

# G A P S

# 10

percent of AP Psychology students were up to Dartmouth's standards

# 23

percent of MVHS students take AP classes to skip classes in college

# 3

percent of MVHS AP students have taken more than 10 AP classes

Last year, junior Anna Liu took AP Calculus BC and AP Computer Science. Now, she takes AP Music Theory, AP U.S. History, AP Statistics and AP Physics. If Liu goes to Dartmouth, however, she will not receive credit for any of these courses.

In early January, Dartmouth announced that it would no longer be offering college credit for Advanced Placement or International Baccalaureate examinations starting with the class of 2018. Other schools like Bard College and Caltech have also decided not to accept AP scores as college credit.

Additionally, there are colleges that give AP credit but require a minimum test score to earn it. For example, the minimum AP exam score for credit in chemistry at Boston College is a four, while the minimum score for the same test

at Vanderbilt is a five. However, the lowest score any college will accept is the passing score — a three.

### Evaluating the test

At a school like MVHS, where 42 percent of AP students have taken upwards of three AP classes, denial of AP credit is something that could potentially affect many students.

One of the reasons colleges have cited for this change in policy is that AP-level courses are not as rigorous as college courses and do not adequately prepare students. This sentiment is echoed by college professors like David E. Mills, an economics professor at the University of Virginia. "AP courses are tailored to the exams, and high-school

instructors impart test-taking strategies at the expense of writing and critical-thinking skills," Mills wrote in the website of the Texas Academy for Mathematics and Science.

At Dartmouth, Hakan Tell, Classics professor and Chair of the Committee of Instruction, tested 100 incoming freshmen who had scored a five on the AP Psychology exam to determine the merit of the AP exam. According to *The Dartmouth*, the student publication at the college, only 10 percent of the students tested scored up to Dartmouth's

standards and received credit.

The results of this experiment contributed to the university's decision to change its AP credit policy.

Kenneth Bernstein, recently retired AP Government teacher from Eleanor Roosevelt High School in Maryland, agrees with Dartmouth's

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new policy in the academic journal *Academe*, reasoning that AP teachers have the tendency to teach to the AP exam rather than teaching the class as a college level course. Due to *No Child Left Behind* and *Race to the Top*, public schools have operated under the restrictions of the testing law and its requirements.

"With test scores serving as the primary, if not the sole measure of student performance ... anything not being tested was given short shrift," Bernstein said.

According to Bernstein, most of the tests are also primarily — if not solely — multiple choice, and when they do include writing, they don't call for a higher understanding of writing mechanics. As a result, Bernstein explained, students arriving from his high

# IN LEARNING

Dartmouth's decision to deny AP credit brings focus to the value of the tests

by **Steven Lim** and **Joyce Varma**

school “lacked experience and knowledge about how to do the kinds of writing that are expected at higher levels of education.”

“At [MVHS] it’s just about college acceptance,” AP Economics teacher Pete Pelkey said. “I don’t think that the quality of the course work is always considered.”

## Cause and effect

However, most colleges continue to accept AP credit. According to Dr. Barbara Sawrey Dean of Undergraduate Education at University of California San Diego and professor in the Chemistry and Biochemistry departments, AP exam scores generally reflect adequate knowledge of the subject.

“I would say in general, yes, students who score a five are pretty well prepared for not only taking university courses but also accelerating their progress in our courses,” Sawrey said. But she acknowledges there are some benefits to taking courses in college instead. “In some cases there’s an advantage to actually having the course at the university so that you are familiar with the faculty and the faculty members’ expectations when you move on to other courses.”

For the most part, these conflicting views dominate the discussion about AP credit at colleges. Pelkey provided a different reason that colleges have for denying AP credit.

“If all of the freshman and sophomore classes have been filled by AP tests, then you don’t have the bottom line professors, your associates, teaching the freshman classes,” he said. “It’s a money issue. That’s why the colleges are clamping down on this. It’s not because the kids don’t know the information, it’s because the professor needs to have a job.” In fact, according to Pelkey, skipping freshman and some sophomore year classes can save students as much as \$30,000 at some schools.

Eliminating this monetary benefit would increase the financial burden already placed on students’ shoulders. Students also

wouldn’t be able to graduate earlier from college by skipping classes through AP credit, and may even graduate late.

Nonetheless, if Dartmouth’s decision was to become widespread across colleges, some students would not care too much.

## Taking the challenge

In El Estoque’s March Survey, 32 percent of students said they take AP classes to boost their resumes, while only 25 percent said they wanted to learn more through AP classes. Because of this, 62 percent said they would still take AP classes if colleges stopped giving college credit for AP classes.

Because many students take APs to boost their resumes, they would still take AP classes even if colleges wouldn’t give them credit. Though students may have to graduate later and spend more money for tuition if their AP credit is denied, MVHS students will continue to take AP classes.

“I feel like I would still take AP classes even if they weren’t AP because it’s just more of a challenge for me,” Liu said. “I don’t like sitting in normal classes most of the time because the material goes really slowly, and I’d rather have the challenge. Even if I don’t get credit for it, it’s still really good intellectually. I think learning’s just really fun.”

Junior Anshul Ramachandran shares a similar view of AP classes. “Mostly, if I think it’s a cool course, I’m gonna take it. I know a lot of people who are like ‘Oh I heard AP Music Theory is an easy class, let’s take it. I think it’ll look really good.’ That doesn’t sound really cool at all so I just decided to take Advanced Multimedia instead,” Ramachandran said.

Despite Dartmouth’s and some other schools’ decisions to deny AP credit, students will not have to worry about it becoming a widespread policy just yet, and there is much more debate to be had.

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# 37

percent of MVHS students would be deterred from applying to a college that denied credit for AP scores

# 62

percent of MVHS students would still take AP classes if they were not counted for college credit

\*Data was collected from a survey of 420 respondents.