

CALIFORNIA STATE UNIVERSITY

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Ingrained Tracking:

The Disproportion of Students in Advance Placement  
versus Remedial English

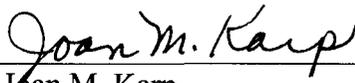
A Thesis submitted in partial satisfaction of the  
requirements for a Master of Art in Education

by

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## ABSTRACT

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The Disproportion of Students in Advance Placement versus Remedial English

By

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The research analyzes reasons for the achievement discrepancy among various ethnic groups at my school. Specifically, this research studies the relationship between students in Advance Placement English (AP) and their counter parts in standard-level English classes to examine the contributing factors such as ethnicity to student placement.

The findings indicated that there was a discrepancy between English 11 and AP English enrollment and ethnicity. Blacks and Hispanics are under-represented in the higher level English class; likewise, White and Filipino students are over-represented.

This study also examines the relationship between the contributing factors for AP English placement and stand English placement. Examining issues of equity, and policy implications on how to increase the access of minority students to advanced classes and ultimately, achievement will enable our community to work towards closing the achievement gap.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

CHAPTER I: Introduction.....	1
CHAPTER II: Theoretical Framework.....	4
Equity and Equal Access.....	5
Expectations.....	11
CHAPTER III: Methods.....	14
Participants.....	14
Setting.....	15
Procedure.....	17
Data Analysis.....	18
CHAPTER 4: Results.....	19
CHAPTER 5: Discussion.....	30
References.....	37
Appendix A: Student Questionnaire.....	39
Appendix B: Interview Protocol.....	43
Appendix C: Questionnaire Summary Sheet.....	45

## LIST OF TABLES

Table 4.1. Primary Language Spoken in the Home.....	20
Table 4.2. The Relationship Between Being on Honor Roll in the Lower Grades and AP Enrollment.....	21
Table 4.3. Student Perceptions on what Constitutes a "Good Student".....	22
Table 4.4. Student Perceptions on "Good Grades".....	23
Table 4.5. Relationship between AP Enrollment and Ethnicity.....	29

## LIST OF FIGURES

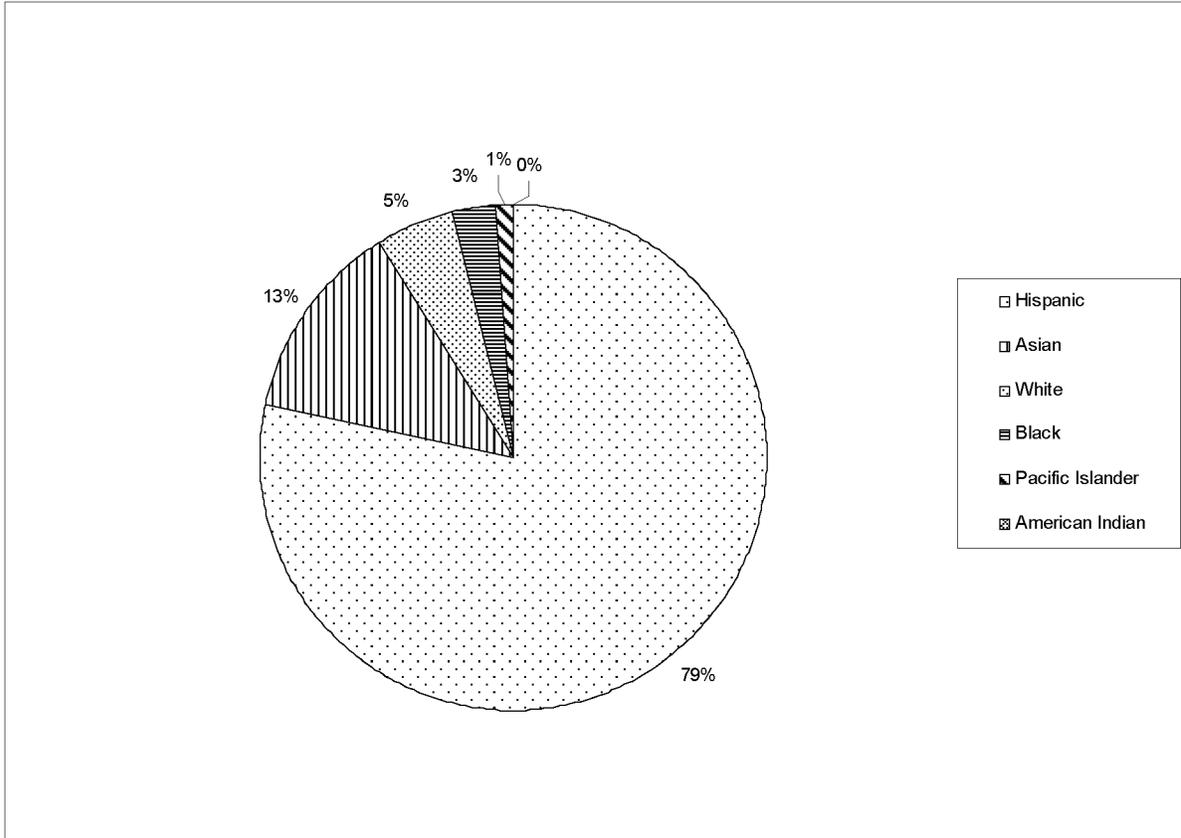
Figure 1. Student Population of Temple High School.....	2
Figure 2. English 11 and AP students by Ethnicity.....	19
Figure 3. Parental Education AP versus English 11.....	26

## CHAPTER 1

### Introduction

Despite the number of ethnically diverse students in the nation's public schools, a persistent achievement gap exists between Anglo students and their ethnically diverse peers (Diller, 1999). For example, 79 percent of my school's population is made up of Hispanic students. This percentage is not reflected in our English Advanced Placement (AP) classes . I have spent the last three years teaching standard-level English classes along with remedial reading classes and my students, along with an alarming amount of other students in "like schools" are struggling to become "proficient". Proficient is a term that is used to identify the students who have mastered at least seventy percent of the required material on the state mandated test. There are three levels below this one - far below basic, below basic and basic.

In this research, I examine reasons for the achievement discrepancy among various ethnic groups at my school. This research provides critical information for our school, as well as our district. For example, Temple High School has a total enrollment of 2,595; and 79 percent of these students are Hispanic. However, this same group of students makes up only 43 percent of the AP English population. African-Americans represent 2.8 percent of the general population, yet this group of students makes up only 1.1 percent of the AP English population. On the other hand, Filipino students represent 13 percent of the general population, yet they make 41 percent of the AP English population. Figure1.1 summarizes these demographics.



*Figure 1.* Student Population of Temple High School.

