

Advanced Placement Psychology
Valley Park High School 2021-2022
Mr. Steve Harris

Dear Students and Parents,

It is my pleasure to introduce you to Valley Park High School's AP Psychology program! My true passion within the Social Sciences has always been psychology, so I am thrilled to have this opportunity to share this passion with students at a more advanced level. Students who are successful in this course will be better prepared to perform at high levels in university level courses, especially among the social sciences. In addition, students who complete this course will have the option to take the national AP exam in Psychology. This exam offers a chance to earn college credit for an introductory psychology course, which is required by nearly every major at most universities.

The AP Test is recognized by many major universities. Most schools award 3 credit hours for passing scores on the AP Psychology exams. However, there are some universities that award 6 credit hours for outstanding scores. AP scores can range from 1 to 5. Most colleges accept a 4 or 5 for credit and many accept a 3. The AP exam consists of 100 multiple choice questions and 2 comprehensive essay questions. The national exam is comprehensive and very challenging, which elevates successful students to an elite level among their peers.

I would like to outline several aspects of the course that may cause concern later in the semester and clarify them in advance. Since the goal of this course is for students to earn college credit, students should consider this a college course. To be successful, students must have strong motivation and be willing to devote a considerable amount of out of class time to preparation. If your son or daughter is not reading or studying for this class on a daily basis, their success is much less likely. Given the nature of a fast-paced, college course, it is difficult to be successful by only putting in an hour or two before the test (a strategy many students have relied on through much of their high school career). Most previous students agree that success in AP Psychology requires approximately 5-7 hours of out of class time each week. This assumes 5 days of in-person classes, so it may be higher if in a virtual environment. Students will need to demonstrate a much higher level of effort and discipline in order to ensure that they do not fall behind.

Psychology is most often defined as the scientific study of behaviors and mental processes, which is intentionally broad and thus includes a wide variety of topics. In the context of human behaviors and mental processes, some topics may be considered controversial or triggering by some students. When facing these potentially controversial topics, this course, as outlined in the College Board Curriculum, will focus on the most current scientific point(s) of view. If you are concerned about the nature some of these topics, the College Board course description (available on my website) includes the full course curriculum. Feel free to contact me if you would like additional questions or clarifications.

Grades are also an area of high interest for students and parents. Tests are designed to emulate the AP Exam and therefore are the largest component of their grade. Several units also have major projects, which require college level writing. Tests and projects account for 90% of students' grades. "A" grades are difficult, and show nearly complete mastery of material. "B" and "C" grades are more common, especially first

semester, and still show that your student is learning a significant amount of psychology. Please keep in mind that these grades should correlate with how your student would do in Intro Psychology at any university, so please do not be alarmed if it takes a few tests for your student to adjust to the higher expectations of this course. All students will receive plenty of feedback so they have the potential to continue to grow throughout the year.

While I work hard to make sure students are prepared for the national exam, there is no guarantee that a high grade in this course will translate to a high score on the national exam. The material covered in the course is extremely expansive and students will need to have a detailed and deep understanding of a wide variety of concepts. There are approximately 450 terms and 80 psychologists that students will be required to thoroughly understand. As is common in university level courses, a basic recognition will not be sufficient. Students will need to be able to apply, evaluate and synthesize any of these concepts based on given situations. Typical essay questions describe a situation and require students to relate 7 concepts from different units to that situation. It is entirely possible that a student could experience success in this course and not deal adequately with this two hour exam. In previous years, my students have been very successful, and I can guarantee that students will be challenged greatly throughout the year and that they will be given ample practice with the forms of questions they may see on the exam. My primary goal of this course is for all students to be extremely prepared to succeed on the exam and earn college credit, if they choose to take it.

I am very excited to work a group of such exceptional students as we dive into the depths of human thought and behavior. I would like to encourage you to voice any questions or concerns as they arise throughout the school year. Feel free to contact myself, Ms. Goldberg (VPHS's AP Coordinator) or Dr. Luhning at any time.

NOTE: This year's AP Exam will take place on Tuesday, May 3 at 12:00.

Sincerely

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Please take a moment to sign this disclaimer regarding the concerns expressed in this letter. This will merely let me know that both parents and students understand the seriousness of this course and the work involved in order to be successful.

(Student Signature)

(Parent/Guardian Signature)

(Student's Printed Name)