

**REPORT OF THE ACADEMIC SENATE TASK FORCE ON
HONORS/AP/IB/CC “GRADE BUMP”¹**

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The Academic Senate Task Force to study the admissions Honors/AP/IB/CCC² “grade bump” was empanelled in the winter of 2003 to consider once again the question of the appropriateness of this policy for calculating freshman applicants’ G.P.A. for UC admissions and placement purposes. The core reasons why this matter has been addressed are twofold:

1. UC is committed to offering places to the top 12.5% of high school graduates and it is important that we are confident that our mechanisms for identifying the highest achievers are reasonable and reliable.
2. Because of the commitment cited above, it is essential that we know whether the use of the grade bump enhances or detracts from our ability to predict future success at UC.

This was not the first attempt to review this policy which had been in effect since 1982. In 1998, the Academic Senate, after a review of the consequences of the grade bump for predictive validity, recommended to the Board of Regents that the 1 full grade bump (e.g. a “B” being treated as an “A”) be reduced to a .5 bump, halving the significance and potential consequence of the policy. At that time, the Senate concluded that while UC’s ability to predict the future performance of incoming students was reduced by reliance on the full grade bump, a half grade bump could be justified statistically. This conclusion was reached via a sophisticated regression analysis in which the predictive powers of various models were assessed.³ The extensive discussion of the matter within the Academic Senate led to the recommendation that the *grade point* incentive to take such courses be maintained, but that it be reduced as suggested above. At its meeting on March 10, 1999, the Board of Regents reviewed three recommended changes in admissions criteria. It

¹ The Academic Senate Task Force on Honors/AP/IB/CCC “Grade Bump” is very grateful to Susan Wilbur, Director of UC Admissions, and staff in the Academic Student Services offices at Office of the President. They have all been helpful in developing data for the Task Force and engaging in often spirited and helpful debates with the faculty involved in these discussions. The analyses contained herein are, however, entirely those of the Academic Senate Task Force. The Task Force notes that the conclusions reached as to the meaning and significance of the data reviewed may not always be the same as those of the staff in Academic Student Services.

² Hereinafter, the terms “Honors/AP” will be used to include all four of the types of courses that qualify for the one-letter grade bump in UC freshman admissions. AP is the abbreviation for Advanced Placement, a course and examination program under the aegis of the College Board, Honors are high school courses recognized by BOARS as suggesting more challenging work than regular courses; IB stands for International Baccalaureate, a European based program and examination system and CCC stands for community college courses, although any courses taken at a college would also qualify for this grade-point supplement.

³ The review looked at the predictive power of unweighted HSGPA and weighted HSGPA which allowed for the 1.0 grade “bump” and weighted HSGPA that allowed for a .5 grade “bump.” It was found that the strongest predictive power was between no weighting of the Honors/AP/IB/CC courses and a .5 “bump.”

approved the others⁴ and tabled the question of the grade bump, requesting that the Senate revisit the matter at a later date.

In the intervening years, the Academic Senate was deeply involved in a set of challenging questions concerning freshman admissions and focused attention primarily on the entrance examinations... which resulted in a call for the College Board to revise SAT I to reflect a greater consonance with high school college preparatory curricula. The grade bump discussion was necessarily deferred to a later date.⁵

While the primary question of concern has been on the consequences of the Honors/AP bump for the goal of selecting the highest performing and most promising students, at the outset of renewed discussions in 2003 questions were apparent concerning appropriate credit at UC for AP exam takers. The *ad hoc* task force, therefore, was structured to include, *inter alia*, the Chairs and Vice Chairs of both BOARS and UCEP. This was designed to allow the task force to consider both sets of issues with the necessary expertise and liaison to standing committees of the Academic Senate to which the task force would report.

University-assigned AP Credit

Before reporting on the analyses and conclusions of the task force concerning the grade bump, it is necessary to summarize the kinds of issues that were raised with respect to credit at UC for AP exam takers,⁶ and why it is that no *substantive* recommendations on these matters are contained herein. The University offers unit and, sometimes, course credit for AP work if the student attains a score of 3 or higher on the 5-point AP scale. But there is serious question as to whether a score of 3 effectively documents achievement that is equivalent to successful completion of a university-level course covering similar material. There were several internal studies at UC campuses demonstrating, for example, that students with a 3 on the AP chemistry exam fared no better in introductory chemistry at UC than students who had not taken AP chemistry in high school. There were also news reports on the decisions taken at Harvard University and Massachusetts Institute of Technology, in which the former moved to require a 5 on AP exams for credit to be given and MIT stopped giving any units for “successful” AP exam completion, because they did not deem the AP courses to be equivalent to those offered at its own institution. In addition to the concern that a score of 3 may be too low to be an advisable basis for an offer of UC credit, it was similarly noted that departmental policies varied widely

⁴ In addition to a reduced grade bump, these included Eligibility in Local Context and the addition of a visual and performing arts requirement (with reduction in elective courses from two years to one).

