



Ahmet Palazoglu
Chair, Assembly of the
Academic Senate
Faculty Representative,
UC Board of Regents
Academic Senate

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February 18, 2026

Academic Senate Division Chairs

Re: New College Board Scoring System for Advanced Placement (AP)
Exams

Dear Divisional Chairs:

On behalf of the Academic Council, I am pleased to transmit the attached letter and accompanying appendix from the Board of Admissions and Relations with Schools ([BOARS](#)), the University Committee on Educational Policy ([UCEP](#)), and the University Committee on Preparatory Education ([UCOPE](#)) concerning the College Board's implementation of Evidence-Based Standard Setting (EBSS) for Advanced Placement (AP) exam scoring.

The Council agreed that the issues and recommendations outlined by the three systemwide committees warrant broad faculty awareness and consideration. The implementation of EBSS has coincided with changes in AP exam pass rates, raising questions for campuses that rely on AP scores in admissions, credit, and course placement decisions. The joint letter includes recommendations to divisional Senate committees, undergraduate programs, and admissions offices regarding the monitoring and use of AP exam scores to inform local reviews and decision-making.

I ask that you please forward these materials to your divisional Senate committees on admissions, educational policy, and preparatory education, as well as to other interested faculty and administrators as appropriate.

Thank you for your assistance in sharing this information within your campus.

Sincerely,

Ahmet Palazoglu

Chair, Academic Council

cc: Academic Council
Provost & Executive Vice President Newman
Vice President & Vice Provost Gullatt
Associate Vice Provost and Executive Director Yoon-Wu
Senate Division Executive Directors
Senate Executive Director Lin



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BOARD OF ADMISSIONS AND RELATIONS WITH SCHOOLS (BOARS)

David Volz, Chair
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UNIVERSITY COMMITTEE ON EDUCATIONAL POLICY (UCEP)

Catherine Sugar, Chair
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UNIVERSITY COMMITTEE ON PREPARATORY EDUCATION (UCOPE)

Bradley Queen, Chair
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January 9, 2026

Ahmet Palazoglu
Chair, Academic Council

RE: College Board’s New Scoring System for Advanced Placement (AP)
Exams

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Dear Chair Palazoglu,

On behalf of the Board of Admissions and Relations with Schools ([BOARS](#)), University Committee on Educational Policy ([UCEP](#)), and University Committee on Preparatory Education ([UCOPE](#)), we are writing to inform the UC community about the College Board’s implementation of a new method for scoring Advanced Placement (AP) exams known as Evidence-Based Standard Setting (EBSS)—a method that integrates the input of faculty with subject-area expertise and empirical evidence from a variety of data sources and research studies.

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The shift to EBSS started in 2022 and appears to have largely gone unnoticed within the UC system over the last few years. BOARS, UCEP, and UCOPE govern systemwide policies specific to undergraduate admissions, academic programs, and student preparation, respectively. Therefore, the College Board’s implementation of EBSS overlaps with the jurisdiction of all three committees, as it has potential impacts on credit by exam to: 1) fulfill A-G subject requirements for first-year admissions (BOARS); 2) fulfill

general education (GE) requirements for transfer admissions (BOARS); 3) fulfill GE and specific subject requirements for UC degrees (UCEP); and/or 4) guide UC campus-specific placement decisions in subjects such as English and math (UCOPE).

Our three committees have questions and concerns about: 1) the fidelity and consistency of AP exam scores resulting from the application of EBSS, and 2) how EBSS-based scores align with scores obtained using the College Board's prior method for cut score decisions. To help facilitate decision-making within the broader UC community moving forward, we present in Appendix 1 our current understanding of the germane issues by summarizing UC's use of AP exams, the College Board's shift to EBSS, and our consultations with the College Board about their new methodology.