Research indicates that minority students' achievement is lower than their Anglo peers<sup>1</sup>. Since my school is reflective of an under-representation in AP English, it is an appropriate setting for this study. Specifically, this research studies the relationship between students in AP English and their counterparts in standard-level English classes to examine the contributing factors such as ethnicity to student placement. This study also examines the relationship between the contributing factors for AP English placement and standard English placement. Examining issues of equity, and policy implications on how

<sup>1</sup> [www.civilrightsproject.harvard.edu](http://www.civilrightsproject.harvard.edu)

to increase the access of minority students to advanced classes and ultimately, achievement will enable our community to work towards closing the achievement gap.

This study uses mixed research methods. I used the school's data base to identify the demographic information on both (English 11 and AP) groups. The information printed is listed in an Excel document. This document is sorted by teacher, which means it is in order by class. For example, all of teacher X's students are in alphabetical order then teacher Y's students are listed in alphabetical order and so on. This document also includes parent education status, ethnicity, primary language, feeder school and migrant status. I then utilize qualitative methods to analyze interviews conducted with teachers and counselors.

The main findings of this study indicate that there is a disproportion of students from various cultural, ethnic, and linguistic backgrounds in AP English versus English 11 classes. The factors that contribute to students being enrolled in AP English include having been in honor roll in earlier grades, getting teacher recommendations for AP placement, extra-curricular involvement and parental education level. The relationship between AP English enrollment and ethnicity is not equitable, as this research suggests that once students are tracked early on, they rarely "move up" from their tracked course of study. These findings have critical implications for school-level decisions for making AP more accessible for all students.

The thesis is organized as follows: In Chapter 2, I discuss the study's theoretical framework. In Chapter 3, I outline the research methods. Chapter 4 presents the findings. Finally, in chapter 5, I discuss the implications of this study for teachers, administrators, and policy makers.

## CHAPTER 2

### Theoretical Framework

#### *Introduction*

In this chapter, I review relevant research relating to equity, equal access, resource distribution, expectations, socioeconomic factors, and diversity. Studying the distribution of AP English classes necessitates the integration of research relating to equity, equal access, resource distribution, expectations and diversity. All of the above mentioned variables have their own unique impact on placement; therefore, examining them separately gives a better understanding of how specific the solutions must be.

The residents and students in California are changing rapidly; therefore, our educational system is being required to change. In *Diversity and Distrust: Civic Education in a Multicultural Democracy*, (2000), Stephen Macedo says, "Public schools are supposed to contribute to the creation of a common civic identity (p.231). Meeting the needs of all students is now the stated goal of the United States public school system; through policies such as No Child Left Behind (NCLB). The federal law focuses on narrowing the achievement gap between races, and holding schools accountable for reaching adequate yearly progress in student achievement. It requires that states monitor the performance of racial and economic subgroups and hold failing schools accountable.

The state has structured the California Standardized Test in a way that gives schools more points for making academic gains with the lowest students. Since these scores are public and the test is mandated, this can be seen as an incentive for schools to address the problem of the students that are often "invisible". The quality of teacher impacts the quality of the curriculum that is taught.

These policies' purpose is to ensure the yearly progress of each student.<sup>2</sup> The subgroups (i.e., special education, low income and minority students) further affect the adequate yearly progress of each school, as these groups tend to score lower than the majority of students. As a result, more attention is focused on the academic achievement of all children so that schools reach their adequate yearly progress targets.

No Child Left Behind has created certain demands on districts. There are stronger accountability components in place. For example, all students are tested on statewide standards, the sizes of K-3 classes have been reduced, and the qualifications of teachers have been increased so that all teachers must be "highly qualified" in the subject matter which they teach. "The structure of nested inequalities creates the worst problems in the schools large, poor central cities. In the large school districts, almost 70 percent of the students are non-Anglo, and over half are poor or near-poor. They have larger schools and larger classes, as well as less adequate buildings, classrooms, and technology. Compared with suburban districts, teachers in city schools are less likely to be certified or to have studied in the areas that they teach, have less experience and are more likely to leave before the end of the school year" (Hochschild, et al.p.25, 2003).

### *Equity and Equal Access*

#### *Access to qualified teachers*

Professionals who excel in teacher preparation programs and state mandated tests for teachers are more likely to be hired by districts in affluent communities. Consequently, schools in urban areas find themselves in a position where the pool from which they are left to hire and place in their classroom continues to promote a disadvantage. These teachers who are now serving our at risk population do not have the

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<sup>2</sup> [www.civilrightsproject.harvard.edu](http://www.civilrightsproject.harvard.edu)

expertise to serve the needs of our students. This cycle continues to contribute to the disproportionate numbers in student performance across ethnic subgroups. The challenge is to ensure that every child has a qualified teacher.

Clearly, the qualifications of teachers are not evenly distributed across schools. Lankford, Loeb, & Wyckoff, (2002) studied resource distribution and found out that Many schools have no teacher who is new, is teaching out of their certification area, failed a certification exam on their first attempt, or who graduated from the least competitive undergraduate colleges. Higher performing schools have more qualified teachers. On the other hand, lower performing schools have more new and inexperienced teachers. Many of these schools have teachers that are teaching courses for the first time, and a significant percent have failed a certification exam on their first attempt. Another form of inequity is resource distribution, for example, typically the best teachers, the smallest classes, and the most resources go to the high groups, and to mainstream or English-speaking classes (Hochschild et al, 2003).

Hochschild et al (2003) report that 90 percent of Americans agree that "equal opportunity for people regardless of their race, religion, or sex" is "absolutely essential" as an American ideal, and the same huge proportion agree that "our society should do what is necessary to make sure that everyone has an equal opportunity to succeed (p. 10). Equity in schools is a powerful instrument that can help translate the American Dream into a reality. The quality of education one receives not only directly affects their future, but also the future of our country. Helping students learn as much as they can enables them to pursue their dreams and increases the chance that the brightest will benefit the nation through discoveries, insights, or leadership (Hochschild et al, 2003).

The American Association of Colleges of Teacher Education (AACTE) views the problem of weak teachers in our most challenging schools as a national tragedy. Even within schools, equity is a problem with who teaches whom (Richard Ingersoll, 1999). For example, teachers who teach advance-level courses are experienced, well trained or highly competent. This is rarely the placement for new teachers. The advanced-level students are students that have the strongest skills; placing the best teachers with this group is not an equitable distribution.

Many of the students in these schools are not aware that these teachers are not adequately prepared to teach them; however, some students are aware. In a student directed research on class cutting, one student said "... they should start having classes for teachers so that they can learn how to teach and deal with different types of students" (Shultz & Cook-Sather, 2001, p.77). Teacher preparation is another important factor to be considered when student achievement is the goal.

The shortage of qualified teachers is creating or sustaining major damage to students. Recent studies have shown that it takes students a few years to offset the effects of even one bad teacher, while even one good teacher significantly improves student performances (Puriefey, 2000). Providing the most effective teachers with the students with the greatest needs cannot be seen as an option or a suggestion; it is necessary. Unless highly motivated and qualified teachers are working with the disadvantaged students, it will be difficult for them to experience equal success.

