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AP® Japanese Language and Culture Advanced Placement Program, The College Board

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Background and History

Since its inception in 1955, the College Board's Advanced Placement (AP®) Program has provided students worldwide the opportunity to challenge themselves with the rigors of college-level courses while still in high school. Currently, the College Board offers AP examinations in 33 different courses, with approximately 800,000 students in about 17,000 schools having taken AP exams in May 2009 (an increase of approx. 45% and 20% respectively over the 5-year period since 2004). Over 90% of 4-year colleges and universities in the U.S. recognize AP and provide credit, advanced placement, or both for qualifying scores.

Since the beginning, the AP Program has offered modern language courses and exams in French, German, and Spanish. In 2003, however, the program launched its World Languages Initiative and decided to expand its portfolio. The College Board views this initiative as a first step in its commitment to furthering multiculturalism and multilingualism in secondary education.

At that time Japanese and Chinese were considered among the most commonly taught languages with sufficiently large enrollments that were not included in the AP portfolio. Thus, the first AP Language and Culture courses in Japanese and Chinese became available to students worldwide in the fall of 2006 with the first exams administered in May 2007. The initial development of the AP Japanese Language and Culture course and exam was made possible thanks to financial support from the Japan Foundation and to professional assistance offered through the Alliance of Associations of Teachers of Japanese (AATJ).

As the first step in developing a new course, the AP Japanese Task Force was formed in 2004, consisting of 12 members in total, with six accomplished secondary-school teachers and six experienced college and university professors recruited by the College Board from among nominations submitted by officers of Japanese teachers' associations and their regional, state, and local affiliates. During the 2004-05 academic year the Task Force convened three times to create the draft Course Description and initial exam specifications.

Once completed, the work of the Task Force was handed over to the Development Committee, which was a 6-member group composed of some members of the Task Force and some new nominees. Over the 2005-06 academic year, the committee refined the Course Description, finalized exam specifications, wrote exam questions, and assembled the first sets of the 2007

exam. It also contributed to the design and implementation of the first iterations of professional development experiences for prospective teachers of the new AP Japanese course.

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The Development Committee has since continued its appointment and work beyond the inaugural course offering and exam administration as the committee periodically refines the Course Description and generates new sets of the exam.

The Content of AP Japanese

In most subject areas, AP courses target the content of similarly titled introductory or first-year college courses. The existing AP courses in modern languages are an exception to the rule, however. Not only Japanese but also Chinese, French, German, and Spanish all target the curriculum of second-year college courses rather than those at the introductory level. The AP Japanese exam targets students who have completed a total of approximately 300 contact hours of college-level instruction (equivalent to four semesters or six quarters in most programs).

AP Japanese is a response to earnest voices heard from throughout the Japanese language teaching profession at that time. These voices demanded a departure from the formats and purposes of conventional language tests. They called for the kind of exam capable of measuring students' language proficiency as opposed to their knowledge of the language. The message was loud and clear: Proficiency-based performance assessment is the way to go and it should be founded on standards-based curricula and pedagogies that stress the development of communicative and cultural competence. AP Japanese was to break new ground in standardized language testing.

AP Japanese is tied to the ACTFL Proficiency Guidelines and the Standards for Japanese Language Learning found in the *Standards for Foreign Language Learning in the 21st Century*. In so doing, the exam made a departure from other high-stakes tests that are so familiar throughout the field. And it is making an impact on the ways the Japanese language is taught at all levels. Further, AP Japanese has positioned itself well for the critical issue of program articulation across the various levels of schooling and the connection between high school and college in particular, narrowing the gaps or philosophical differences that may exist between different levels of Japanese language education.

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The Impact of AP Japanese on Japanese Language Education

As the College Board's annual *AP Report to the Nation* shows, increasing enrollment in AP courses is a fact of life in many secondary schools nationwide today. Participation in such courses reflects the commitment of educators and students to elevating standards in the U.S. classrooms, while engaging in the development of AP curricula and design of related assessments provides subject areas with the opportunity to review curricula and standards at all levels. AP does facilitate articulation among various levels of instruction and encourages strong students to continue to advanced levels of study.