Given the potential UC-wide implications of the College Board's 2022 decision to begin shifting to EBSS, our three committees strongly recommend that, as a precautionary measure, divisional Senate committees, faculty, and staff responsible for managing undergraduate admissions, academic programs, and course placement requirements across the UC system do the following:

- 1) Collaborate with their local Institutional Research office to gather and summarize the percentage of freshman and transfer students with scores 1, 2, 3, 4, and 5 for all AP exams reported from 2015-present, as this will identify whether pass rates—the percentage of students with a score of 3 or higher—for certain AP exams have shifted since EBSS implementation began in 2022.
- 2) Monitor pass rates for EBSS-impacted AP exams in the future since the College Board has indicated that, like standard-setting panels, EBSS-based pass rates may fluctuate from year to year, albeit the year-to-year variation under EBSS is expected to be less than the year-to-year variation under standard-setting panels.
- 3) Determine whether AP score-based criteria used for admissions, course credit, and course placement decisions need to be reconsidered and/or adjusted for EBSS-impacted AP exams.
- 4) Proactively identify and better understand specific parameters and/or variables within EBSS that may be responsible for a sharp

increase in pass rates for EBSS-impacted AP exams as well as whether these changes have differentially affected certain groups of students.

- 5) Proactively reach out to Senate divisional representatives on BOARS, UCEP, and UCOPE to ask questions and/or voice concerns.

In our capacity as chairs of our respective systemwide committees, we will continue to engage with the College Board to: 1) better understand issues surrounding EBSS methodology and 2) obtain a more granular understanding of which students' skills and knowledge are represented by updated EBSS-based AP exam scores. Moreover, we are also available to meet with faculty and staff colleagues across the UC system to further articulate our concerns and/or summarize additional, non-publicly available information provided by the College Board.

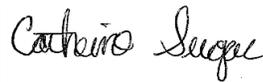
This is a complex issue that has required extensive consultation within and outside of UC, and we want to ensure that impacted programs have the most up-to-date information to make informed decisions about whether AP exam scores reflect the level of preparation and excellence we expect of UC students. In the meantime, we are actively working with the Office of Institutional Research and Academic Planning (IRAP) at UC Office of the President to better understand the predictive power of A-G course completion and performance (including honors courses and associated exams for college credit) on overall UC first-year GPA and persistence rates over the last 10 years.

Thank you for your assistance in conveying this information to the UC community.

Sincerely,



David Volz
Chair, BOARS



Catherine Sugar
Chair, UCEP



Brad Queen
Chair, UCOPE

Appendix 1 - College Board's New Scoring System for Advanced Placement (AP) Exams

Use of AP exams for admissions, course credit, and course placement decisions

The College Board has developed courses and exams for roughly 40+ different AP subjects. AP exams are widely used at the UC and nationally for undergraduate admissions, granting of college course credit, and placement decisions. Indeed, the College Board reports that approximately 6 million AP exams are taken each June and graded by 30,000 faculty nationwide. AP exams are scored on a scale of 1-5, and there is a stated correspondence whereby an AP 5 represents college-level course grades of A+ or A; AP 4 represents A-, B+, or B; AP 3 represents B-, C+, or C; AP 2 represents C-, D+, or D; and AP 1 represents grades lower than D. UC-intending freshman or transfer students who earn scores of 3 or higher on close to 20 different AP exams are able to use credit by exam to 1) fulfill A-G admissions requirements, 2) satisfy lower-division course requirements for UC programs, 3) satisfy lower-division courses at the California Community Colleges (CCCs), 4) satisfy UC's systemwide Entry Level Writing Requirement, and/or 5) satisfy UC's systemwide English language proficiency requirement. Since 2015, the College Board has launched approximately 10 new AP exams in a handful of different subjects, and the scale of AP scores (ranging from 1-5) and threshold for receiving credit by exam (AP 3 or higher) has, to date, not changed despite the College Board's shift to EBSS beginning with the 2022 exam cycle.

College Board's shift from standard-setting panels to EBSS

From 2001-2022, the College Board's AP Program utilized standard-setting panels as the basis for scoring AP exams. Standard-setting panels relied on an average of nine college instructor participants – the composition of these panels varied by year and AP subject – to score AP exams and determine performance cutoffs for each AP score (ranging from 1-5) based on their expertise, experience, and established, well-documented scoring protocols. However, the College Board noted that the small panel sizes created vulnerability to inconsistencies in pass rates both within and among subjects over time. For example, pass rates for certain AP exams across disparate disciplines such as AP Spanish and AP Physics 1 were highly variable, with “extreme highs and lows ranging from 37% to 97% scores of 3 or higher.” Moreover, according to the College Board, standard setting panels for certain AP exams underpredicted performance in equivalent college courses.

