



Academic Pivot: Responses to AP Curriculum Changes

Faculty and students discuss the reasons and impact of the school's decision to remove all Advanced Placement courses next year.

Celine Wang, Assistant Features Editor

Abby Landres '26 sits in an empty classroom doing homework before her last class of the day. Her legs are propped up on a chair and she is focused on her laptop. She taps the keyboard as she scrolls through her latest texts with her friends. Her eyes move quickly over the messages until they land on a bold headline halfway down: "School to replace all Advanced Placement (AP) classes starting next year."

Landres said the elimination of AP options hinders students' ability to prepare for the exam and narrows their academic opportunities.

"It's upsetting that they're trying so hard to stop people from taking APs," Landres said. "I'm glad there's still the rigorous classes, like honors [classes]. But for me, with Latin specifically, it's really annoying because I was planning on taking it next year. Now, the way they've changed the class, we won't have all the information to take the AP. [The restriction] is blocking certain paths for people before college applications."

The availability of Advanced Placement (AP) courses in U.S. high schools varies. 48% of public high schools offered five or more AP courses in the prior school year, and these schools represent 80% of the high school population in the U.S., according to the College Board. This indicates that larger schools are more likely to offer a broader range of AP courses. In general, AP participation and performance have been on the rise. Over 1.2 million students took more than 4.3 million AP Exams in 2024, according to College Board Newsroom.

Head of Upper School Beth Slattery said AP courses have become less important for the student population and that teachers are better suited to provide a more focused education to the community.

"APs are a standardized curriculum created by the College Board, and it has lost its relevance for our particular population," Slattery said. "Our teachers are better equipped to actually be up on the innovation and the topics to educate our students than the College Board's generic curriculum that is targeted at everybody. With the APs, it was a lot of kids just solely focused on what APs were going to do for their college application, rather than challenging themselves."

Ryan Acosta '26 said he recognizes the school's view but noted that many students want courses that will help earn them college credit.



“I understand the school’s point of view [in that] they want to give teachers more flexibility with teaching other courses,” Acosta said. “There are a lot of students who are against it because they want to get that course specifically that will prepare them for the exam. Others don’t really mind, and they say that they’ll self-study.”

Slattery said she acknowledges the varying opinions on the AP curriculum, but felt it was ineffective and required adjustment for the overall benefit of the school.

“For a few years now, we’ve given teachers the options to pick their curriculum,” Slattery said. “A lot of teachers decided on their own that they didn’t want to teach the AP curriculum anymore, and we also still had a number of teachers who really liked the curriculum. But from my perspective, when thinking about everybody, [the curriculum] was broken. I know that it was an issue because I have a broader perspective of the whole school.”

Upper School Latin Teacher Bradford Holmes currently teaches AP Latin, which will transition into Honors Latin Literature I next school year. Holmes said having courses independent of the AP structure will give teachers the flexibility to structure the curriculum as they see fit and in a way that benefits students.

“We’re still keeping the curriculum in the program nominally,” Holmes said. “The class is now just two different literature courses. They both happen to have about a third or a quarter of their curriculum that is taken from the AP syllabus. Both courses use good texts, but the entire course is no longer built around the AP syllabus. I can take those two courses that can be sequenced out in a way that we, the teachers, want to do it. In the end, students can still take the AP if they want to, but they no longer have to.”

The removal of AP courses at the school could lead to less standardized curriculums for classes taught by multiple teachers, as each department will design its own advanced coursework, according to Slattery. Although some classes will continue with a similar format, without a common AP framework, students in the same course may face varying levels of academic rigor.

Landres said she is frustrated that the removal of APs adds to an already heavy workload by making self-studying for exams a burden.

“On top of all the other adjustments they’re doing next year, the removal of APs is really not great,” Landres said. “If I do end up taking tests next year, it would be a nuisance as I would have to self-study. We’re already so busy at school. It’s not great that this [new curriculum] will possibly add a load onto our plates.”

Holmes said he plans to adjust the spring curriculum if seniors in his class decide to take the AP exam, providing support to those who still choose to take the test.

“If a lot of kids are planning to take [the AP test], then we’ll just spend some time in the spring reading through the AP curriculum,” Holmes said. “If not, then we’ll do other content that I had planned otherwise. So the entirety of the fourth quarter would be semi-dependent on how many kids are going to take [the test] when they’re seniors.”

Slattery said the exams cause unnecessary pressure and have minimal college impact, and the school’s own advanced courses remain challenging and more appropriate for its students.

“APs actually add stress to the students,” Slattery said. “There’s this inflated perception that AP exams matter a lot. They really don’t matter very much in terms of getting into college, and for a lot of colleges, they don’t matter that much in terms of getting credit. [What] makes Harvard-Westlake students unique is actually the Harvard-Westlake curriculum, and a number of college admission officers have said this to us. Our courses are not less rigorous. They are still really strong courses, just better suited for our population.”