



Frequently Asked Questions of Pearland ISD

1. Why did your campus/school district choose to participate in the AP Capstone program?

The district had a vision for a discussion-based Humanities course for students. During the research phase for such a course, the pilot for the AP Capstone program was announced, and a local, Houston-area high school was participating. After connecting with that school and further research and discussion, there was enough interest to join the list of school districts wanting to participate in AP Capstone. The College Board extended the invitation in the 2013-14 school year to both Glenda Dawson and Pearland High Schools to participate, and the first AP Seminar courses were offered in the 2014-15 school year.

2. How did Pearland ISD implement the AP Capstone program?

The flexibility of the AP Capstone program allows for varying implementations. Neither high school campus chose to anchor AP Seminar to another AP course. Instead, AP Seminar is offered as an independent Social Studies elective and AP Research is offered as an English/Language Arts elective (open only to those students who took AP Seminar).

On the Dawson High School campus, during the implementation of the program, the two teachers taught both the AP Seminar and AP Research courses – the benefit being an awareness of student strengths and weaknesses as the teachers often had the same students in the second year. It is important to consider class sizes and student count as this model creates a potentially heavy burden on the teachers as they had to score papers and presentations for both AP Seminar and AP Research students in the same critical timeframe in the spring semester. Both teachers met once a week with the Advanced Academics Specialist for collaborative planning, program implementation, and progress monitoring. Currently, one of those teachers is now designated as the AP Seminar teacher, and the other one is designated as the AP Research teacher.

From the beginning, Pearland High School had a teacher designated for AP Seminar and a teacher designated for AP Research. This implementation model enabled those teachers to specialize in the skills necessary for success in each of the courses. Both teachers met once a week with the Advanced Academics Specialist as well.

Both high school campuses have a traditional seven periods a day schedule, so the AP Capstone courses meet every day. The fall semester is designated for direct instruction, teacher feedback, and student practice. The spring semester is considered “exam mode” when the AP Seminar students complete the through-course performance tasks as well as prepare for the End of Course (AP) Exam. The AP Research students write their academic papers and present and defend their research findings in the spring semester. The class sizes are within the College Board’s recommendation of 20-24 students.

3. What are some benefits to participating in the AP Capstone program?

The benefits of participating in the program include college preparation, separation and distinction in the college admissions process (when compared to other students who have similar AP transcripts), and student choice. Students who participate in the AP Seminar and AP Research courses are more critical readers and better consumers of information. They are also better communicators, both in written and oral communication.

The AP Capstone program is an opportunity to stand out in the college admissions process. While the number of schools in the greater Houston area that offer Capstone is growing each year, it is still relatively small. Students who have the Capstone courses on their high school transcripts could stand out in the college admissions process as being college ready with the research, writing, and presentation skills necessary for college success. The AP Seminar and AP Research Certificate and the AP Capstone Diploma help identify students as prepared for college. The overwhelming majority of the Capstone students take additional AP classes during both years of the Capstone program.

Student choice is an attractive component of the program for some because students can choose their research topics in an effort to build on the learning and rigorous course work of their other AP classes. Students might also choose to pursue their area of research at the college level as a major or minor course of study and/or as a foundation for future graduate work.

4. Why is it important for students to conduct and complete a research project?

Students will need research, argumentation, writing, and collaboration skills in their college courses and their career pursuits. These are valuable, lifelong skills that students begin to develop before stepping onto the college campus. Students become more independent thinkers through the opportunity to pursue their passions. Through AP Research, students demonstrate their research and writing abilities in a 5,000 word academic paper and their presentation skills in a presentation and oral defense, similar to what might be expected of a university student in an undergraduate program.

5. What makes the AP Capstone courses different from the other AP courses?

The AP Capstone courses are skills based, offer student choice and incorporate through-course assessments unlike other AP courses. The courses are skill driven, not content driven, so there can be variation in implementation and flexibility in staffing in order to best meet the needs of the campus's existing AP community and advanced learners. Students can choose topics for further exploration and deeper understanding which is attractive to some students. Both courses have through-course performance tasks that are completed during the spring semester, which are locally scored and externally validated.

In AP Research, students get to delve into a topic or area of their interest and explore, explain, or create based on their research findings. The AP Research students can work with a consultant/expert advisor during their process thereby developing skills that better enable them to actively participate in an academic community. These students present their papers and products before an oral defense panel. This experience offers the students an opportunity to present their research question or goal, their method or process, and their conclusions similar to what a university student might do at the undergraduate level.

