“BEYOND AP”—MEDIA SOURCES

I prepared this short reading and resource list for marketing and communications people a few years ago to offer examples of how the whole “AP or not-AP” discussion has been framed in the media and presented by schools—Peter Gow 12/6/17

This [front-page New York Times 2002 article](https://www.nytimes.com/2002/12/16/education/ethical-culture-fieldston-decision-ap.html) on Ethical Culture Fieldston’s decision to go its own way appeared in 2002 and set the stage for a number of schools’ decisions to let go of Advanced Placement-designated courses. Colleges’ perspectives have not changed since then. As was the usual case in these early stories, Fieldston had assembled a sheaf of testimonial letters from colleges assuring its college counseling office (and of course students and families) that students without “AP” on their transcripts would not be hurt in the admission process.

Note the closing quote: “We look at whether the applicant has taken the high school’s most demanding courses,’ said Marlyn McGrath Lewis, [Harvard’s] director of admissions. ‘But whether the classes are designated as A.P. or not is irrelevant. Abolishing A.P. classes won’t hurt the kids.”

This [2004 Wall Street Journal article](https://www.wsj.com/articles/SB106492001838283053) surveyed a number of schools that at that time were the vanguard of the movement questioning the value of Advanced Placement courses, including a group of New York City independent schools. It refers to the College Board’s AP trademark concern that a couple of years later led to the AP audit process to “validate” the use of the letters “AP” on transcripts. (It also quotes me—and within two years, the school I worked at had dropped its last Advanced Placement-designated courses.)

The [Los Angeles Times writes in 2005](https://www.latimes.com/topic/schools/high-schools/96000016535979199.html) of the decision by Crossroads School of Arts & Sciences to replace its Advanced Placement-designated courses with its own high-level advanced courses.


A harsh and more recent critique of the College Board and the Advanced Placement program from *The Atlantic*. As sharply pointed as the article is, it touches only obliquely on the issues that most trouble many independent schools.

The [Phillips Exeter Academy School Profile](https://www.exeter.edu/admissions/prospective-students/profiles), a document that accompanies all college applications and that provides a “shorthand” overview of the school’s curriculum. Note terms like “toughest” and “most advanced”; note, too that they make reference to students’ Advanced Placement examination scores while at the same time referencing the school’s decision to eschew the AP designation for its courses “as all Exeter departments offer coursework that goes beyond the College Board's AP curriculum.”

IMPORTANT NOTE: Each school’s college counseling office also sends a School Profile to each college with each application; this is where the school communicates its special qualities to college admission offices, including high points of the curriculum, extra-curricular programs, and school culture and values. A key component to every School Profile is the notation of the school’s “most rigorous,” most advanced course offerings in each academic discipline, and this is where non-AP
schools can and do communicate this information. Here is a sampling of the Profiles from a few other non-AP schools:

Westtown School (PA)

Beaver Country Day School (MA)

The Urban School of San Francisco (CA)

Haverford School (PA)

And a school that has more recently made this transition:

Pomfret School (CT)

Here is how St. Mark’s School (MA), now in its fifth AP-less year, explained its school-created advanced courses in its 2015–16 School Profile:

“Advanced Work: Beginning in the 2014–2015 school year, St. Mark’s began offering teacher generated, school-specific, vigorous offerings. Across the full curriculum, students are exposed to interdisciplinary work and the opportunity to develop strong scientific inquiry, historical research, collaborative problem-solving, critical thinking, and written communication skills. Newly developed courses such as our innovative STEM and Historical Research Fellowships, along with Mathematical Research, Advanced Topics classes in Computer Science, and Modern Language and Religion form the core of our most vigorous offerings. Students in good academic standing may also elect to work with a faculty mentor to develop an independent study program to further their academic exploration in an area of personal interest. Independent Study courses (ISPs) are semester-based, and students complete their ISP with a culminating project representative of their topic of study.”