#### *Access to curriculum*

Equity in the courses that are taken by minority students is an issue which can be examined at many levels such as state, district, school and class. For example, at a state

level the need to close the achievement gap has led to several state-funded programs that give financial incentives to new teachers who agree to teach in low-performing schools. Many of these teachers are teaching courses for the very first time and are not prepared for the academic challenge that comes with the territory. In addition to teaching some of these courses for the first time, many of these teachers are teaching content that they are not credentialed to teach. "The structure of nested inequalities creates the worst problems in the schools large, poor central cities. In the largest school districts, almost 70 percent of the students are non-Anglo, and over half are poor or near-poor. They have larger schools and larger classes, as well as less adequate buildings, classrooms, and technology. Compared with suburban districts, teachers in city schools are less likely to be certified or to have studied in the areas that they teach, have less experience, and are more likely to leave before the end of the school year" (Hochschild, 2003 p.25).

In their book, *Reaching and Teaching All Students*, Robert L. Sinclair and Ward J. Ghory define an Equality School as a good school that focus on the learning of all students. The emphasis is placed on creative intelligence and constructing a learning environment where children from different backgrounds work together for the success of all. "Their success is determined by how well everyone learns, not by the accomplishments of a few "(p.86).

Diller (1997) found that there are cultural differences in learning styles, but the United States school system is characteristic of Northern European culture. Children that have not adapted to this mode are at a disadvantage and are more likely to fail. These findings support the need for ensuring that our neediest students are coupled with our

most effective teachers. When efforts are made to differentiate the curriculum for the success of all children, student achievement and school performance is increased.

### *Resource Distribution*

In May 2000, a class action law suit was filed on behalf of California's Public School students, *Williams v. State of California*. The Williams settlement, originated from unequal access to excellence. The settlement states that schools must provide access to current materials, qualified teachers and safe facilities. The case documented that there were disparities in resources distribution across the state (Powers, 2004). Since the results of state testing have political consequences for schools, there must be some form of accountability in place to provide the resources that are needed. Money alone will not be the answer to this dilemma. "Advocates of the educational outcomes proposal argued that state financing systems should ensure not simply equal funding, but equal outcomes" (Powers, p.766). The state of California is judging schools and students based on the results of the state test. The expectations are equal, but the resources are not.

Authentic assessment is essential in determining student placement. However, when certain assessments are used as single instruments to justify or confirm placement for large groups of students, this form of tracking perpetuates inequity. On the other hand, academic tracking can be beneficial in ensuring that a student maximizes their full potential provided that on-going equal opportunities and resources are allocated to all students. Most high schools sort students by perceived or measured ability, and well-off children almost always dominate the high groups. Well-off or white parents usually manage to ensure that their children obtain the benefits of this structure; "poor and non-Anglo parents have a much harder time doing so" (Hochschild et al, 2003; Chiu & Khoo,

2005). Once students are tracked into these lower level courses, they generally remain there for the duration of their educational lives. Since there is a major difference in the instruction that is given to the group of students in the lower level courses and the higher level courses, rarely does a student acquire the necessary skills to transition from lower to higher level classes. Minority students, despite federal education law and Williams settlement continue to achieve at a low level and have less access to quality education. "A recent analysis of educational resources distributed to California students of different races found teacher resources, strongly skewed toward white and Asian students" (Betts, Rueben & Danenberg, 2000).

### *Tracking*

Another form of inequity is ability grouping. This form of grouping usually keeps students in ability grouped classes for core subjects, but makes allowances for one or two classes to be taken at a higher level. However, the logistics of scheduling does not leave room for the allowances, thus all courses are taken on the same track (Slavin, 1996). Once students are tracked into these lower level courses, they generally remain there. "More commonly, high achievers may be assigned to 'honors' or 'advanced placement' sections of a given course, and low achievers may be assigned to special 'remedial' sections (Slavin, 1996, p. 169). Despite the fact that research states that this method is ineffective and perpetuates institutional segregation, many educators still support it. "One stubborn obstacle to equality in school settings is the belief by many educators that students need to be sorted to be taught efficiently" (Sinclair & Ghory, 1997 p.91). Arguments opposed to ability grouping focus on the reality of the lack of instruction the low achievers receive. Students performing low on standardized test are sometimes the

symptom of slower paced curriculum, the least experienced teachers, and low expectations. The result of being in an atmosphere that is demoralizing sometimes is visible in things such as delinquency, absenteeism, dropout, and other social problems.

### *Expectations*

Teacher expectations of students have an impact on student learning. Teachers should not hold the same expectations for all students; neither should they deliver identical instruction to all students (Cotton, 2000). Cotton also found that problems are created when differential treatment creates or sustains differences in student performance that would not exist if the treatment was more equitable. Many teachers are unaware of Communication is the means for attaining an understanding amongst all stakeholders to reach the ultimate goal of student success. Research indicates that "through dialogue with our students and their communities, we may find ourselves looking at learning, cooperation, and achievement in a more complex, interesting way" (Landsman, 2004 p. 13). The school needs to establish this repertoire to make it clear to parents and students that there are different paths one may take in their academic career. Most parents naturally will do all they can to be a part of the support system to ensure that their child is doing all they can to tap into the resources available as well as advancing themselves on their academic plan. Accordingly, performance levels and course offerings are apt to become more rigorous and competitive amongst students. It is inevitable to see a positive impact in school wide performance when leaders and teachers take the time to make their community feel welcome.

There are several factors involved in preparing students to be successful in more advanced level courses. Accountability is one of many tools necessary to make this

transition. Carefully examining factors will increase the effectiveness of the selected tools. Many researchers have concluded that socio-economic status (SES) factors, such as parent education and income are strongly related to student outcomes at all levels of education (Chiu et al, 2005; Stinebrickner & Stinebrickner, 2003). There is a correlation between parental education and parental involvement. Typically, the more education parents have the higher the SES. "Children who come from disadvantaged families tend to have lower achievement than do those who come from more advantaged families. This disadvantage does not tend to disappear as a child progresses through school" (Phillips, Crousse, & Ralph, 1998, p.34). A child's motivation to go to college can be affected by the encouragement of parents. Previous research has shown that both motivation and aspirations affect effort, which in turn, affects academic achievement

Research indicates that "self-fulfilling expectations bring about change in student performance, whereas sustaining expectations prevent change" (Cotton, 2001, p.51). A positive climate can be created in a school; this is determined by the awareness amongst professionals. For example, student achievement and attitude is affected by the school wide and classroom expectations. Rather than limiting student achievement due to inappropriate practices on behalf of teachers, they must raise the bar and focus on exercising immediate feedback to all students. This useful information can then be internalized by student so that they can continue to progress. Individuals who were considered at risk will begin to achieve simply because they are being encouraged whereas students who were considered average will begin to excel by merely stimulating them. Targeting the needs of all students and executing teaching practices accordingly creates profound outcomes.