According to the College Board, EBSS is superior to standard-setting panels since it 1) bridges the professional judgment of educators and analytical rigor of empirical validation and 2) systematically collects and employs a wide range of evidentiary sources to inform the placement of exam cut scores. In short, EBSS collects input from hundreds of college instructors – at least five times the number of instructors typically used within conventional standard-setting panels – and then assembles higher-resolution student performance data to predict who is prepared to pass the equivalent college course relative to AP exam performance. According to the College Board, “EBSS uses data compiled from AP Exam administrations, such as test taker performance characteristics, score distributions and exam statistics, and data concerning the consequential impact of setting cut scores at particular points, as well as evidence gathered from special studies, including longitudinal evidence of the college performance of students who did and did not take AP, input

collected from a heterogeneous array of higher education instructors teaching introductory, credit-bearing college courses comparable to particular AP courses, comparisons of the content of AP and comparable college courses, and postsecondary instructors' evaluations of individual AP items and tests." These data are then integrated and evaluated by College Board psychometricians and disciplinary experts in tandem with content standards to set final cut scores. Final cut scores are then mapped to AP 1-5 scores that are reported to colleges, educators, and students, and in turn used as the basis for calculating pass rates (AP 3 or higher). As of 2025, the College Board noted that many AP exams have transitioned to EBSS. EBSS will continue to be their approach to scoring AP exams moving forward, with additional exams moved to EBSS as they come up for regular review and revision.

The College Board's AP program began implementing EBSS in 2022 to ensure greater consistency across subjects and exam administrations by mitigating year-to-year variation in pass rates and recalibrating performance standards across a range of AP exams. To justify the shift to EBSS, the College Board reasoned that EBSS "addresses growing academic and industry research that shows the limitations of widely used traditional standard-setting methods." The College Board further stated that "[t]hese limitations include challenges rooted in the cognitive and social task of standard settings' employment of small participant panels, difficulties and biases that traditional panelists have when assessing test content difficulty and student ability, and examples of traditional panelists making serious but unfalsifiable errors in judgment." In short, the College Board noted that the shift to EBSS dealt with long-standing issues in small-panel standard settings, particularly relevant to AP, including the limited ways traditional methods have of incorporating predictive, normative, and content types of information into the process as well as the shortcomings of human judgment in making sound performance level decisions without the guidance of empirical data.

Consultation timeline with the College Board

BOARS, UCEP, and UCOPE initially became aware of the College Board's shift to EBSS in 2024. Since BOARS has oversight of credit by exam, BOARS took the lead on this issue and met for the first time with College Board representatives on November 1, 2024 to better understand EBSS. In response to initial questions raised by BOARS during that meeting, the College Board emailed a report on February 25, 2025 entitled "Validation Approaches for Evidence-Based Standard Setting Cut Scores". This report was based on a paper presented by College Board representatives at the Annual Meeting of the National Committee on Measurement in Education in Denver, CO in April 2025. Within this report, the College Board describes the rationale for moving to EBSS and heavily relies on a single paper published by [McClarty et al. \(2013\)](#) as the framework and basis for this shift. However, BOARS noted that the McClarty et al. (2013) paper lacks details about the methodology, as it primarily provides a conceptual framework that outlines the steps, opportunities, and challenges involved with EBSS. Since this was the only paper the College Board cited to support EBSS, it was unclear to BOARS whether EBSS is a widely used and accepted approach within the field or not. Moreover, from February to October 2025, additional information and documents were

not provided by the College Board to help inform BOARS' understanding and potential implications of EBSS implementation.

As a result of unresolved methodological questions that persisted during the first half of 2025, BOARS – along with the Chairs of UCEP and UCOPE – requested a second, 1-hour consultation with the College Board during BOARS' meeting that took place on November 7, 2025. On October 10, 2025 (4 weeks prior to this second meeting), BOARS (in collaboration with the Chairs of UCEP and UCOPE) emailed a list of 26 detailed questions to the College Board that focused on the rationale for using EBSS, EBSS methodology, and data/analysis requests. These questions were provided to the College Board in advance to help them prepare responses with the level of detail and rigor the committees desired. In response to these questions, the College Board provided written responses and an example AP English Briefing Book to BOARS on October 30, 2025; these written responses were then forwarded to the Chairs of UCEP and UCOPE. During BOARS' November 7, 2025 meeting, the College Board presented slides that summarized differences between standard-setting panels vs. EBSS, year-to-year variability in pass rates for certain AP exams using standard-setting panels, comparisons of EBSS-based pass rates (AP 3 or higher) relative to pass rates (C or higher) for equivalent college courses at four anonymized UC campuses, and an overview of the EBSS process flow including principles underlying final cut score recommendations. In addition, the College Board emailed a 7-page follow-up letter to BOARS on November 11, 2025 that aimed to further address questions that were raised during BOARS' November 7, 2025 meeting.

