



CASE STUDY 2: MAKE IT A CORE COURSE

Converting AP Seminar to English 10: AP Seminar

Getting Started with AP Seminar

Granada Hills Charter School (GHCS) started offering AP Seminar in 2015 as a yearlong academic elective course for their juniors. Students took AP English Language concurrently to reinforce the skills necessary for the course. In 2021, the University of California updated their academic credit designation, which allowed us to offer AP Seminar as an English course. Our biggest challenge was the limited space in the student schedule, so this update was critical to increase enrollment and get more teachers trained in the department.

Shifting from an Elective to a Core English Course

The data and assessment specialist in our English department first explored the alignment of AP Seminar to the California state standards for English Language Arts. He then considered how the course would fit with the typical sophomore English class. The specialist spent time aligning the department benchmarks with the AP Seminar standards and skills and formed an exploratory committee. The department chair and school administrators reviewed the data and rationale for making the switch to a core English course. Then the department reached a consensus. Although there was initial skepticism from other English teachers, the data spoke for itself. Student recruitment took a little time. Two things benefited us: our school policy to pay for all exam fees for any AP course and the fact that we require all students to take the exam.

I found the experience of being an AP Seminar reader and consultant extremely useful. In the summer of 2022, I organized a private AP Summer Institute and trained five teachers. We now have eight teachers certified to teach AP Seminar, and each one has one or two sections. We share the philosophy that if we train more teachers, we can help identify more students that are ready and benefit from the course frameworks.

DISTRICT:

Granada Hills Charter

SCHOOL:

Granada Hills Charter School

LOCATION:

Granada Hills, CA

MEET THE TEACHER



Spencer Wolf

AP Seminar Teacher

SCHOOL STATS

4,800

Students enrolled

246

Students enrolled in AP Seminar

51%

Low income



- 20% White
- 41% Hispanic or Latino
- 4% Black
- 16% Asian
- 19% Other

English Department Sequence

Our English department is flexible. We don't tie AP courses to a specific grade level. Our course offerings focus on cumulative English standards over four years of high school, and we conduct their own assessments to check for standards and performance. In the inaugural year of adding AP Seminar to their offerings, 40% of students were sophomores, 50% of students were juniors, and 10% were seniors.

Grade 9 Choices	Grade 10 Choices	Grade 11 Choices	Grade 12 Choices
College Prep	College Prep	AP English Language and Composition	AP English Language and Composition
Honors English 9	Honors English 10	AP English Literature and Composition	AP English Literature and Composition
—	English 10: AP Seminar	English 11: AP Seminar	English 12: AP Seminar

**Students who take AP Seminar or English 10: AP Seminar before senior year have the option to extend their learning in AP Research, but as an elective.*

To support the transition, we built a strong professional learning community to develop a repository of student supports. We created an instructional technique bank that all teachers can access and adjusted pacing to align with English foundational skills to be more deliberate in instruction. We emphasize foundational skills in the first few months of the year and always make it a point to build in mock exams and after-school support sessions.

Impact of AP Seminar as an English Course

In our inaugural year of AP Seminar as an English course, enrollment increased 156%, from 100 to 256 students, while performance remained steady. Out of a total of 256 students, 90% earned a 3 or higher on the AP Exam. This year there are 374 requests from interested students. We'll offer 11 sections taught by 8 AP Seminar teachers. Recruitment is happening via student word-of-mouth.

The overall AP Seminar student demographics are much more in line with our overall school demographics than they used to be. Before the transition, we had more male students enroll in the sciences than female students, but we had an overrepresentation of female students and underrepresentation of male students in AP English courses. Our AP Seminar was 75% female and 25% male. Last year the proportions were almost equal. More male students chose an AP English course.

“I have two favorite aspects of teaching Seminar. One is the freedom and flexibility to design curriculum around meaningful topics for kids. Also, seeing the wide range of topics that students choose to investigate and really engage in. One of the first students I taught in Seminar is currently in a PhD program, where he’s building on issues he first began exploring in Seminar and later in Research.”

—SPENCER WOLF, AP SEMINAR TEACHER, GRANADA HILLS HIGH SCHOOL

“AP Seminar gives kids a chance to meaningfully engage in skill development on topics that matter to them. Learning becomes less about “doing school” or “taking a test” and more about engaging in actually understanding, evaluating, and responding to perspectives about meaningful things.”

—SPENCER WOLF, AP SEMINAR TEACHER, GRANADA HILLS HIGH SCHOOL

EDUCATOR TO EDUCATOR: Tips from Granada Hills Charter School for Shifting AP Seminar from Elective to a Core English Course

- 1** Create an exploratory committee to engage in long-term planning. Engage the English department. Help observe AP Seminar in action. Students are capable.
- 2** Think about working backward across the 4-year English curriculum to grow the program. This helped build the foundation and change the culture of the department to prepare students. Teachers start seeing more students as capable of succeeding in AP courses. This has paid off the most.
- 3** Align with state standards. Emphasize them in grades 9 and 10. This helps prepare students for AP Seminar. Building the foundation within the department allows us to train more teachers to scale the sections offered.
- 4** Recruit students earlier by asking them about topics that are relevant to them. Use the time after AP Exams to connect with students and recruit them. Encourage them to explore subjects of interest.

“AP Seminar has given me insight into the power of collaboration, and of having kids share their work as authentically as possible. When kids have the chance to speak about a topic they’re excited about and try to communicate their understanding to an audience, they come to life and get excited.”

—SPENCER WOLF, AP SEMINAR TEACHER,
GRANADA HILLS HIGH SCHOOL