As for Japanese-language education in the U.S., despite the declining Japanese economy since the 1990s, it has continued its growth at the turn of the new century. There was a 24.1% increase in the number of Japanese-language learners in the U.S. from 1998 to 2003. However, according to the last survey report on Japanese-language education overseas conducted by the Japan Foundation in 2006, the number dropped to 118,000 learners, marking a 15.9% decrease. Approximately 88% of these Japanese-language learners are studying the language in educational institutions. The notable change from 2003 to 2006 is the declining percentage of K-12 learners. In 2003 more than 60% of Japanese-language learners in the U.S. were in primary and secondary schools, while 30% were in higher education and 7% in non-school situations. In 2006 these numbers changed to 50% for K-12 learners and 38% for college students.

It should be noted that the 2006 statistics present the situation just before AP Japanese was implemented. The Japan Foundation's forthcoming report on its 2009 survey on Japanese-language education overseas should be able to give a clearer picture of the impact of AP Japanese on Japanese-language education in the U.S. During this three-year period the number of high school students who took the AP Japanese exam increased dramatically by approximately 25% from 1,667 of the inaugural year 2007 to 2,085 in the year 2009. Moreover, nearly 200 AP Japanese programs have been authorized to offer the course through the AP Course Audit.

So what benefits has AP Japanese brought to Japanese language education at large? What are its implications for the Japanese-language students and teachers of today and tomorrow?

The potential benefits identified by the teachers, administrators, students, and parents who had requested the implementation of AP Japanese before its launch included improved articulation between secondary and college Japanese programs, development of a field-wide set of expectations and standards, improved feedback to teachers and students on students' accomplishment, and strengthening of Japanese curricula. Furthermore, experts had expected increased stability of Japanese programs, retention of the best students in Japanese programs, and an increase in the numbers of students in advanced-level courses. It was also believed that

AP Japanese would bring with it a heightened awareness of the availability and strength of Japanese language instruction in the U.S. Their views were expressed as follows:

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Concerning articulation, expectations, and standards

- A very important function of the AP course and exam is to facilitate articulation between various levels of Japanese-language education and provide a shared vocabulary to educators at all levels by which they may define the levels of Japanese skills of students completing secondary programs and entering university programs.
- The AP course and exam, which are based on university-level offerings, help to set national standards for what should be included in a strong high school program and incidentally help to clarify expectations in elementary and intermediate college courses as well.
- The availability of credit and advanced placement would encourage strong students to continue their study of Japanese at the university level.
- Many students of Japanese wish to continue their study of Japanese at college, and more and more students desire jobs that utilize their language skills. Parents and students seek a curriculum and assessment that give students credit for the knowledge and skills they have acquired and help them make a smooth transition to college programs in which they can continue to develop their skills.
- University instructors anticipate that the AP course and exam can have a positive effect on student achievement. They look forward to receiving well-prepared students who can make a smooth transition into intermediate and advanced college-level courses.

Concerning feedback

- AP Japanese should be able to provide a welcome addition to the types of feedback the students want on their progress. It would provide a clear indication to students, parents, administrators, and teachers of the students' levels of accomplishment.
- The substantial number of elementary and junior high school Japanese programs means that many students have taken five or more years of Japanese by the completion of senior high school. Such students want the recognition of their achievements that AP Japanese can offer.
- The availability of AP Japanese can help maintain adequate enrollment in advanced-level Japanese courses by encouraging students to pursue study that enables them to take the AP exam and receive recognition for their accomplishments.

