

The Importance of Long Sequences of World Language Study: Equitable Access to Advanced Placement Courses

AP World Languages Initiative

You are very likely aware that The College Board is purposefully and actively seeking to impact world language studies by expanding its Advanced Placement (AP) offerings to include AP Chinese Language and Culture, AP Italian Language and Culture, AP Japanese Language and Culture, and AP Russian Language and Culture by May of 2007. By developing these new AP Exams for students and the corresponding professional development support for teachers, the College Board is taking the necessary steps towards recognizing and promoting second language study and its rightful place of prominence and importance in U.S. schools, given the urgent demands of our global 21st century society. While we will continue to support the acquisition of traditional European languages with our AP French, AP German, AP Latin, and AP Spanish courses, we recognize the need to encourage students to broaden their understanding of and ability to communicate with the citizens of a greater variety of nations abroad.

A Matter of Equity

The College Board is equally committed to equitable access to our AP courses for all students, and to the principle that all students who are willing to accept the challenge of a rigorous academic curriculum should be given consideration for admission to AP courses.¹ The Board encourages the elimination of barriers that restrict access to AP courses for students from ethnic, racial, and socioeconomic groups that have been traditionally underrepresented in the AP Program. Schools should make every effort to ensure that their AP classes reflect the diversity of their student population. For the study of world languages, the Equity Policy Statement translates into long-sequences of study.

Because of the time investment necessary to achieve second language proficiency and due to the demonstrated benefits of world language studies, it is imperative that state policy makers consider the addition of formal, sequential instruction of world languages as essential, beginning in the middle school and even sooner, in order to allow equitable access to everyone. While we know that elementary programs are key to developing students' ability to acquire a second language and to fostering their positive, receptive attitudes about language and culture, without long-sequence language study of five or six years, second language fluency and success on an AP exam in a world language remain possible for only an elite, select group of our student population. Does the required K-12 curriculum in your state include long-sequences of world language study?

Long Sequences of World Language Study Significantly Better

Research data bear out that in order to achieve equity for all students, increasingly longer sequences of study are essential to the acquisition of second language proficiency. As part of the 2002 AP French, AP German, and AP Spanish language exams, survey data support a strong connection between the length of study (in years) and students' scores on the corresponding AP Examination. Students who had engaged in long sequences of language study (e.g., beginning in grades 4-6) performed significantly better on the corresponding AP Exams and positioned themselves to be granted advanced placement and/or receive academic credit when entering college. (Baum, Bischof, & Rabiteau, 2002).²

World Language Study Translates to Higher SAT Scores

In the College Board's report, *2004 College Bound Seniors: A Profile of SAT Test Takers*, students whose profiles include long-sequences of world language study consistently demonstrate higher scores on both the math and verbal portions of the SAT than do their non-language studying counterparts.³ The gains are incremental; the more years of world language study, the greater the gains on the SAT Test. These data continue to corroborate previous research confirming the correlation of world language study with higher SAT scores.⁴

We hope you believe, as we do, that it is time for state legislatures to recognize the need to support second language proficiency for every U.S. student. We welcome your questions and extend our appreciation to you for your time and careful consideration of this matter.

With best regards,

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¹ Visit the College Board's Equity Policy Statement and additional related information at:
<http://apcentral.collegeboard.com/article/0,,150-157-0-2200,00.html>

² Baum, D. Bischof, D., & Rabiteau, K. (2002). *Before and Beyond the AP Foreign Language Classroom*.
http://www.collegeboard.com/prod_downloads/apc/ap04_beforeandbeyond.pdf

³ http://www.collegeboard.com/about/news_info/cbsenior/yr2004/reports.html

⁴ Cooper, T. (1987). Foreign Language Study and SAT-Verbal Scores. *The Modern Language Journal*, 71(4), 381-387.