6. Who are the students that participate in the AP Capstone program?

In Pearland ISD, the AP Seminar course is offered in the 11th grade, and the AP Research course is offered in the 12th grade. The AP courses in Pearland ISD are open enrollment; therefore, any motivated student who chooses to accept the challenge of advanced coursework may register for AP Seminar. Because of the different nature of the Capstone courses, it is critical that students in the program have regular attendance. Students who tend to find success in the Capstone courses are interested in real-world issues as well as inquiry, analysis, research and collaboration.

Teachers, counselors and/or administrators from each campus meet with sophomores during course selection for their junior year classes to discuss the benefits and challenges of the AP Capstone program. The AP Seminar teachers meet with sophomore students to build interest in Seminar, and the AP Research teachers meet with the (current) Seminar students to bridge the two courses and promote program retention. Current AP Seminar and AP Research students meet with small groups of sophomores in round table discussions about the program. During the implementation, the campuses held parent meetings in the evening for parents interested in learning more about the program. Current AP Capstone students spoke about their experiences in the program at those parent meetings. A group of students also created a video to further promote the program on campus.

7. Who teaches the AP Capstone courses?

The two AP Capstone courses are considered Innovative Courses and as such the certification requirements to teach them are grade level specific and not content specific (TAC 19, Part 7, Chapter 231, Subchapter D, Rule § 231.97). Successful Capstone teachers are flexible, visionary, collaborative, and student centered. At Dawson High School, the Capstone teachers are both AP history teachers. At Pearland High School, the Capstone teachers are both English teachers.

8. Do the AP Capstone teachers receive a stipend?

No, the teachers do not receive a stipend. In the first two years of implementation, the teachers had an additional, common planning (conference) period. One day per week, the teachers met during the common planning period with the Advanced Academics Specialist to discuss program implementation and progress. On the remaining days, the teachers utilized the additional planning period to collaborate, lesson plan, grade, score, etc. for the course.

In subsequent years, if the teacher has four sections of an AP Capstone course, then the teacher receives the additional planning period. Teachers still meet with the Advanced Academics Specialist every other week during the year.

The teachers are given release time in the spring semester proportionate to the number of Capstone students they have on their rosters. The office of Advanced Academics and the campus share the cost of the substitutes in order for the teachers to utilize this release time to film and score presentations, participate in the oral defense panel, and/or score written assessments in solitude.

9. Who in the district/on the campus attended initial training for AP Capstone?

In the first two years of the AP Capstone program in Pearland ISD, a team attended the APSIs for **both** AP Seminar and AP Research:

- The designated AP Seminar teachers from each high school campus
- The designated AP Research teachers from each high school campus
- The Assistant Principals over Advanced Placement at each high school campus
- The campus counselors over Advanced Placement at each high school campus
- The two Advanced Academics Specialists from the district office
- The Director of Advanced Academics

This same team met at the central administration building early in the spring semester to calibrate and complete the online scoring training during the implementation years. Only the classroom teachers scored the actual Performance Tasks. The additional team members participated in the training in an effort to further their understanding of the AP Capstone assessments and scoring, their understanding of how to support the teachers in their efforts, and their understanding of how to adequately represent students and their accomplishments in the Capstone program in letters of recommendation. The additional team members did complete online scoring training in subsequent years.

10. What are the pre-requisites for AP Capstone?

Per the College Board, AP Seminar is a pre-requisite for AP Research. In Pearland ISD, the pre-requisite for AP Seminar is Pre-AP English 2. It is beneficial for students to have a strong background in writing before the AP Seminar course. For some students (depending on their topics), it might be beneficial for them to have a background in statistics when taking AP Research; however, Pearland ISD does not *require* AP Statistics as a pre-requisite or co-enrollment for AP Research.

11. Are the AP Capstone courses elective courses?

The AP Seminar course is a social studies elective course with the PEIMS number designated for Innovative Courses – AP Seminar by TEA.

The AP Research course is an English elective course with the PEIMS number designated for Innovative Courses – AP Research by TEA.

12. What curriculum do you use in AP Seminar?

There is not a prescribed curriculum for either AP Capstone course. Teachers receive the framework for the courses at APSI. Teachers then find resources (articles, speeches, TED talks, art work etc.) to use as they teach the skills that are outlined in the course framework.

In AP Seminar, the Seminar teachers guide the students through the recursive process multiple times in the fall while providing direct instruction and teacher feedback. In the spring semester, the AP Seminar students are in “exam mode” and complete the two through-course performance tasks and then the AP Exam in May. The teachers have a more limited role during the spring semester as outlined in the *AP Course and Exam Description* and *AP Implementation Guide* provided by the College Board.

