will come to Williams prepared for success.”

Williams College

“We have seen very strong applicants from DA, and matriculated many of them over the years.”

Bowdoin College

What Colleges Seek: Curious Minds, Intellectual Stories

- Successful performance in accelerated, challenging, rigorous courses
- Sustained, focused interests vs. multitude of activities
- Academic curiosity and interests aligned with the college/university
- Alignment with the college/university's values
- Involvement in extracurricular activities/organizations that are meaningful/impactful
- Demonstrated character, empathy, leadership, maturity and collaboration
- GPA
- College essay
- Recommendation letters
- Demonstrated interest or correspondence
- A special talent (arts, athletics)
- Additional connection to the institution (legacy or donor)

Invigorating DA's Curriculum For Teachers and Students

Advanced Placement

- Teachers emphasize:
 - Breadth over depth at a fast pace
 - Teaching to a test
- Students learn to synthesize vast amounts of complex material at a fast pace
- Leads to ephemeral learning

Advanced Courses at DA

- Teachers emphasize:
 - depth over breadth
 - student inquiry
 - global relevance
 - independent problem-solving
- Students learn to:
 - synthesize complex information
 - apply knowledge and skills to real life
 - engage in topics of genuine interest
 - create authentic demonstrations of learning
- Leads to more enduring learning