

August 12, 2019

Dear American Studies Parents,

For many parents, American Studies is their first exposure to the Advanced Placement program. We welcome you to the world of AP. For those who are familiar with AP as a program, there are some subtle things that make American Studies different from other AP classes. The American Studies team would like parents to know a few things about our course and about the challenges that students have chosen to undertake.

What we do:

We have designed the American Studies course with three goals in mind:

- **Provide well-rounded content.** This is a rigorous course that moves quickly and is devoted to developing a deeper understanding of American history and culture and is designed to meet the needs of gifted/talented students. The ability to discuss American literature, music, and art within the context of American history is at the true heart of the American Studies program. Students will have to confront controversial issues head on and deal with them in a thoughtful manner that considers multiple points of view. Students will have to go beyond the study of presidential trivia and basic grammar in order to gain a full understanding of the forces that have shaped this nation, its history, and its people. Addressing the questions of what America is, what it means to be an American, and where America is going will be a driving force in our curriculum. We also want to develop students' ability to express themselves in an effective, meaningful way. In this way, the class is not just a study of American culture – it is a way for students to examine where they fit into the American mosaic and how they can shape it.
- **Develop skills that will serve them in college.** This is a college-level course, and it will require college-level work. Part of the purpose of this class is to help students develop study skills, note-taking skills, writing skills, speaking skills, reading skills, analytical skills, and a work ethic that will serve them well in college and beyond.
- **Prepare them for both AP exams.** We deliberately save this goal for last. The bottom line for many parents and students is that this class sets students up for the ability to take two different AP exams and gain college credit for at least two college classes. We sincerely believe that, if we achieve our first two goals, this one will take care of itself. We do not *teach* to a test; we *test* to the test. We have designed our assessments in class to prepare our students for the format of the exam. This means that essays will be timed, and that exams will be longer than they may have seen in the past.

What parents and students should know:

There are a few policies that every parent and student should know:

- **Late work:** Daily assignments will not be accepted late. Major grade assignments that are turned in late will lose ten points if they are turned in by 4:30 on the day that they are due. Major grade assignments will lose 30 points if they are turned in on the following day; after that, no credit will be given.
- **Make-up work:** Students who have an excused absence on the day that an assignment is due, or on the day of an in-class assessment, are expected to turn in the assignment, or make up the assessment, on the day that they return to school. If the teacher deems that making up an assessment that day is not feasible, the student is expected to make up that assessment within one week. Likewise, students who miss an assignment due to an excused absence should make up that assignment within one week. Students who miss class due to an unexcused absence will not be allowed to make up what they missed.
- **Collaborative assignments:** Over the course of the year, we will do a number of assignments in collaborative groups for major grades. Individual student grades on these assignments will fluctuate based on confidential peer evaluations.
- **Tutorials:** Teachers will be available for tutorials every Tuesday morning at 8 a.m. in room A207. If students feel they need additional tutorials or are unable to attend on Tuesday mornings, tutorials are available by appointment.

We understand that extenuating circumstances sometimes arise. Students are strongly encouraged to be advocates for themselves and maintain open lines of communication with their teachers. This is a skill that will serve them well in college and the workplace.

What you can do:

Though this is a college-level class, we acknowledge that we are still dealing with high school students. To that end, we want to work with parents to make sure that students are successful. Parents can help their children in a number of ways:

- **Be supportive.** This class may be harder than classes that students have taken up to this point in their academic careers. It is not uncommon for grades to be lower than they have seen before. We don't think students should settle for lower grades, but parents should know that there is a considerable step up in skills and effort from what may have made them successful in the past. By definition, a college-level class that is geared toward (though not limited to) gifted and talented students is going to be asking students to perform at least two grade levels above where they are now as high school juniors. In addition, it is important to remember that this single class counts as **two** Advanced Placement class credits. While the workload for this class may seem daunting, it is worth noting that the average student will spend almost 30% of his/her class day with us. We encourage parents to be supportive of their children and remember several key things:
 - Students are being rewarded for their grades with enhanced GPA points.
 - A good grade in this class benefits them not once, but twice.
 - If students are struggling, or if they have questions, this is the time for them to learn to be advocates for themselves. Encourage your students to come and talk to us. There is no shame in asking us for help; it's why we're here.
 - Students can benefit from a "long-term" view of how they are paving the way for their college career.
- **Follow your child's progress.** There are a number of ways parents can do this. One of them is to follow the calendars that are posted in our Google Classroom. Another is to use the district's Parentviewer program that allows parents to keep track of their child's grades. While essays will take us a couple of weeks to grade, our team is committed to getting grades into our grade books within five school days of their completion. We also plan to use a "Z" to indicate grades that can be made up. Finally, parents and students can subscribe to receive text/e-mail reminders through Remind.com. Teachers will provide students with codes that are unique to their classes during the first week of school.
- **Talk with your child.** This class discusses a lot of big issues, and students will be forced occasionally to function outside of their comfort zone. This is especially true when historical issues crop up as current events. The most important influence on who they are and how they view the world comes from you. We encourage you to discuss some of these big issues at home.
- **Help your child with their long-term vision.** We encourage parents to help their children start planning for their future. To that end we encourage parents to visit the College Board's website (www.collegeboard.org), where they can access information on the AP program, the SAT, and financial planning information. In addition, students and parents can access information on colleges and universities, including their policies for AP credit.
- **Feel free to contact us.** Over the course of the year, if you have questions or would like to discuss your child's performance in class, feel free to contact us. The best way to get in touch with us is via e-mail, using the e-mail addresses below.

We sincerely hope that this will be a successful year for all of our students. Thank you for all that you do to help ensure your child's success.

Sincerely,
The PSHS American Studies Team

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