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Concerning curriculum and program development

- In schools that are currently building their programs, the availability of the AP course and exam helps to establish strong, coherent Japanese programs and could increase student enrollment.
- Schools planning to introduce new language curricula often select languages in which AP curricula are available.
- The availability of AP Japanese may encourage schools considering adding languages to select Japanese for addition.
- The offering of AP Japanese can improve the status and stability of Japanese within foreign language departments in the schools.
- The availability of AP Japanese could discourage “defections” by students who otherwise might elect to drop Japanese in favor of one of the languages for which AP courses are available.
- The availability of AP course encourages schools to continue offering Japanese to advanced levels of instruction.

The following are reflections given by an experienced high school teacher on AP Japanese just before AP Japanese was fully implemented. These reflections give a better sense of what many high school teachers of Japanese like this teacher had expected from AP Japanese at that time.

Not all high-school students continue on to university and thus would not take the AP exam. So, why would we want to teach the AP curriculum to all students? I have often heard this question and the reply that AP is a one-year course for only the most advanced students.

How do we, as teachers, know which Japanese Level 1 students will continue to study and become students of the most advanced course? I do not believe we can. So, if we start teaching Japanese Level 1 class using a curriculum aligned to AP with the expectation that all students would take the AP course and exam in their final year of study at high school, we can focus more on teaching and higher expectations for all students. Conversely, if we wait until the fourth or fifth year of language instruction to introduce the AP curriculum, we will have put our students at a disadvantage.

Recently a French teacher complained that her students who had stated that they wanted to take the AP exam this year now seemed unwilling to study for it. It appeared that over the past three years, the French class in question proceeded at a leisurely pace especially since the teacher had not considered offering AP. Currently, the students are being pushed to prepare for the AP exam

and they are frustrated. Wouldn't it be better if this French teacher had looked at the entire four-year period and started preparing the students from the first year, even knowing that some students might not continue? More than a goal, I

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see the AP exam as a benchmark. Hopefully we can teach our students that learning Japanese is a life-long process and that AP Japanese is one important step along the way.

Many college-bound students used to drop out of Japanese Level 4 or 5 in order to obtain college credit by taking a course that offered AP. But now we have the opportunity not only to retain those students but also attract other students who are interested in taking AP courses.

Having AP gives prestige to the subject of Japanese language and it evens the playing field with other language courses that have AP. I believe schools would be less likely to cut an AP program and more likely to support their teachers who want to attend AP workshops and summer institutes.

Often school administrators highlight their challenging courses on their websites in order to attract families that are moving into the area. Now Japanese is to be included on that list. Further, administrators are often concerned about mandates imposed by state and federal governments. These mandates often require rigorous academic programs. Schools that offer AP and have aligned their curricula would be better prepared to meet those mandates.

Students in an AP Japanese course will be in a rigorous academic program that encourages their best possible work. The students can receive university credit at most colleges and universities if they score a 3 or better on the exam, thus saving time and tuition once they enter university.

Kanji is always a major hurdle for many students of Japanese without a background in Chinese characters. Currently many teachers simply teach *kanji* that are in the textbook or in the state curriculum without taking student needs into consideration. However, there is a fixed number of *kanji* that students must learn for AP Japanese. If students need to know a fixed number of *kanji* for the AP Japanese exam, they must set the goal for themselves with or without their teachers' assistance. This type of goal-setting is an important skill for the students that would help them become lifelong learners.

My students were ecstatic when I mentioned that AP Japanese was in the making. I asked them why they would take AP Japanese and how it would benefit them.

The number one reason to take an AP course was the possibility of obtaining college credit. They also wanted a challenging course and the prestige (bragging rights) of taking it. They did comment that they would work harder in an AP class than in a regular class. One student mentioned that it fit into his future plans and

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that it would look good on his résumé and college application. Another student said that she would be able to receive dual credit, both high school and college. Finally, in most schools the AP courses are weighted (in our school a B in an AP course is the same as an A in a regular course) so students can improve their GPA.