The previous discussion examined achievement not just as aggregated test scores, but conceptualized it in the context of equity, equal access, and resource distribution. The purpose of this study is to broaden the discussion of achievement and accountability to consider issues of equity. Of specific focus are these research questions:

1. What is the proportion of students from various cultural, ethnic, and linguistic backgrounds in AP English classes versus English 11 classes?
2. What factors contribute to students being enrolled in AP English?
3. What is the relationship between AP English enrollment and ethnicity?

## CHAPTER 3

### Methods

This study is a mixed-method study; the methods used were qualitative and quantitative. The quantitative data were gathered from the student data system at my school. The qualitative data consisted of information reported on questionnaires completed by students and in-depth interviews with educators and counselors.

#### *Participants*

*Students.* Since my research questions are centered on AP English students and their counter parts, the participants consisted of 11<sup>th</sup> and 12 grade students. Temple High AP English classes start in the 11<sup>th</sup> grade. The first group of students that I discuss is the English 1 I(juniors) and 11S (seniors). English 11 is offered for juniors and 11S for seniors only. This combined group will be referred to from this point on as English 11 students. These students are in this particular English class because they have not passed the California High School Exit Exam (CAHSEE). There are a total of 110 students enrolled in these classes, but only 73 participated in the questionnaire. However, all information not related to the student questionnaires (e.g., ethnicity, language, parental education and migrant status) is given on the entire population. English 11 is not an option; it is mandatory that each site provide some type of intervention class for the students that need to pass the CAHSEE. Many of these students have an additional reading class as an added resource for acquiring the skills that will enable them to pass this very important test.

The second group of students researched was the English 3AP and English 4AP students, who will be referred to from this point on as AP students. These students have all passed the California High School Exit Exam (CAHSEE) and met the criteria for being in an advanced-level English class. There are a total of 88 students enrolled in these classes, but only 75 participated in the questionnaire. These students do have the option of taking this class, it is not mandatory that students enroll in advanced-level courses, such as AP English. These students are recommended to take this class by teachers, counselors and sometimes parents.

*School Personnel.* Teacher 1 is a teacher that teaches English 11 classes. She is a third year teacher who cares very much for this special group of students. She is one of our mentor teachers and is passionate about building the skills that this group needs to pass the CAHSEE. Teacher 2 teaches AP English and has been teaching for over 20 years. She prefers teaching this level of English and is very comfortable with this group. Counselor 1 is a third year counselor and is dedicated to the success of all students. Counselor 2 is a sixth year counselor and is passionate about students enrolling in the most rigorous courses available.

### *Setting*

Temple High School is one of six comprehensive high schools in the Temple Union High School District; it has worked hard to provide a safe and challenging educational environment since it opened in south Oxnard in 1966. For the 2005-2006 school year, Temple High serves 2,550 students who come from a community of

agriculture, light industry and military. Temple High is proud of its successful heritage in academics, athletics and extra-curricular activities.

After two years of being in the Immediate Intervention - Underperforming Schools Program, Temple High scored a 648 on the 2005 Academic Performance Index (a rise of 38 points) to remove itself from program improvement status. In addition, Temple High has been recognized as a Renaissance school, awarded a Golden Bell in 2003 for its exemplary English Language Acquisition - A Model for Success, and received a six-year term of accreditation during its last WASC review. The last couple of years have brought a lot of change to Temple High. This high school has spent the last 2 1/2 years in the modernization process, and the 2005-2006 school year opened with a new principal and three new assistant principals.

Temple High is one of the most ethnically diverse campuses in Ventura County. During the 2005-2006 school year, the student population consists of 79 percent Latinos, 11 percent Filipinos, 5 percent White, 3 percent African-American, 1 percent Asian-American, .6 percent Pacific Islander, and .4 percent American Indian. These proportions have remained fairly consistent over recent years. A high rate of transience, some gang affiliations, significant levels of single-parent families, and substance abuse are some of the challenges faced at Temple High. Many families are low income, with about two-thirds of our students (1730) qualifying for the Title I program. Additionally, there are 855 students enrolled in English Language Development, 449 students in the school's migrant education program, 108 special education students receiving resource services, and 111 students in special day classes. Core subjects are offered at the standard, college preparatory and honors/AP levels. Science and Biology classes are now

offered at the college prep and AP levels only. In addition, a variety of programs are provided to meet the student's interests and needs.

### *Procedure*

General information was summarized from the school student data-base, to examine the research question "What is the proportion of students from various cultural, ethnic, and linguistic backgrounds in AP English classes versus English 11 classes? This tool was also used to analyze parent education, ethnicity, primary language, feeder school and migrant status.

A list of all students in English 11, 11S and English 3AP, 4AP was printed and sorted by teacher of each course. Parent permission slips were printed in Spanish and English. Each class was visited and told that the questionnaires were voluntary and parent permission was necessary in order to participate. Parent permission slips and questionnaires were color-coded to help separate the two groups for analyzing purposes. Parent permission slips were distributed that day and collected on the following. Only the students who returned with parent permission slips signed were given the questionnaires to complete. The questionnaires included both qualitative and quantitative questions. The students were given approximately 15 minutes to complete the questionnaires; then they were collected. This was a two day process. These data were analyzed by tabulating information reported on each question. See Appendix A for the student survey.

In addition to the qualitative responses from the students, a standard-level English teacher, an Advance Placement English teacher and two counselors were interviewed using an open-ended interview protocol, with probing questions. All interviewees

consented to participate. The purpose of these interviews was to answer the question "What factors contribute to students being enrolled in AP English." The interviews were all conducted before the questionnaires were analyzed. Teacher 1 was interviewed during lunch and Teacher 2 was interviewed after school; both interviews took place on the same day. Both interviews took place in their classrooms. Counselor 1 and Counselor 2 were interviewed on the next day during lunch and after school. Both interviews took place in their office. The interviews ranged from 30-45 minutes. The researcher took careful notes during interviews. Appendix B contains the interview protocol.

#### *Data Analysis*

The student questionnaires were color coded for the two groups. A tally sheet was created for each question and each question was summarized on a tally sheet. Descriptive statistics were used to analyze the data and visual depictions of results were created. Careful notes were taken during each interview; the responses were read critically and then coded for themes.

Information on ethnicity, parental education, grade level, and language were summarized for English 11 and AP students using descriptive statistics. Results were depicted visually. Finally, data from all sources were analyzed using critical thinking and findings were considered significant if corroborated in multiple data sets.

