

AP Seminar Synopsis

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1. GENERAL COURSE DESCRIPTION

The AP Seminar course is an inquiry-based course that aims to engage students in cross-curricular conversations that explore real-world topics and issues from multiple perspectives. Students are empowered to collect and analyze information with accuracy and precision in order to craft and communicate evidence-based arguments.

1.1. **Goals.** The goals of the AP Seminar course include:

- Engage students with rigorous college-level curricula focused on the core academic skills necessary for successful college completion.
- Extend students' abilities to synthesize information from multiple perspectives and apply skills in cross-curricular contexts and in new situations.
- Empower students to collect and analyze information with accuracy and precision.
- Cultivate students' abilities to craft, communicate, and defend evidence-based arguments.
- Provide opportunities for students to practice disciplined and scholarly research skills applied to relevant topics of their interest and curiosity.

1.2. **Expected Student Learning Outcomes.** Throughout the program, students consider multiple points of view to develop their own perspectives on complex issues and topics through inquiry and investigation. The AP Seminar program provides students with a framework that allows students to develop, practice, and hone their critical and creative thinking skills as they make connections between issues and their own lives.

While helping students to develop and strengthen their critical and creative thinking skills, students learn to consider multiple points of view to develop their own perspectives on complex issues and topics through inquiry and investigation.

The inquiry process exposes students to a variety of primary and secondary print and non-print sources such as articles, research studies, and foundational literary and philosophical texts; speeches, broadcasts, and personal accounts; and artistic works and performances. The wide variety of academic sources provide the opportunity to gain a rich appreciation and understanding of issues as students collaboratively or independently analyze and evaluate the evidence to consider options, alternatives, solutions, or resolutions of real-world or academic problems.

1.3. **Plagiarism Policy.** Adherence to College Board AP policies is critical to producing valid AP scores. According to the College Board, "Violations of program policies and/or exam procedures may result in the cancellation of student scores and/or the school being withdrawn from the AP Capstone program by the College Board's AP Program." We quote the AP Capstone documentation below.

AP Capstone Policy on Plagiarism and Falsification or Fabrication of Information

Participating teachers shall inform students of the consequences of plagiarism and instruct students to ethically use and acknowledge the ideas and work of others throughout their course work. The student's individual voice should be clearly evident, and the ideas of others must be acknowledged, attributed, and/or cited.

A student who fails to acknowledge the source or author of any and all information or evidence taken from the work of someone else through citation, attribution or reference in the body of the work, or through a bibliographic entry, will receive a score of 0 on that particular component of the AP Seminar and/or AP Research Performance Task. In AP Seminar, a team of students that fails to properly acknowledge sources or authors on the Team Multimedia Presentation will receive a group score of 0 for that component of the Team Project and Presentation.

A student who incorporates falsified or fabricated information (e.g. evidence, data, sources, and/or authors) will receive a score of 0 on that particular component of the AP Seminar and/or AP Research Performance Task. In AP Seminar, a team of students that

incorporates falsified or fabricated information in the Team Multimedia Presentation will receive a group score of 0 for that component of the Team Project and Presentation.

To the best of their ability, teachers will ensure that students understand ethical use and acknowledgment of the ideas and work of others, as well as the consequences of plagiarism. The student's individual voice should be clearly evident, and the ideas of others must be acknowledged, attributed, and/or cited.

1.4. **Big Ideas.** The “big ideas” of the course are expressed by the mnemonic acronym QUEST.

- Big Idea 1: Question and Explore
- Big Idea 2: Understand and Analyze
- Big Idea 3: Evaluate Multiple Perspectives
- Big Idea 4: Synthesize Ideas
- Big Idea 5: Team, Transform, and Transmit

2. PERFORMANCE TASKS

During the AP Seminar course, students complete the following assessments: two through-course performance tasks and an end-of-course exam, while adhering to AP College Board policies to ensure the validation of their scores. Performance tasks will be completed in the second semester.

The following assessments are used to calculate a final AP Score (using the 1–5 scale) for AP Seminar.

2.1. Performance Task #1: Team Project and Presentation.

2.1.1. *Task Overview.* Students work in teams of three to five to identify, investigate, and analyze an academic or real-world problem or issue. Each team designs and/or considers options and evaluates alternatives; develops a multimedia presentation to present the argument for their proposed solution or resolution; and provides a defense to questions posed by the teacher.

2.1.2. *Scoring.*

- Individual Research Report (1,200 words): Internally scored, externally validated
- Team Multimedia Presentation and Defense (8–10 minutes, plus defense questions): Internally scored

2.1.3. *Weight.* 20 percent of score

2.2. Performance Task #2. Individual Research-Based Essay and Presentation

2.3. **Task Overview.** The College Board's AP Program will annually release cross-curricular source materials (texts) representing a range of perspectives focused on a single theme or topic. Students use these texts to identify a research question of their own; conduct research; analyze, evaluate, and select evidence to develop an argument; and present and defend their conclusions. The final paper must refer to and incorporate at least one of the provided sources.

2.4. **Scoring.**

- Individual Written Argument (1,200 words): Internally scored, externally validated
- Individual Multimedia Presentation (6–8 minutes): Internally scored
- Oral Defense (two questions from the teacher): Internally scored

2.5. **Weight.** 35 percent of score

2.6. Performance Task #3. AP Seminar End-of-Course Exam (2 Hours)

2.7. **Task Overview.** During the AP Exam administration window, students take the AP Seminar End-of-Course Exam. The exam consists of four items: three short-answer questions and one essay question.