There are no perfect tests to measure proficiency. But I think the AP course and exam based on the 5 Cs (Communication, Cultures, Connections, Comparisons, Communities) of the standards-based curriculum will have a great impact on the Japanese teaching profession. Our students will be challenged to think critically and to communicate well in the Japanese language, which is ultimately what we want.

All indications from people involved in AP Japanese are that the abovementioned predictions are seen to be holding mostly true and the expectations largely met. For instance, the AP curriculum as well as instructional and assessment materials downloadable from the College Board website are used as guides for teachers of Japanese to develop standards-based instruction for students at all levels. Many teachers throughout the nation have started working proactively and systematically to develop and implement a vertically aligned Japanese program aimed at helping students gradually develop the skills necessary for success in AP Japanese. They are building and strengthening rigorous curricula; introducing skills, concepts, and assessment methods to prepare students for success in AP Japanese; and promoting access to AP for all students who wish to study Japanese at the advanced level.

The number of on-site and online teacher training workshops and institutes for Japanese-language teachers has increased since AP Japanese was introduced in 2006. These professional development opportunities are often designed around the AP Japanese curriculum. Professional opportunities for dialogue among Japanese-language teachers of all educational levels have also been created in various places in the U.S. to facilitate articulation between levels and to encourage the continued growth of Japanese-language education in this nation.

Furthermore, AP Japanese became a point of interest for officials of the Japanese government and Japanese business leaders who have begun to see the value of the soft power hidden in the teaching of Japanese language and culture overseas.

A shift in the wind has definitely been taking place in the field of Japanese-language education in the U.S. since the implementation of AP Japanese. This emerging change can be felt in the atmosphere with positive expectations in the field at all levels from elementary to secondary school to the university.

However, systematic research must be conducted to investigate the true impact of AP Japanese on Japanese-language education in the U.S. To carry out a thorough review of the issue, a series of data-based studies are needed to consider its different aspects such as curriculum development, teacher practice, student motivations and attitudes, and so forth.

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Professional Development

The College Board has a long tradition of making a wide variety of **professional development opportunities** available to AP and pre-AP teachers alike. Opportunities for AP and pre-AP teachers include real-time events delivered online, one-day workshops offered throughout the country during the academic year, various sessions at the AP Annual Conference in July, and weeklong Summer Institutes. Most current information on professional development opportunities is available on the AP Central site, the College Board's official website exclusively on AP, at

<http://apcentral.collegeboard.com/apc/Pageflows/InstitutesAndWorkshops/InstitutesAndWorkshopsController.jspf>

Serving as **AP Exam Reader** is also a unique professional development opportunity. In June AP teachers and college faculty members from around the world gather for a week or so in the U.S. for the annual AP Exam Reading to score the free-response sections of the exams. Many teachers who participated in AP Japanese Reading describe the experience as extremely rewarding. The amount of professional support and training they can receive as AP Reader is unbelievable, they often say. More information on AP Exam Reading is available at

<http://apcentral.collegeboard.com/apc/public/homepage/4137.html>

AP Japanese Reader applications can be submitted online at

http://etscrs.submit4jobs.com/index.cfm?fuseaction=85332.viewjobs&CID=85332¬es_id=1

The College Board **AP Fellows** program is an annual competitive grant program that provides scholarships for secondary school teachers planning to teach AP courses in schools that serve minority and/or low-income students who have been traditionally underrepresented in AP courses. The scholarships assist teachers with the cost of attending an AP Summer Institute.