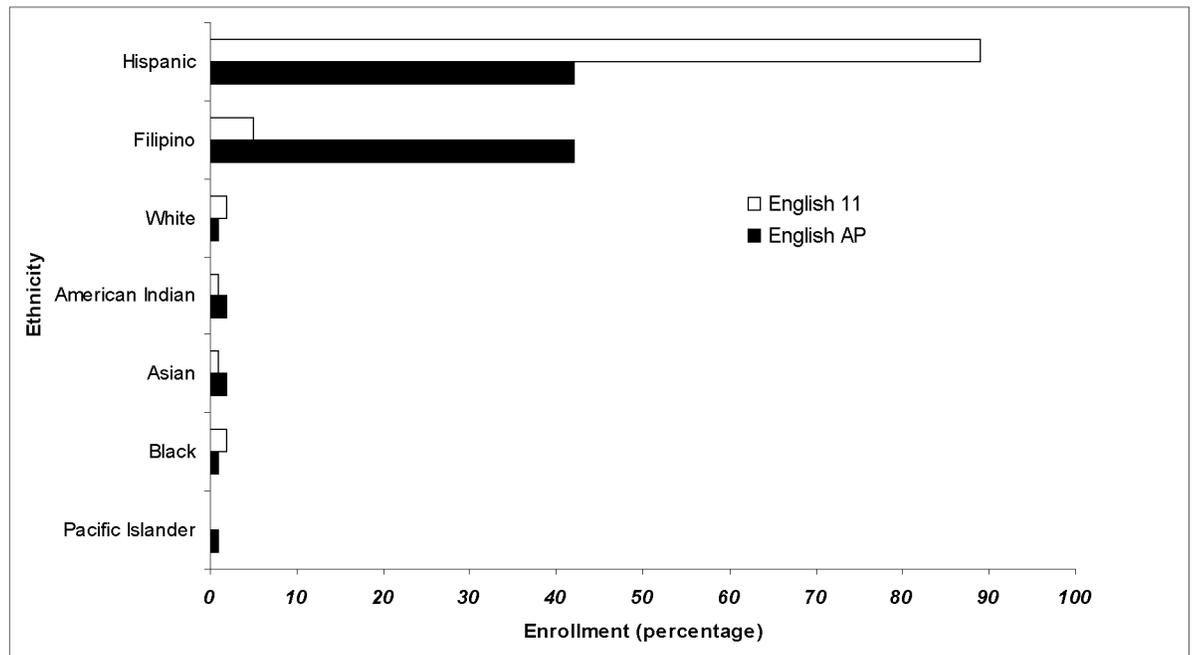
## CHAPTER 4

### Results

In this Chapter, I present the findings of my research. The Chapter is organized around each research question.

*Research Question 1:* What is the proportion of students from various cultural, ethnic and linguistic backgrounds in AP English classes versus English 11 classes?

The results indicate that the majority of students in English 11 (89 percent) come from a Hispanic background, where as Hispanics compose only a little over 40 percent of the student population in the AP classes. In contrast, Filipino students compose 40 percent of the AP population. Finally, about ten percent of AP students are White. I discuss these findings further in Chapter 5. Figure 2 depicts these results.



*Figure 2:* Ethnicity of Students in Advance Placement and English 11 Courses.

The results of the linguistic analysis indicated that there are basically three different languages spoken in the home. The majority of students in English 11 (70 percent) come from homes where Spanish is the primary language spoken in the home, whereas only 17 percent of AP students' primary language in the home is Spanish. Further, 4 percent of English 11 students' primary language spoken in the home is Tagalog, versus 12 percent of AP students. Finally, 25 percent of English 11 students come from homes where English is the primary language spoken, versus 56 percent of AP students. Thus, the more AP students speak English in the home as compared to English 11 students.

Table 4.1 depicts the primary language spoken in the home of English 11 students versus AP students.

Table 4.1.

*The Primary Language Spoken in the home of English 11 students versus AP Students*

Language	English 11	AP
English	25	56
Ilocano	0.9	0
Spanish	70	17
Tagalog	04	12
Vietnamese	0	.9

Note: The values represent percentages of the languages spoken.

*Research Question 2:* What factors contribute to students being enrolled in AP English?

This section of the findings is organized by themes that emerged from all data sets.

*Honor roll.* A striking finding from the student questionnaires indicated that AP students were on honor roll during their 7, 8, 9 and 10<sup>th</sup> grade. When asked about being on honor roll in lower grades, a vast majority of the AP students indicated that they had been in honors classes in lower grades. Thus, being on honor roll in middle school and in freshman and sophomore years is an indicator of being enrolled in AP English as a Junior and Senior. Table 1 depicts the percentages of students who responded "yes" to the question of having been on honor roll in grades 7, 8, 9, and 10.

Table 4.2.

*The Relationship Between Being on Honor Roll in Lower Grades and AP Enrollment*

Grade	English 11	AP
7	12	79
8	16	89
9	11	87
10	11	79

Note: The values represent percentages of respondents who said they had been on honor roll in that grade.

*Behavior.* Behavior was another theme that emerged from the student questionnaires. According to 42 percent of the English 11 students, having perfect attendance and no tardies described a good student; whereas 5 percent of the AP students listed attendance and tardies as an characteristic of a good student. Another characteristic of a good students was "not in trouble", according to 8 percent of English 11 students.

However, only 1 percent of the AP students identified this element as a characteristic of a good student. The largest discrepancy concerning characteristics of a good student was represented by 27 percent of English 11 students saying that studying and homework were indicators. However, 87 percent of AP students said that this element was a characteristic of a good student. Hence, AP students appeared to have a more sophisticated understanding of a good student (studying, doing homework) as compared to English 11 students (come to class and stay out of trouble). Figure 4.2. depicts the findings.

Table 4.3.

*Student Perceptions on what Constitutes a "Good Student"*

Characteristic	English 11	AP English
Positive attendance	42	5
Positive behavior	8	1
Positive work habits	27	87
Positive participation	14	7
Other	8	1

Note: The values represent percentages of students who agreed with the particular characteristic. The other category included characteristics such as "has supplies," "doesn't do drugs," "is smart," and "is prepared."

When asked their perspectives on what constituted "good grades", the following responses were given. When asked about whether A's only were good grades, 3 percent of English 11 students agreed, whereas 25 percent of AP students agreed that A's were

good grades. The responses for B's and C's indicated that 7percent of English students agreed that these grades were "good", whereas, 0 percent of AP students agreed. When asked whether A's *and* B's were good grades, 22 percent English 11 students agreed, whereas, 60 percent of AP students agreed. Finally, when asked whether A's, B's *and* C's were good grades, 34 percent of English 11 students agreed, versus only 5 percent of AP students. Hence, AP students appeared to set higher expectations for grades than English 11 students. Table 4.3 summarizes these findings.

Table 4.4

*Students' Perceptions of "Good Grades "*

Grade	English 11	AP English
A's	3	25
B's&C's	7	0
A's & B's	22	60
A's, B's & C's	34	5
Your Best	0	9
D's & Above	4	1

Note: The values represent percentages of students who responded to each grade type.

