
Driving Postsecondary Success Through AP at Canadian Universities

The Advanced Placement® Program (AP®) has been in Canadian secondary schools for over 30 years. During this time, College Board has been working with an increasing number of schools and school districts, helping to clear a path for all students to own their future. In 2020, amid a global pandemic, over 18,000 young Canadians took 28,000 AP Exams from over 600 schools, in every province and territory, joining the ranks of over 2.6 million students from across the planet. Students are currently able to receive credit and advanced placement at every English-speaking university within Canada, nearly all colleges and universities in the U.S., as well as utilize AP for admissions or credit or both in 450 institutions across 75 other countries and regions around the world.

The covid-19 pandemic has forced students and educators to press pause on many aspects of their lives. As ministries, schools, and universities restart efforts to further support students' postsecondary success, decision-making grounded in data and research is more important than ever.

Numerous studies have tracked AP students' performance in U.S. colleges and universities demonstrating strong relationships between AP and key student outcomes in university. This research finds that AP students are more likely to persist to their second year of university, earn higher course grades in university, and ultimately earn university degrees, than similar students who didn't take AP.

As part of an ongoing series of AP validity research, this study explores relationships between students' AP Exam performance and three measures of postsecondary success—first-year grade point average (FYGPA), retention, and degree completion—for students who attend Canadian universities, specifically the University of British Columbia (UBC) and the University of Alberta (UofA). Results from these analyses indicate that AP Exam scores are correlated with success for students who attend UBC and UofA.

As educators look to help students get back on track during and after the covid-19 pandemic, these findings can help inform school and institutional planning and decision-making. During this unprecedented time of challenges and uncertainty, educators in Canada continue to seek ways to help more students from diverse backgrounds prepare for the rigors of postsecondary study. As this current study suggests, AP can play a significant role in secondary schools, postsecondary institutions and governments achieving this goal. From Computer Science to English Literature, AP can provide a broad set of programs and courses, aligned to the various provincial curricula, that help clear a path for all students to own their future.

Key Takeaways:

- AP examinees earning scores of 3 or higher are more likely to earn higher grades in college, return for a second year, and ultimately complete a degree compared to students who didn't take AP Exams.
- The positive effects of AP Exams on postsecondary outcomes extend to multiple AP discipline areas (Science, Math & Computer Science, and English), with stronger findings in AP STEM subjects.
- Students scoring 3 or higher on multiple AP Exams is associated with more positive college outcomes, particularly for degree completing within 6 years, even when accounting for high school GPA.

Relationship Between AP Scores & Postsecondary Success

This study analyzed 12,663 first-year, full-time undergraduate students at two institutions, UofA (5,374) and UBC (7,289). This section below shows the results for students who took one or more AP Exams compared to students who didn't take any AP Exams and didn't report participating in the International Baccalaureate® program.

Results are reported separately for students attending UofA and UBC¹. Figure 1 illustrates that students who score a 3 or higher on one or more AP Exams earn higher FYGPAs at both institutions than non-AP students. Although the grading scales used at the two institutions are different², the percentage increase in grades between non-AP students and students who score a 3 or higher is 11% among UofA students and 7% among UBC students.

Figure 1: Mean FYGPA by Non-AP and AP 3 or Higher Group

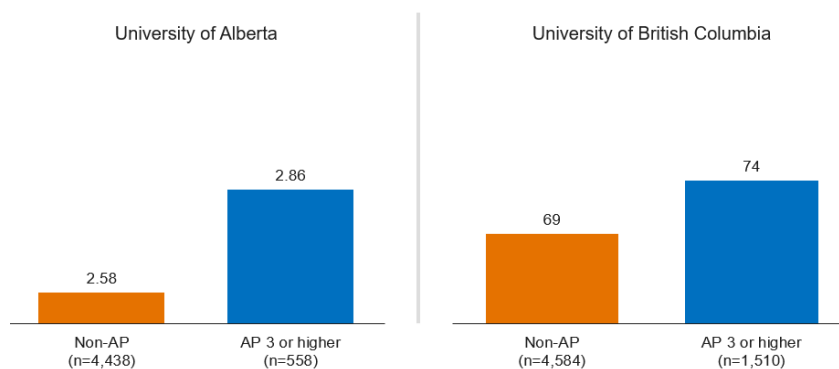
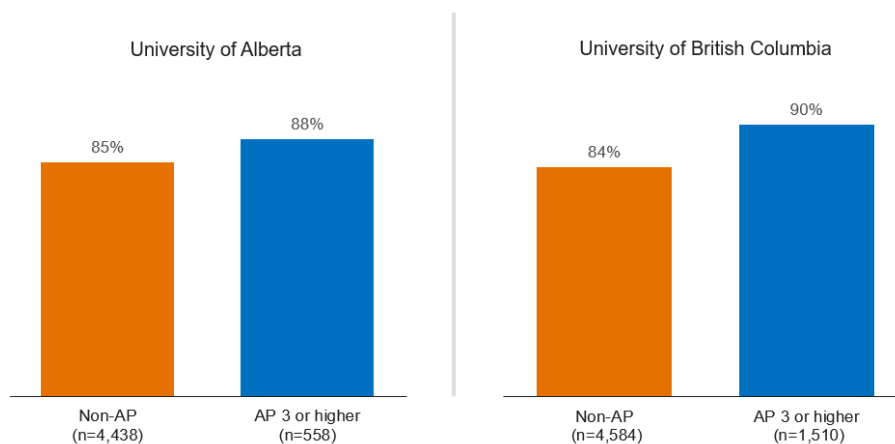