2.8. **Scoring.**

- Three Short-Answer Questions (analysis of argument in a single source): Externally scored
- One Essay Question (synthesizing and creating an evidence-based argument): Externally scored

2.9. **Weight.** 45 percent of score

3. EVALUATION AND GRADING

3.1. Grade Components. Skill-based assessments include, but are not limited to:

- (1) Inquiry-based assessments
- (2) In-class timed writings: Analysis, argument, synthesis
- (3) Reflections
- (4) Team projects: Team building, cooperative learning, group presentations
- (5) Writing activities and assignments
- (6) AP preparation: Skill-based activities, practice essays
- (7) Online portfolios

These assessments will be categorized, for the purpose of entry into the gradebook in accordance with district policy, as follows:

- Classwork: 20 %
- Homework: 10 %
- Quizzes: 20 %
- Exams: 30 %
- Projects: 20 %

3.2. Course Work. This course requires students to complete a number of tasks in preparation for the AP Seminar formal assessments. It is expected that students thoroughly and thoughtfully complete all work assigned in this course, regardless of whether the assignment receives a grade. Class participation is extremely important. This includes attendance, reading comprehension activities, reflections, taking research notes, rewriting drafts, peer review (in class), and team meeting sessions (in class and at home).

3.3. Participation in Class Discussion. Students must come prepared to participate actively in discussions, both online and in class. It is the firm intent of the instructor to introduce intriguing and occasionally controversial issues, while at the same time allowing the class to come to grips with the pros and cons of the issues involved.

Evaluation will be based on how student participation (comments, ideas, and questions) helped to enhance and/or advance our overall collective understanding through critical discussion and listening.

3.4. Expectations for Academic Success. This course is designed to have students work in groups/teams frequently. As such, some of the graded work will require students to function effectively as a member of a team. Issues regarding interpersonal communication and responsibilities to the group should be brought to the instructor's attention immediately.

It is the student's responsibility to make arrangements for any missed work outside of class time. If a student has an excused absence, he/she will be allowed to turn in the missed assignment and will be given another day for any work assigned and due while absent.

This course requires students' active participation in all activities and discussions. Lessons have been designed to create an open forum for the exchange of thoughts and opinions. Students are expected to be on task at all times, and respect the thoughts and opinions of classmates. Cooperative groups, discussions, debates, and projects involve daily participation. Absences will affect grades. Please be here and be on time.

4. CONTENT

The first semester will consist of exposure to the variety of skills expected by the AP Seminar Course Description. These include reading and analysis of documents such as excerpts from articles, books, plays, poems, songs, and videos. The emphasis will be on identifying and evaluating the authors main points and arguments, and comparing and contrasting arguments made in two or more documents.

The second semester will continue occasional analysis of articles, but will focus on completion of the AP Performance Tasks.

We describe here the outline of the first semester. This semester will consist of three units; getting acquainted with QUEST, utopian literature, and review of former AP Seminar stimulus materials.

4.1. Getting Acquainted with QUEST. We will use the following stimulus materials; excerpts are extracted from the longer sources. In each case, we identify the author's thesis, main claims, and supporting evidence. When appropriate, we hold discussions on these issues, and compare the ideas in the source materials.

- *The federal debt limit drama isn't a fight over spending*, LA Times Editorial Board, August 2021
- *Letter from Einstein to President F. D. Roosevelt*, Albert Einstein, August 2, 1939
- *Letter from Oppenheimer to Secretary of War Henry Stimson*, J. R. Oppenheimer, August 17, 1945
- *President Eisenhower's Farewell Address*, Dwight D. Eisenhower, January 17, 1961
- *Rebuilding America's Defenses*, Project for a New American Century, September 2000
- *Anthony's Eulogy for Caesar*, William Shakespeare, 1599
- *Gorilla Sales Skyrocket After Latest Gorilla Attack*, The Onion, February 10, 2013
- *Supreme Court Gets It Right on Texas Abortion Law*, National Review, September 2, 2021

In order to get students more acquainted with public speaking, they will produce two projects.

- Debates: in teams of two, with topics chosen after class discussion, students will participate in scored debates.
- Presentations: in teams of two, with topics selected by the teams, students will produce and present slide show presentations.

4.2. Utopian Literature. We will read, study, analyze, compare and contrast excerpts from the following utopian/dystopian literature.

- *Lifeboat Ethics*, Garrett Hardin, Psychology Today, September 1974
- *The Communist Manifesto*, Karl Marx and Frederick Engels, February, 1848
- *Goldstein's Book*, from 1984, George Orwell, 1948
- *Utopia*, Thomas More, 1516
- *The Republic*, Plato, 380 B.C.
- *Harrison Bergeron*, Kurt Vonnegut, 1961

After having studied these works, students will form groups, tasked with designing a utopian country. Each group will produce a presentation and a paper describing one aspect of a perfect society. These topics may include:

- Culture (language, education, arts, entertainment)
- Government and Justice
- Economics
- Foreign Affairs and Defense
- Science and Religion

4.3. AP Seminar Stimulus. We will end the first semester by reading and analyzing the AP Seminar 2019 stimulus materials, looking for main points, arguments, evidence, and the relationships between the various documents.

4.4. Second Semester. The second semester will consist of preparing the students for the AP Seminar Performance Tasks. For the team tasks, teams and topics will be chosen by the students, with the consent of the instructor. These tasks will be completed around the end of February. Then, the class will focus on the individual tasks. Topics will be chosen by the students with the consent of the instructor.