Another difference in students' behavior was in regard to homework. When asked how much time per day do the student spent on homework, 38 percent of English 11 students said less than one hour, whereas only 11 percent of AP students did homework for less than an hour. Only 7 percent of English 11 students said they spend two to three hours per day on homework, whereas, 27 percent of AP students spent that amount. When given the choice of three or more hours per day spent on homework, 4 percent of English 11 students agreed, whereas, 28 percent of AP students gave this answer. Hence, AP students spend more time on school work outside of school hours, as compared to English 11 students.

*Teacher recommendation.* When asked whether a teacher had recommended the student to an advanced level English class, 53 percent of English 11 students indicated that they had never been recommended, whereas only 13 percent of AP students gave this answer. Only 8 percent of English 11 students had been recommended to a higher level English class by a teacher more than once, whereas, 44 percent of AP students had received recommendations more than once.

*Extra-curricular activities.* Yet another difference between these student populations rests in their activities after school. According to the student questionnaires, 90 percent of English 11 students cared for small children at home, versus 53 percent of AP students. Further, 32 percent of English 11 students play sports at school, versus 47 percent of AP students. Finally, only 19 percent of English 11 students were members of a school club, versus a striking 85 percent of AP students. Thus, AP students are active in extra-curricular activities.

In summary, the interviews corroborated that being on honor roll in middle school, spending time on homework, teacher recommendations to AP classes, and extra curricular involvement are characteristics of AP students and all contribute to Advance Placement in English classes. The adult interviewees stated that behavior is one of the main components considered when recommending students to advance level English classes. In addition to considering grades, state tests scores are also viewed with the understanding that performance does not always correlate with ability.

### *Parental Education*

Parental education was a factor in placement as well. All adult interviewees mentioned that some parents did not support teachers in recommending their child to an advanced level English class because the parents were not aware of the benefits of these courses. According to the student data base, 47 percent of the English 11 parents were not high school graduates, versus 13 percent of AP parents. Further, 6 percent of English 11 parents had "some college", versus 33 percent of AP parents. Finally, 6 percent of English 11 parents are college graduates, versus 24 percent of AP parents. Thus, AP parents are more educated than English 11 parents. Figure 3 depicts the parent education of AP versus English 11 students.

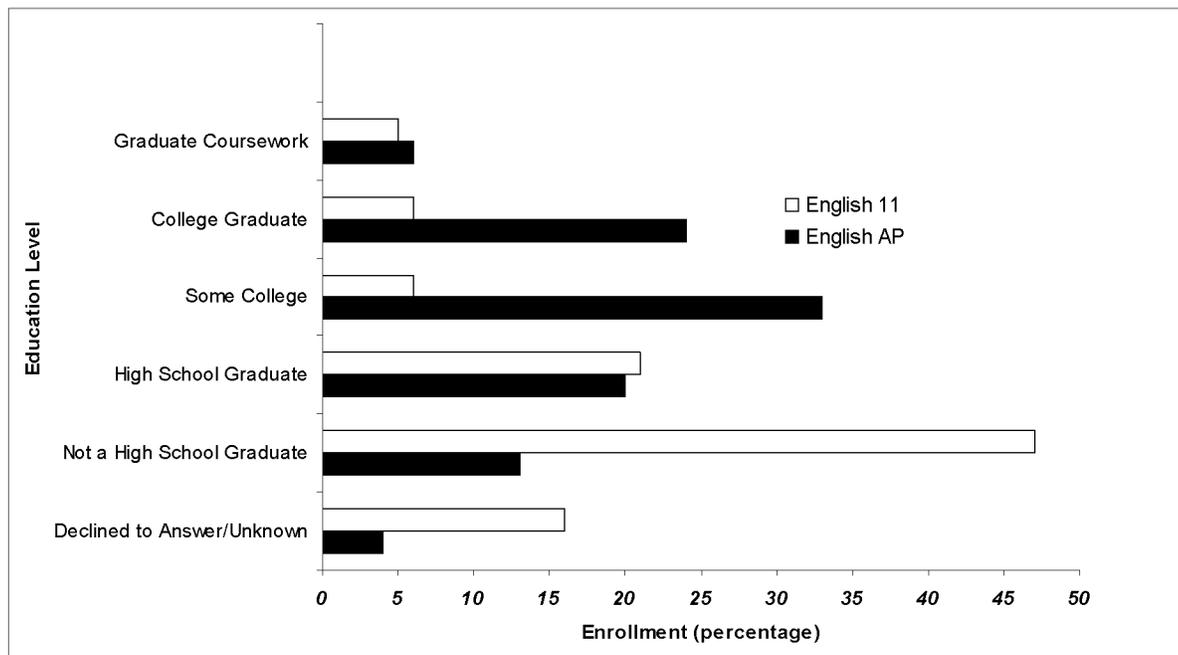


Figure 3. Parent education level of English 11 and AP students

### *Recommendation Indicators*

There was a consensus on the standards for recommending students to AP English among the teacher and counselor interviewees. Among the list of AP student characteristics were motivation, a willingness to increase the rigor in a more challenging course, good attitude, previous test scores and grade point average. The AP English teacher weighed behavior and past honors classes very heavily. She did not think that students could be successful in AP classes if they were not previously in Honors classes. Behavior problems automatically made a student ineligible for recommendation. Students must be enrolled in College Preparatory classes in order to be eligible for AP recommendations. This meant there was a need for the number of recommendations from standard level English class to College Preparatory class to increase. However,

there were very few students that were even recommended for College preparatory advancement. According to the interviews, the main reason given was behavior. Other factors included poor attendance, poor self-confidence, study habits and lack of motivation. All interviewees stated that they have recommended students to higher level courses, but the students were unwilling to move. Lack of motivation, confidence self-esteem and parental support were listed as reasons for not accepting the recommendation.

Question 4 stated, in our school, our total population is 2595. The Hispanic population is 2051 (79 percent) and the African-American population is 74 (3 percent). The AP population is 90. The Hispanic population in AP is 39 (43 percent) and the African-American population is 1 (1 percent). When asked, what do you think contribute to this; the interviewees had a long list of contributing factors. Among the list was the lack of parental support, lack of teacher support, language barriers, parent education about the different levels of courses and their importance, lack of homework being understood by parents, emphasis placed on testing, lack of motivation, home environment not conducive to learning, and parents only focused on graduation requirements. When given the percentages of our general population compared to our AP population, all of the interviewees were surprised. Counselor one stated,

I had never noticed, the numbers were never given to me like this before, wow, this has never come up before.

