

# Good Marks for AP and IB

Experts Endorse College-Level Study Programs

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Debate rages among Washington area parents, students and teachers over which college-level track is superior: the large Advanced Placement program or the fast-growing International Baccalaureate. A report to be released today by a team of academic experts gives both high marks, with a slight nod to IB in two subjects.

The experts assembled by the Thomas B. Fordham Institute, a Washington-based think tank that advocates more school rigor, awarded a B-plus to the AP and IB English literature courses and a B-minus to history courses in both programs. But IB Biology received an A and AP Biology an A-minus. IB Math received a B-minus and AP Calculus AB a C-plus.

The Fordham Institute said those grades were good, compared with the mostly low marks it has given state standards for public schools. Its report concluded that AP and IB "demonstrate that independent entities can and do make programs and assessments that are rigorous, fair and intellectually richer than almost any state standard and exam for high school that we've seen."

The report -- "Advanced Placement and International Baccalaureate: Do They Deserve Gold Star Status?" -- complained about indications from the College Board, which oversees the AP program, that it might revise some courses and tests. It said the College Board was pursuing changes to social studies courses that might encourage "more time talking about such themes as 'politics and citizenship' or 'continuity and change,'" which report authors worried would reduce time for learning facts about historical events.

About 14,000 U.S. high schools offer AP classes, and about 500 offer IB.

The authors acknowledged the difficulty of comparisons. AP and IB are structured differently, although both give exams that enable students to earn college credit. AP has one-year courses, and many IB courses take two years to complete, so the Fordham report focused only on one-year IB courses.

Both programs lost points in math because they allowed more use of calculators than the authors considered appropriate. AP U.S. History was faulted for mentioning few specific historical events in its course plan. IB does not have a course devoted to U.S. history, but its world history course lost points for focusing too narrowly on the 19th and 20th centuries. The authors advised teachers to ignore the outlines for both courses and teach to what the report deemed rigorous AP and IB history exams.

Brad Richardson, regional director of IB [North America](#), said he was pleased that the report praised IB, as it did AP, for preparing students well for college. Trevor Packer, a College Board vice president who oversees AP, declined to comment.