Additional resources may be available for AP teacher professional development through **state** (approximately 30 states, to date) and **federal funds**. Since 1998, federal and state legislators committed to equity and excellence in education have shown support for the AP Program by providing funds in the form of AP incentive grants to support teacher professional development. For the latest information on AP Fellows and state and federal funds, go to <http://professionals.collegeboard.com/k-12/awards/ap-grants/fellows>

Joining the AP Japanese **Electronic Discussion Group (EDG)** provides opportunities to ask and answer questions on all things about AP Japanese. The AP Japanese EDG is a venue for people not only to stay in touch but also to stimulate one another on professional matters relevant to

AP Japanese. More information is available at
<http://apcentral.collegeboard.com/apc/public/homepage/7173.html>

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Advocating AP Japanese

To administrators

School administrators who are committed to AP Japanese must be committed to the Japanese program as a whole. Getting their support is essential to establishing and maintaining an AP Japanese course. Below are some arguments in favor of AP Japanese that can be used with school administrators.

- The existence of AP in general can raise the bar for academic achievement in the school.
- High schools that participate in competitive programs such as AP demonstrate their commitment to academic excellence, putting them at the forefront of pre-collegiate studies.
- AP teachers are more motivated because they are presented with the opportunity to work in greater depth with motivated and well-prepared students.
- Incorporating AP into a Japanese program will establish a strong curriculum throughout, with clear articulation between levels, hence strengthening the entire existing program.
- The automatic inclusion of the 5 Cs of the national standards in the AP curriculum guarantees the credibility of the program.
- Highlighting the challenging and competitive course on the school's website or brochure could help to attract families that are moving into the area.
- The existence of AP in a school's Japanese program will attract Japanese teachers of high caliber.
- Enrollment in Japanese language classes will improve across the board but especially at the higher levels, at which enrollment traditionally declines.

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To students and parents

In most cases, parents and students share the same goals in the student's education. Therefore, the same points can be argued in favor of AP Japanese for both groups. Below are some arguments that can be used with them.

- The rigorous curriculum of AP will encourage a student's best possible work. This is something they can be proud of.
- There is a certain prestige associated with the high academic standard of AP. This association can help students on their college applications and résumés, as well as give them a boost of confidence.
- With a clearly laid-out, goal-oriented curriculum, students can learn the valuable life skills of setting goals for themselves and following through.
- AP courses are weighted in most schools (i.e., counted as having a higher grade point), thus giving students the opportunity to raise their GPA.
- It has been documented that success in AP courses and exams is correlated to successful academic performance at college.
- More than 90 percent of four-year colleges and universities in the U.S. reward qualifying AP exam scores with credit, advanced placement, or both (<http://professionals.collegeboard.com/testing/ap/scores/credit-policies>).
- By scoring a 3 or better on the AP exam, a student can earn course credit, be placed in a higher-level course, or both at most universities. This represents not just the chance to save on college tuition and graduate early from college but also frees up time in a student's college schedule, allowing the student to take more advanced courses, double major, or explore additional disciplines and opportunities.

The importance of the AP coordinator and other faculty members

The culmination of study in an AP Japanese course leads to the AP Japanese exam administered in May each year. Administering the exam can be a serious undertaking and taking on this responsibility for AP Japanese and all other AP exams is the central role of the school's AP coordinator. The AP coordinator is in charge of all aspects of the exam administration, from turning in the student participation forms and teacher listings to paying the exam fees, from obtaining testing materials and supplies to ordering the AP exams, and from recruiting and training proctors to administering the exams. Fundamentally, the AP coordinator must be a full- or part-time administrator, counselor, or a faculty member who is not teaching an AP course. Therefore, the AP Japanese teacher cannot perform this job.

However, it is very important that the AP coordinator has the support of the AP Japanese teacher as well as of other faculty members to ensure that the exam administration be a success. AP Japanese teachers may offer logistical support for setting up the exam as well as act as help to recruit other faculty members for their support.

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Resources

The best place to go to for most useful information about AP Japanese and AP in general is AP Central, the College Board's official website exclusively on AP Program, <http://apcentral.collegeboard.com/>

The homepage of AP Japanese Language and Culture Course is http://apcentral.collegeboard.com/apc/public/courses/teachers_corner/37222.html

Once at the homepage, all the information and relevant links are available such as course description, course audit information, exam information, and exam and instructional resources.