When asked how teachers might help in increasing the AP enrollment, the interviewees indicated that the teachers can also help by looking for AP potential, consider mentoring and seek to increase the parent/teacher connection. The interviewees suggested that parents need to be better educated about the benefits and requirements of

advanced level classes; this was a consistent concern among all interviewees. Counselors need to facilitate more parent information nights in order to strengthen their role as liaison between parents and teachers. Administrators can help by voicing to teachers the importance of teacher recommendations, using staff development time to train teachers on the importance and process of level changes. The student body can help by encouraging and educating one another. An interviewee stated:

The AP students can talk to the Honor students, the Honor students can talk to the College Prep students and the College Prep students can talk to the Standard students because sometimes they can encourage each other better than adults.

*Research Question 3: What is the relationship between AP English enrollment and ethnicity?*

The findings indicated that there was a discrepancy between English and AP English enrollment and ethnicity. The student data base at Temple High indicates that English 11 enrollment is primarily Hispanic (89 percent). This group is under represented in English AP. According to the student data base, they make up only 43 percent of the English AP population. According to the student data base, Filipino students consists of 11 percent of the general population, yet they make up 41percent of the AP population. This group is over-represented in AP English. Likewise, White students consist of 5 percent of the general population, yet they make up 13 percent of the AP population. This group is also over-represented in English AP.

Table 4.5

*AP English Enrollment and Ethnicity in Comparison to Total School Population*

Ethnicity	General Population	AP English
American Indian	.4	2
Asian	1	2
Pacific Islander	.6	1
Filipino	11	41
Hispanic	79	43
Black	3	1
White	5	13

Note: The values represent percentages of enrollment.

## CHAPTER 5

### Discussion

There are some limitations in this study. First, I researched one school and thus do not have data on whether the situation is similar in other schools. Limited generalizations can be made from this study. However, my findings are similar to those of other studies in that minorities score lower on standardized tests which suggest that they may not be placed in advanced courses. Second, the analysis was based on descriptive statistics. However, using multiple data sets allowed me to triangulate data, and all data sets indicated similar patterns.

Despite the limitations, the results clearly indicated that the percentage of minorities in English AP is disproportionate as compared to the total population at Temple High School. There is an over-representation in AP classes of every sub group with the exception of Black and Hispanic students. Filipino students make up 11 percent of the general population at Temple High School, yet this group makes up 41 percent of the AP population. White students make up 5 percent of the general population, yet they make up 13 percent of the AP population. However, Blacks constitute 2 percent of the general population, yet they make up 1 percent of the AP population. Hispanics make up 79 percent of the high school's population, yet they only represent 41 percent of the AP population.

Knowing who the students in English AP are can provide critical information for several groups of people - students, teachers, parents and educational leaders. This information can be a tool to help inform English 11 students of the different levels of classes that are available to them. This tool could help the students who are not in the AP

class understand that the "world of advanced classes" does not have to exclude them.

This could also serve as a reminder to teachers that both groups (standard and AP) have students with the potential to be academically successful.

It is important that the minorities preparing for the AP classes are not made to feel as if they need to make a decision between their culture and education. The advanced level classes are not reflective of the minorities at Temple High and some students are uncomfortable learning with a new group of people. Many of our students have been tracked into standard level courses. They begin taking standardized tests in elementary school. Many of them are unaware of the importance of these tests, and many minority students do not perform well. These scores highly influence the educational track that this student will experience the next year. Not only is the next year influenced by the test scores, but the scores also follow them from elementary to junior high and the cycle continues to repeat itself. Rarely, if ever, is a student taken off of a track to which she or he was assigned. Many of the minority students are unaware that the possibility to transition to higher-level classes is an option for them. Their grades and test scores are definitely reflective of their performance, but their scores are not necessarily reflective of their ability. Yes, they answered the questions on the test, but, there are several factors that should be taken into consideration before placing these students in classes and keeping them there for the duration of their educational lives.

Many of the English 11 students have had very little exposure to the idea of higher-level courses being a reality for them. I believe that understanding who the students are in English AP (ordinary students such as many of them) and the practical steps that were taken to get there will serve as motivation. One plan for increasing the

number of Hispanic students in English AP is to educate all teachers—not just college prep and honors—on the qualifications for Advance Placement. Educating all teachers, gives the teachers that teach standard level classes an opportunity to be more familiar with the criteria for advance placement. Many of these teachers have the skills to challenge students academically and give them experiences that the standard level classes usually lack. If students are not mastering grade-level material, it is unreasonable to expect them to be motivated to volunteer or even be interested in higher-level courses. To many of these students, there are no obvious consequences for not attending college; therefore, students opt out of another opportunity to fail.

The students with the greatest needs should be paired with the most experienced or most effective teachers. Since this is not happening and the high minority/high poverty schools have a surplus of new teachers, many of these students will not experience the same quality of education as other students. A growing body of research says that much of the underachievement that we have historically blamed on poverty or family characteristics is instead attributable to what we have done: systematically assigned these children disproportionately large numbers of our weakest teachers. The state mandated tests are designed to hold the same standard for all students; however, the resources are not equitably distributed. When the need is different, then the resources should also be different. Fair does not always mean equal.

No longer should the veteran teachers alone have the privilege of only teaching the advance level classes. New teachers should be trained to teach higher level courses such as AP English. When these teachers are trained to do this effectively, their AP classes will not be the only beneficiaries. The students that are in the standard-level

classes will begin to become better prepared for more challenging assignments and stronger candidates for the higher-level courses.

Historically, minority students have not had many opportunities to experience this level of education. When I began to study for this assignment, I had regular meetings with one of the counselors. I discovered a long list of minority students with good grades and good behavior that had never been recommended to transition to college prep, honors or AP classes. There was one particular student that was in a Standard level English class that scored "advance" on the English portion of the state mandated test. Although this student was not in any of my classes, I went personally to speak to the former English teacher and the present English teacher to compare observations. They both believed that she was very capable of succeeding in a higher level English class, but neither took the time to make the recommendation. This is an example of what we cannot continue to practice. Understanding the criteria should lead to a greater awareness of the unnecessary gap that exist and a motivation to target the students with the potential to be advanced.

Another option is to educate all students on the benefits and qualifications of AP classes. Minority students need to know that they have the option of going to college and that they have the potential to be successful there. Exposing these students to the realities of college, not only equips them with more information, but also serves as additional motivation. We must teach them to create options for themselves whenever it is in their power to do so. The AVID curriculum was designed to address this very issue, however many of our students are unable to enroll in this course. They are deficient in the content areas and in an effort to increase their knowledge in these areas, as well as, raise the scores for standardized testing; they have no room for electives. For example, a student

who scores below proficient in English will have a reading class in addition to his/her English class. The same is true for math. This creates an additional frustration for the English 11 student because they lose the privilege of having electives and sometimes sports.

Many students are not aware that these (advanced placement) classes exist; others have assumed that the classes are unattainable for them. In other words, they do not believe that they belong in this class. They do not believe that they can be successful and many of them do not believe they are wanted in this class. If this is their perception, then it is their reality. What is the source of this self doubt and these powerful assumptions? When a student's ability to succeed is measured by test scores, teacher's expectations and/or behavior, it does not take long for them to develop an inferiority complex. By the time these students reach high school (where advanced placement classes are offered), many of them no longer believe in themselves. They are convinced that they belong in a certain group and the self-fulfilling prophecy continues to unfold.