Figure 2 shows second-year retention rates by AP and non-AP Exam groups and indicates that students who earn a 3 or higher on one or more AP Exams are more likely to return for a second year, as compared with students who didn't take any AP Exams with predicted gains twice as high among students at UBC compared to UofA.

Figure 2: Second-year Retention Rate by Non-AP and AP 3 or Higher Group

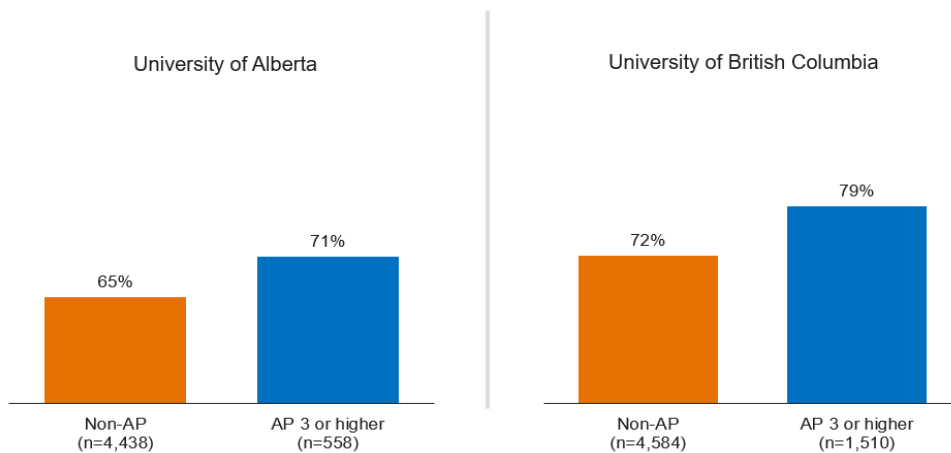


¹ Results shown focus on outcomes for non-AP and AP students for all students regardless of high school grades. Additional analyses were run controlling for high school grades and the positive findings for AP generally persisted but were smaller as is expected when additional measures of prior achievement are included.

² UofA's grading is on a 0-4.0 scale, and UBC's grading is on a 0-100 percentage scale.

Figure 3 shows results for six-year graduation rates by AP and non-AP groups. Students who earn a 3 or higher on one or more AP Exams are six (UofA) to seven (UBC) percentage points more likely to graduate in six years or less as compared with students who didn't take any AP Exams.

Figure 3: 6-Year Graduation Rate by Non-AP and AP 3 or Higher Group



Additional Findings

Analyses (figures not shown) also examined postsecondary outcomes by AP discipline and number of AP Exams with scores of 3 or higher to find at both institutions:

- The positive relationships between earning AP scores of 3 or higher and all 3 student outcomes studied – FYGPA, retention, and degree completion – held across disciplines are even higher for STEM-focused AP Exams. For instance, students who scored a 3 or higher on 1 or more AP STEM Exams are 11 percentage points more likely to earn a degree within 6 years than non-AP students.
- The number of AP Exams with scores of 3 or higher is positively related to degree completion in 6 years. At UBC, students earning scores of 3 or higher on 3 or more AP Exams are 13 percentage points more likely to graduate within 6 years compared to non-AP students and students at UofA who earn scores of 3 or higher on 3 or more AP Exams enjoy an 8-percentage point boost over non-AP students.