

June 4, 2008

Dear Parent:

Your child has signed up to take AP US History in the fall, and I wanted to make you aware of the commitments students must make in order to be successful in this class. I would like to have the signed acknowledgement back on the first day of school.

Advanced Placement United States History is a one year class that offers a general survey of American History since Columbus' discovery until present day. The class is a college level introductory course that is taught at the high school. The culmination of the class is a national exam that if the student's score high enough on, will possibly gain them 3 to 6 hours of college credit at the college of their choice (this is on a college by college basis, so please check with your college to ensure that this will happen.) This year's exam will be given Friday, May 8, 2009. The cost is \$85.00 and may be totally or partially covered by the school depending upon finances. Students are not required to take the exam, but they really don't have anything to lose by taking it. I will teach the course as if every student is taking the exam. In order to gain accountability, the College Board has set strict guidelines about what must be taught and there is very little time for diversion from the recommended curriculum. Therefore the pace of the class will be very rigorous and challenging.

Students taking this class must, therefore, be very motivated, willing to do outside research, reading and writing as well as being able to work on their own initiative. They should have above-average reading and writing skills, but a lack of those skills do not make the class unattainable, it just means the student must work even harder. Students will be responsible for every piece of information gleaned from the class and or readings whether I presented it to them in class or not.

This course will be very demanding on students' time, requiring considerable homework. To be successful, the student will probably have to do at least 6-10 hours of reading/homework a week. They will generally have at least one exam, essay, and/or one quiz each week. In-class work will be devoted to ensuring the understanding of the readings in the textbook and other materials, as well as developing the requisite skills needed to excel on all aspects of the AP test. In-class assignments will include, but not be limited to, supplementary readings, oral presentations, group discussions, quizzes, and objective and essay tests. Most quizzes will be announced ahead of time, but some may be unannounced. But the bottom line is simply this: **to get the most out of the classroom instruction, the student needs to keep up with the reading.**

Homework is mainly reading (and responses to reading) and generally NOT daily written work or take-home worksheets. Homework assignments will vary from week to week. It is the student's responsibility to keep up with all homework and reading assignments, as no late work is accepted (with the exception of excused absences). The pace is very demanding — two or three chapters a week at times. The student will be expected to take notes/outline and define key terms for each chapter in the text. There will be a quiz assigned on each chapter's reading. These assignments will generally be given at least one week ahead of time and hopefully, several weeks ahead of time. The bonus to the student is that they can plan their own study time to more easily match their schedule. The pitfall is that the student can easily slack off and, after 7-10 days, fall rapidly behind

Reading is a necessity in the study of history. Reading should be done for the day assigned to complement the activities in class. Students should not expect to gain a firm foundation reading the material the night before the test. One cannot rush through readings at the last minute and expect to grasp the more subtle aspects of the authors' arguments, and that is where some of the most important material is likely to reside. Therefore, students should have the readings done by the dates assigned. I urge the students to take notes as they read.

In many ways, our relationship will not be that of teacher and student, but of coach and student. I will be teaching general principles, giving advice on techniques, and evaluating the progress, but the majority of the learning is in the students' hands. We simply do not have enough time to cover all the material the College Board requires in the amount of time given. Therefore, the burden of learning falls on the student.

Each summer the students are required to do some work ahead. This summer the students are reading portions of a book about the American Revolution. They will be completing key terms note cards. In addition, they will be receiving their textbooks early and will be expected to read at least the first four chapters if not more, by the time school starts and complete chapter activities with each of those. Since it is the first time that these students are working at the AP level, we

are using an electronic classroom to converse and pass out information to them. If your student does not already have email it is **very strongly recommended** that they obtain one. The electronic classroom is based on using email and we need to have that connection. The instructions for joining the electronic classroom were handed out to the students at the end of school, but if they have lost those, you may contact me at [adadams@howeisd.net](mailto:adadams@howeisd.net) and I will re-send them.

By selecting to participate in an AP US History course, a student instantly becomes a member of what could be called the “two percent club.” Only two percent of all high school students (approximately 400,000 last year) in the United States take the AP US History examination, and for joining this small group of scholars, a student is to be commended. It is important to note, however, that the AP experience is designed to be a college-level, challenging course and that there are no guarantees with regard to grades. A student will not receive an A or a B in this course simply because he or she decided to take “the hardest history course.” Taking AP US History simply to “bump up one's GPA” may backfire. A student must be dedicated to reading, note-taking, and writing throughout the course of the school year in order to achieve at an A or B level. Focus on the course material, not the grade. Keep in mind, also, that the student who receives high grades in my course will not necessarily receive the top score on the AP exam. A good performance throughout the school year will translate into a sense of confidence that one has the skills necessary to conquer a rigorous one-day examination for which there is no adequate way to cram, but that doesn't guarantee that a student will receive a qualifying score on this one-time “mother of all tests.” The only guarantee that comes with this course is that it will be one of the most rigorous courses that Howe High School students will have the opportunity to take.

To sum up: These are some of the issues you and your student should expect as AP US History class members:

- Tests will cover a significantly greater body of information than students may be accustomed to. Some information on the tests will not be covered in class.
- Homework consists mainly of readings for which the student will be responsible for some type of synthesis—quiz, outline, questions, etc.
- Grades are based mostly on the quality of the end product and not the “day to day” minutia.
- There are very few “simple” assignments where students can improve their grades merely by completing the work.
- There are relatively few major grades each six weeks, which increases the need to adequately prepare for each one.
- The major responsibility for learning rests on the student with the teacher as a facilitator not a spoon-feeder.

Your student has chosen to take this class. If, after reading this letter, they have changed their mind, you may contact Mrs. Reynolds or wait until schedule pick up day and do a schedule request change then. During the first six weeks, your student may also discuss a class change with Mrs. Reynolds. However, after the end of the first six weeks, no student will be allowed to change their schedule until semester break.

I want this to be a great and fun learning experience for your child, and I am sincerely looking forward to this great group of kids. However, everyone needs to be aware of the commitment involved with AP US History. Please contact me if you have questions or concerns. Again, my email is [adadams@howeisd.net](mailto:adadams@howeisd.net) or you may contact me via cell at 903-821-0830.

Sincerely,

April Adams

I have read and understand the commitment involved with my child being in AP US History and am willing to support him/her and the teacher in their efforts.

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Parent Signature

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Date

I have read and understand the commitment involved with my being in the AP US History.

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Student Signature

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Date

Please return this form on the first day of school.