



Online Courses Extend Advanced Placement Access to All Students

DIGITAL CURRICULUM SUCCESS STORY

“Our rural schools do not always have resources to teach Advanced Placement courses. We needed to level the playing field for all students. Online courses make it possible for us to provide an option for students who don’t have local access to AP courses.”

*Dr. Clar M. Baldus
Project Administrator for
the Iowa Online AP Academy
The Connie Belin & Jacqueline N. Blank
International Center for Gifted
Education and Talent Development*

➤ Iowa Online AP Academy

A strong believer in the importance of college preparation, the state of Iowa has long made Advanced Placement* courses a priority. Its schools serve nearly half a million students. A majority of these students live in the state’s eight large urban areas and have the opportunity to take AP* classes offered by their local high school. However, limiting factors outside these urban areas mean many rural students have little or no access to AP courses.

Sometimes there aren’t enough students to justify the cost of offering an AP course in a small high school or district. In other cases teachers qualified to teach rigorous, college-level AP courses aren’t locally available. Regardless of the reason, the lack of access to AP courses means these high school students may be at a competitive disadvantage when it comes to college admissions.

Online Courses Level the Playing Field

Determined to provide access to AP courses for all students in the state, the University of Iowa’s Belin-Blank Center used a technology grant to establish the Iowa Online Advanced Placement Academy (IOAPA) in 2001. IOAPA chose Apex Learning®, the leading provider of online AP curriculum, to deliver online AP courses and provide instruction.

Through IOAPA, small, rural schools that would otherwise not be able to offer AP classes are able to take advantage of distance learning to provide their students with access to AP courses. Students enrolled in Apex Learning online AP courses spend one class period during the day at their high school in a learning lab, where they access their coursework via the Internet.

Iowa-certified online teachers provided by Apex Learning monitor student progress using the reporting features of the learning management system and engage one-on-one with students to support individual success. Both students and teachers frequently report that with the online courses, they develop closer relationships than they would in a typical classroom environment.

“We work as a team with Apex Learning. We have a successful collaboration — it’s more like a partnership than a client relationship.”

— Dr. Clar M. Baldus

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➤ Challenge

Provide access to Advanced Placement courses for students in schools without local AP programs

➤ Solution

Implement a statewide online AP program in partnership with Apex Learning

➤ Success by the Numbers

- From 2001 to 2008
- 4,600 students
- 7,478 AP course enrollments
- 87% completion rate
- 86% passing rate

On-site mentors, often guidance counselors or teachers at the local high school, work in collaboration with online teachers and the Apex Learning instructional management team to provide students with the support they need to stay on track to successfully complete their courses.

“Quality is everything when evaluating digital curriculum. We looked for a vendor that offered robust courses to provide academic challenge.”

— Dr. Clar M. Baldus

Quality Curriculum and Teachers Key to Student Learning

It was extremely important to IOAPA that students enrolled in online AP courses have a comparable experience to students taking AP courses in a traditional classroom. The selection of curriculum was a critical decision. Based on both a detailed review of the course material and the company’s solid track record in developing and delivering high-quality online AP courses, IOAPA felt confident in their choice of Apex Learning. The authorization of Apex Learning online AP courses by the AP Course Audit ensures that the courses continue to meet College Board requirements.

Online instruction is of equal importance to ensure a quality program. Apex Learning online teachers are highly qualified in their subject area and have an average of 17 years of teaching experience in the classroom and four years online.

Online Solutions Support AP Success

Since IOAPA was established in 2001, there have been early 7,500 enrollments in Apex Learning online AP courses, representing 4,600 Iowa students who would not otherwise have had the opportunity to take an AP course. However, IOAPA’s efforts to provide opportunities for AP students in the state did not stop there.

Starting in 2002, IOAPA made AP Exam Review**, a comprehensive online study resource from Apex Learning, available to all students in the state to help them prepare for the AP exams. To date more than 7,500 Iowa students have taken advantage of AP Exam Review as a study tool.

IOAPA has also provided access to Apex Learning digital curriculum for AP for use by classroom AP teachers. The digital curriculum has proven to be a particularly valuable resource for teachers new to the rigors of AP coursework.

**AP is a registered trademark of the College Board, which was not involved in the production of, and does not endorse, AP Exam Review.

“Along with effective curriculum and instruction, one of the factors for a successful program is responsive technical assistance. The Apex Learning support team is worth its weight in gold.”

— Dr. Clar M. Baldus

“AP exam success rates are way up for Iowa students. In 2008, 66.9% of students taking College Board AP exams scored 3 or higher. That places Iowa sixth nationally, well above the 57.8% national average. Our online AP students are certainly part of this success.”

— Dr. Clar M. Baldus



About Iowa and Advanced Placement

- 139,908 high school students statewide
- In 2008, 7,798 students took 11,786 AP exams, up 9.4% from 2007
- 66.9% of exams scored 3 or higher; only 57.8% scored this well nationally
- Iowa ranks sixth in the nation in terms of AP exam scores