Advanced Placement 2020

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The Advanced Placement examinations attract millions of students from all across the world every year who labor to earn college credit, get an edge in college admissions, and display their academic prowess. Having started the registrations for the AP examinations mid-2019, millions of students registered for the Advanced Placement Examinations of 2020 as well. But who would ever have expected the emergence of a global pandemic that uproots the very way of life for more than 6 billion people over the world.

While everyone sorrowfully expected the cancellation or delay of the AP examinations, College Board decided that it would take an unprecedented step and make the Advanced Placement examinations online based. This was certainly a mighty task as never before had any examination been conducted online at a scale wherein millions of students would be involved worldwide and even that during a global pandemic that prevents access to proper internet services and hinders thousands without the requisite devices. Yet College Board took this gargantuan task head on and announced that they would conduct the exams online for 45 minutes rather than the 3 hour traditional exam, focusing upon the Free response questions (FRQs) only.

College Board announced that there would be no MCQs on the examination; rather, they decided to focus on the FRQs only to protect the test integrity as much as possible. After negotiations with thousands of colleges across the United States of America, the company successfully got each and every college, save Harvard University, to agree to grant college credit through the Advanced Placement examinations. The tests would be divided into two questions of 25 and 15 minutes each and with 5 minutes to submit the responses for each question. Each test was to be conducted globally at the same time, including at times such as 1:30AM and 3:30AM in Asia. But, they even found a workaround for that issue and granted the opportunity to students to take CLEP exams on-campus for college credit if their exam windows were at such uncivil times.

Although college board made various mis-steps with rampant server issues, it is the numbers that reveal the true story. College Board allowed 3 exam windows to ensure everyone got the opportunity to give the exams even if they had server issues. More than 95% of the students registered for each exam took the exam on the first date itself without any server issues. College Board set up free FRQ practice for all, set up YouTube channels for each subject to ensure everyone was well prepared for the examination. They distributed electronic devices to students from low income families to ensure they possessed the ability to give the exams. They set up individualised email accounts for students to email answers to once the exam was over and if they had server issues during the exam.

There were possibilities for improvement by College Board. Hundreds of thousands of students potentially experienced server issues that led to an unpleasant examination experience. I am included in that list. However, when we analyse the steps they took to ensure students had a chance to take the AP exams they had worked the entire year to prepare for, it was an extremely commendable job by the company.