In AP Research, the Research teachers guide the student through a sample research process using a particular topic, thus creating a common language for reference and re-teaching purposes in the spring when the students are working on their academic papers and the teachers are in the more limited role.

13. Do you require the students to commit to the two-year program?

We do not require a two-year commitment from the interested students. However, we strongly encourage students to plan for both courses and complete the full program. We promote AP Capstone as a two-year program by reminding students that higher education approached the College Board to craft a program such as this one; therefore, the colleges and universities value the skills developed in the two courses and view the completion of the program as beneficial college preparation. There are some students who do not enroll in the second year; however, more than the majority of the AP Seminar students move forward into AP Research.

14. What if a student does not perform well in AP Seminar?

Per the College Board *AP Capstone Implementation* Guide, students who score a 1 or a 2 in AP Seminar are still eligible to enroll in AP Research but might need additional support and guidance during the course. When this occurs, enrollment is handled on a case-by-case basis.

15. Who sits on the oral defense panel in the AP Research courses?

The AP Research teacher is on the oral defense panel with two additional professionals from the campus and/or district. The AP Seminar teacher, the Assistant Principal over AP and an Advanced Academics Specialist (all whom attended training) have served as the additional two panel members at times.

16. How was the AP Capstone program received on the campuses?

The district was deliberate in the introduction of the program to the high school campuses. Every Pre-AP and AP teacher (in any subject in grades 9-12) received an overview and training one morning during an August in-service day the year of implementation. The Principals from each campus opened the session and addressed their respective teachers with the vision for the AP Capstone program on their respective campuses. Then the teachers came together in a large group setting and the AP Capstone teachers facilitated the professional development session during which they explained the purpose and goals for the new program. They also guided teachers through activities similar to what the students would do in class so they could develop an understanding of the curricular model and recursive process of inquiry.

17. May I visit your AP Capstone campuses?

The campuses welcome visitors in the fall semester since the students are in “exam mode” and completing through-course assessments in the spring. Please contact the Office of Advanced Academics at 281-485-3203 if you are interested in visiting the AP Capstone™ program in Pearland ISD.

Teacher Resources for AP Capstone

AP Capstone Seminar Teacher Resources

Austin, Michael. *Reading the World: Ideas that Matter*. 2nd ed. New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2010. Print.

Chaffee, John. *Critical Thinking, Thoughtful Writing*. 6th ed. United State: CENGAGE Learning, 2015. Print.

Faigley, Lester, Jack Selzer, and Josephine Pirrone. *Good Reasons with Contemporary Arguments*. High School edition. Upper Saddle River, Pearson Education, Inc. 2013. Print.

Jacobus, Lee A. *A World of Ideas: Essential Readings for College Writers*. 9th ed. Boston: Bedford/St. Martin, 2013. Print.

Lunsford, Andrea A. and John J. Ruskiewicz. *Everything's an Argument*. 6th ed. Boston: Bedford/St. Martin's, 2013. Print.

AP Capstone Research Teacher Resources

American Psychological Association. *Publication Manual of the American Psychological Association*. 6th ed. Washington, D.C.: American Psychological Association, 2013. Print.

Booth, Wayne C., Gregory G. Colomb, and Joseph M. Williams. *The Craft of Research*. 3rd ed. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2008. Print.

Christensen, Larry B., R. Burke Johnson, Lisa A. Turner. *Research Methods: Design and Analysis*. 12th ed. Upper Saddle River: Pearson Education Inc., 2014. Print.

Flick, Uwe. *Introducing Research Methodology: A Beginner's Guide to Doing a Research Project*. 2nd ed. Thousand Oaks: SAGE, 2015. Print.

Howard, Rebecca Moore and Amy Rupiper Taggart. *Research Matters: A Guide to Research Writing*. 2nd ed. New York: McGraw Hill Higher Education, 2013. Print.

Leedy, Paul D. and Jeanne Ellis Ormrod. *Practical Research Planning and Design*. 10th ed. Upper Saddle River: Pearson, 2013. Print.

Leedy, Paul D. and Jeanne Ellis Ormrod. *Practical Research Planning and Design*. 11th ed. Upper Saddle River: Pearson, 2016. Print.

Palmquist, Mike. *The Bedford Researcher*. 4th ed. Boston: Bedford/St. Martin's, 2012. Print.

The Modern Language Association of America. *MLA Handbook for Writers of Research Papers*. 7th ed. New York: The Modern Language Association of America, 2009. Print.

Turabian, Kate L. *Student's Guide to Writing College Papers*. 4th ed. Ed. Gregory G. Colomb, Joseph M. Williams, and University of Chicago Press Editorial Staff. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2010. Print.