

Are AP courses becoming endangered?



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Teachers and students across Oklahoma have been in an uproar lately over the new House Bill 1380 which would cut funding for College Board's Advance Placement (AP) US History class. The bill was presented by Representative Dan Fisher from Oklahoma, whose claims against the class have to do with its similarities to Common Core, a set of learning standards that were recently outlawed from Oklahoma public schools, and its lack of emphasis on American exceptionalism.

“In the committee meeting, pretty immediately this took a turn from discussing AP US History to correlating all of AP to Common Core, which it is not,” said AP US History teacher Christine Custred.

Unlike Common Core, AP classes are not required for students to graduate; however, many students enjoy taking them because AP presents a challenge that is different from regular high school courses and allows the opportunity for college credit.

“In AP we have to adhere to the state standards plus the AP requirements,” Custred said. “AP isn't being used to replace the state standards, and that is what I think has been misrepresented.”

Standards for AP are set by College Board, which is a private company that is well-established in the education world and offers exams to students nationwide.

“AP has given me the faith that I can do anything and like my classes and without the pressure that has been put on me and the competition from my fellow peers I wouldn't be in the position that I am going into college,” senior and AP student Abby Bond said.

Based on a 1-5 score that evaluates students from across the nation, AP is used by most colleges to determine whether a student is competent enough in a particular subject to receive college credit without having taken the collegiate class. For many students, the appeal of AP courses also lie in their financial benefits. Compared to paying for and taking the class in college, AP is a cheaper alternative.

“From an academic standpoint, the AP strategies in any class are different than on level strategies,” principal Justin Coffelt said. “Some of those students that excel in the AP class, even though they're high level thinkers, would struggle in on level classes and that's why it's important to have a mix.”

Instead of immediately cutting funding, Custred suggests slowing down and evaluating how the standards of AP can be added to or altered in order to ensure that the standards are not violating any state laws.

“AP raises the bar of critical thinking. No one comes to me after my class and says, ‘Thank goodness I know when D-day was.’ It's the thinking skills, not the names or dates that are important” Custred said. “AP elevates all learning. A five on an AP exam is expected at Harvard and what does that tell us? Ivy leagues accept the credit. AP is significant and I want it to be safe.”

As the debate over House Bill 1380 continues, teachers, students and parents who are concerned about this issue and would like to speak out are encouraged to contact and voice their opinion to their state legislators, Representative Dan Fisher, the author of the bill, and Representative Sally Kern, who is looking into the legality of all AP, as well as Scott Pruitt State Attorney General.