Tying this study back to issues of equity and equal access, it is imperative that all students receive an equal education. It is our duty to prepare these students to meet the challenges that are facing them and to equip them for future challenges. Understanding that the achievement gap will not disappear; there must be a concentrated effort to see it consistently decrease. It is undeniable that the proportional outcomes of Advanced Placement English students at my school are not representative of the school wide population and I believe that these numbers can increase without compromising student learning.

In an effort to increase the number of minority students in advance level English classes, there must be a system of consistent support in place for them. Their level of success will be in direct proportion to the amount of support they receive during this transition. The findings from this study suggest that a focus must be placed on study skills, time management, test taking strategies and reading comprehension. These are just a few self-regulatory skills that will enable students to not only transition, but also have successful experiences.

Parents play a vital role in this dilemma. It is obvious from this study and others that parental involvement is a major factor in the success of a child. The more education the parent has, the more aware he/she will be of the different levels of preparation that is available for the child. Informing parents that graduation may not be the highest goal available for their children, may gain the support that has been lacking. Some parents do not understand that though the advance level class will be more challenging, it is better preparation for college and a more productive life. According to the student data base, a large portion of the English 11 parents did not graduate from high school. "Success" to them is seeing their child accomplish something they did not; it is our job to educate them on the practical steps to attaining this goal.

A lot of schools have partnerships with community colleges, parent education can expand from not only knowing what is expected of their child, but also opportunities for them to earn a high school diploma and/or college credit. This would be empowering parents. Many researchers have concluded that socioeconomic status factors, such as parent education and income, are related strongly to student outcomes at all levels of education (Stinebrickner & Stinebrickner, 2003).

The percentage of English 11 students that are involved in extra-curricular activities is extremely low. Unfortunately, this study did not address the reasons for this. Obviously, these students do not have a connection to the school other than classroom experience. Since, they are in remedial English; it is evident that their experiences are not all positive. They have all failed to pass the CAHSEE and many of them have taken this test several times. As a result of not passing the very important test, many of them have two English classes along with two math classes; they do not have room in their schedules for electives.

Ingrained tracking is a problem not just at Temple High, but across the nation. There are several studies on this very issue. There must be a consistent level of high quality education in our high poverty/high minority schools. Somehow, this has to be ensured through policy measures. Accountability is only one piece to this very simple, yet complex problem. Brown vs. Board of Education guaranteed the right to share schools; somehow the education has remained unequal. Now that students attend the same schools, it is time that they shared curriculum and resources within the school.

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Appendix A  
Student Questionnaire



- |  |     |    |              |
|--|-----|----|--------------|
| 14. Do you have friends in college?        | Yes | no | I don't know |
| 15. Do you have family members in college? | Yes | no | I don't know |
| 16. Do you have a favorite teacher?        | Yes | no | I don't know |

Please circle the following answers (a. b. c. or d.) that describe you most.

17. How many hours of T.V. do you watch a day?
- Less than 1
  - 1-3
  - 4-5
  - 5 or more
18. Who encourages you the most to do well in school?
- Parents
  - Siblings
  - Teachers
  - Other \_\_\_\_\_ (Example: friend, relative, counselor...)
19. How many teachers at your school do you believe really care about you?
- 1-2
  - 2-3
  - 3-4
  - 4 or more
20. How many hours of video games do you play in a day?
- Less than 1
  - 1-2
  - 2-3
  - 3 or more
21. How many hours do you spend on the telephone?
- Less than 1
  - 1-2
  - 2-3
  - 3 or more
22. How much time per day do you spend on homework?
- Less than 1
  - 1-2
  - 2-3
  - 3 or more
23. Has a **Counselor** ever recommended you to an advanced level English class?
- Not at all
  - At least once
  - More than once

24. Has a **Teacher** ever recommended you to an advanced level English class?

- a. Not at all
- b. At least once
- c. More than once

25. Has a **Parent** ever recommended you to an advanced level English class?

- a. Not at all
- b. At least once
- c. More than once

26. Do you consider yourself a good student?

- a. yes
- b. no
- c. I don't know

Describe what a good student means to you. Please print.

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What do you consider to be good grades?

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If you have any questions about the study or survey, please contact LaSonja Temple at (805) 385-xxxx.

Questions or problems about your rights in this research project can be directed to Amanda Quintero,

Director for Research and sponsored Programs at CSUCI, (805) 437-3285 or

email.

Appendix B  
Interview Protocol

## Interview protocol questions for teachers and counselor

**Purpose:** This interview is part of my Master's degree thesis. All information is kept confidential. Results are clustered and no individual response is reported.

1. When making recommendations for Advance Placement English (AP), what makes a student a good candidate?

Probing questions: achievement, academic ability, social and behavioral qualities, leadership potential...

2. How do you use those factors to recommend students?

3. Are there students whom you recommend but who choose not to take AP English? What factors do you think contribute to this?

4. In our school, our total population is 2,595. The Hispanic population is 2051 (79%) and the African American population is 74 (2.8%). The AP population is 90. The Hispanic population in AP is 39 (43%) and the African American population is 1 (1.1%). What do you think contribute to this?

Probing questions: lack of information, lack of motivation, achievement issues, academic ability, language issues, social behavioral issues...?

5. Do you have any suggestions on how to change the proportions? (previous question)

Probing questions: What can teachers, parents, counselors, administration, student body do specifically? Is there a need for more information? More Awareness?

## Appendix C

### Questionnaire Summary Sheet

Question	Eng. 11 Yes	AP Yes	Eng. 11 No	AP No	Eng. 11 Don't Know	AP Don't Know
1. Do you enjoy reading?						
2. Were you on the honor roll in 7 <sup>th</sup> grade?						
3. Were you on the honor roll in 8 <sup>th</sup> grade?						
4. Were you on the honor roll in 9 <sup>th</sup> grade?						
5. Were you on the honor roll in 10 <sup>th</sup> grade?						
6. Do you have younger siblings?						
7. Do you care for small children at home?						
8. Do your parents expect you to go to college?						
9. Do you play any sports at school?						
10. Are you in any school clubs?						
11. Do you live with both parents?						
12. Do you plan to go to college?						
13. Do you look forward to going to college?						
14. Do you have friends in college?						
15. Do you have family members in college?						
16. Do you have a favorite teacher?						

	Eng. 11 "Less than 1"	AP "Less than 1"	Eng. 11 "1-3"	AP "1-3"	Eng. 11 "4-5"	AP "4-5"	Eng. 11 "5 or more"	AP "5 or more"
17. How many hours of T.V. do you watch a day								