Concerns about increased pass rates and EBSS methodology

Based on publicly available score distributions on the College Board's [website](#), in 2024 BOARS, UCEP, and UCOPE initially became concerned about the potential impacts of EBSS as it, overall, appears to have shifted score distributions higher and, in some cases quite dramatically, increased overall pass rates (AP 3 or higher) for certain AP exams. An [update](#) posted by the College Board on July 22, 2024 showed that, for 26 AP exams scored by EBSS across the United States in 2024, the overall pass rates (AP 3 or higher) remained in the ~60-80% range which was typically achieved by standard-setting panels used in prior years. However, for nine AP exams – World History, English Literature & Composition, Biology, Macroeconomics, Microeconomics, Chemistry, US Government & Politics, US History, and European History – that historically had pass rates significantly lower than 60-80%, the implementation of EBSS between 2022-2024 resulted in a sharp increase in the percentage of students with passing scores (AP 3 or higher) across the United States (see below). As EBSS continues to be implemented by the College Board, it is possible that additional AP exams – beyond the nine exams mentioned above – will experience a sharp increase in pass rates because of EBSS.

AP English Literature & Composition and AP English Language & Composition have experienced some of the most significant increases in pass rates following implementation of EBSS. Prior to the use of EBSS to score [AP English Literature & Composition](#) exams, the average pass rate from 2002-2021 was approximately 57% at the national level; however, following implementation of EBSS in 2022, the average pass rate from 2022-2025 has been approximately 75% over the last three years. Likewise, prior to the use of EBSS to score [AP English Language & Composition](#) exams, the average

pass rate from 2002-2024 was approximately 57% at the national level; however, following implementation of EBSS in 2025, the pass rate increased to approximately 74% – an EBSS-driven pass rate that exceeds all standard-setting panel-based pass rates for the previous 22 years. Similar trends have been observed following the implementation of EBSS for other AP subjects such as [AP Chemistry](#) (EBSS first used in 2023) and [AP US Government & Politics](#) (EBSS first used in 2024). In addition, similar to trends observed between 2022-2024, first-time use of EBSS for some other AP exams in 2025 have shown significant increases in pass rates beyond the initial nine exams discovered in 2024 (e.g., the average pass rate for [AP Physics 1](#) was approximately 44% from 2015-2024, followed by an increase to approximately 67% in 2025). Although score distributions that the College Board publicly reports are based on national level data, there is a high likelihood that the use of EBSS has resulted in a sharp increase in pass rates for certain AP exams such as AP English Literature & Composition, AP English Language & Composition, AP Chemistry, AP US Government & Politics, and AP Physics 1 for freshman and transfer students matriculating at some or all of UC's nine undergraduate campuses.

The College Board [argues](#) that “[a]mong AP subjects that have had atypical success rates lower than 60%, the EBSS process justified increasing those success rates to align to the 60%–80% success rate historically achieved in most other AP subjects.” In other words, the College Board’s position is that the use of conventional standard-setting panels for scoring AP exams in the past have, for certain AP exams, underpredicted performance relative to equivalent college courses, and that the implementation of EBSS corrects for these historic underpredictions by shifting AP score distributions from lower to higher scores. Although EBSS, at face value, is likely more robust than conventional standard-setting panels due to the reasons described above, BOARS, UCEP, and UCOPE have ongoing questions and concerns about the methodology of EBSS based on additional, non-publicly available information provided by the College Board since February 2025. In addition to our foundational questions about the shift to EBSS-based methods, we have asked for more concrete evidence for the College Board’s claims regarding EBSS’ validity, reliability/precision, fairness, and consistency, as arguments in these technical test measurement areas are used by the College Board to substantiate cut score decisions.