⁵ Although the Academic Senate was already poised to revisit the grade bump question in early 2003, the imperative was strengthened by the request that we do so by the then Chair of the Regents’ Educational Policy Committee and the provision of the State’s *revised* Master Plan for Education which called upon the Regents of the University of California to end the bump. While the demand in the Master Plan could not itself mandate policy for a constitutionally autonomous institution (UC), the Academic Senate’s leadership believed that it behooved us to demonstrate the virtues of this policy, if indeed it had any.

⁶ It must be noted, of course, that AP is not the only route to earning UC units while still a high school student. The IB programs and community college courses provide this option as well but there are insufficient data concerning IB (still not widely subscribed in California) and community college courses are assessed as are any other “transfer” course from another post-secondary institution, thus, raising fewer questions than credit-by-examination a la AP.

across UC as to the level of performance on AP exams necessary to grant majors a waiver of particular preparatory courses. Despite policies that would seem to mandate to the contrary,⁷ an ancillary problem that was detected on some campuses is that students who were either required, or opted to “repeat” an introductory level for course for which they had “AP credit” under the systemwide rule, were able to get units a second time for what is assumed to be essentially the same work. These were all important questions that were detected concerning the credit-granting process associated with AP exam-taking. The task force quickly concluded that the matter should be deferred until after the grade bump questions about the fundamental value of such courses had been resolved with two recommendations: 1) that UCEP be asked to conduct a thorough review of the practices systemwide with respect to the offer of credit for AP exam completion, and 2) campuses review their own policies to ascertain whether students are prematurely passed on to sophomore or upper division courses, and/or whether double credit is possible for those who repeat courses for which they have “AP credit.”

The Grade Bump

Having set aside for the time being, the issues associated with AP units at UC, the primary focus of the task force was on the impact of the Honors/AP grade bump policy on our ability to identify the most highly performing/promising students.⁸ But other related questions relative to establishing the educational justification for the grade bump surfaced early in our deliberations. These included:

1. The extent to which the UC grade bump practice was common among equivalent universities
2. The predictive validity of AP/IB credit for persistence to degree and time to degree
3. The equality of access to Honors/AP/IB courses in California high schools
4. The extent to which students “take a risk” by enrolling in AP/Honors/IB classes
5. Alternative ways to incentivize the taking and successful completion of challenging courses
6. The consequences of ending the grade bump

Some of these questions and issues were more easily addressed than others, the first two questions were answered with small research efforts by the Task Force. With respect to sub-question #1 (above), via a survey conducted at our request, we learned that the universities employing a “grade bump” for even AP courses (arguably the most common form of “honors-level” high school work) was remarkably limited and

⁷ See, <http://www.ucop.edu/pathways/infoctr/qrcrredit.html>

⁸ The task force was sensitive to the fact that identifying the most “highly performing” freshman applicants might not be the same undertaking as identifying the “most promising,” but we also acknowledged that the difficulty of our task was minimized by two factors: 1) our task was to determine whether an arguably “artificial” enhancement to G.P.A. was justified, thus the burden was on the policy to demonstrate that this “inflation” of past performance was justified by its association with increased promise, and 2) while all correlations have proven low in predicting student grades at UC (when included in a regression equation that includes H.S. grades, SAT I and SAT II exams are no greater in their predictive power than .2) past performance in terms of HS grades has the “edge” in predicting UC performance.

few were “comparable” institutions to UC.⁹ Sub-question #2 was readily answered by a UC study conducted during the previous year which documented that neither persistence to degree, nor time to degree, were positively associated with taking AP courses in high school.¹⁰ Given that this study focused on students who had actually received credit for successfully passing Advanced Placement examinations, arguably the students with the greatest opportunity to reduce time to degree, it may be concluded that *a fortiori* students simply taking these courses (without earning UC units) would not likely graduate more quickly than other students. More common patterns for students with Advanced Placement credit is to graduate with higher numbers of units than other students or to reduce the units taken during their senior year at UC.

Methodology

While the data generated at the Office of the President at the request of the Task Force spoke to the same concerns as in 1998, in contrast with the previous analysis of the grade bump, the Task Force reasoned that it would be helpful to expand our dependent variables. As was done in 1998, the Senate requested data on the impact on predictive validity of using weighted and unweighted HSGPA. We are indebted to Saul Geiser and Veronica Santelices for the tables utilized herein.¹¹ But rather than look at only first-year grades as the dependent variable, as had been done five years previous, we decided to look separately at second-year performance as well. We did so because of our concern about two phenomena: the influence on first-year performance of “retaking” Honors/AP-type courses already completed in high school, and the adjustment to university life that first-year students may differentially experience.

⁹ UC belongs to a consortium through which questions about policy may be raised electronically with other institutions. And while the list of the responding institutions and the policies they reported are on file with the author, the rules of such communications are that institutions remain anonymous.

¹⁰ See, Paul Eykamp, *The Effect of Advanced Placement credit on time to degree at the University of California.* Office of the President, University of California, 2003.

¹¹ The data reported herein in Tables 1- 4 have been published by Geiser and Santelices, in *The Role of Advanced Placement and Honors Courses in College Admissions*, Center for the Study of Higher Education, University of California, 2004.

Table 1

**Percent of Variance in UCGPA Predicted by HSGPA and Test Scores
With and Without Bonus Points for AP/Honors**

Regression equation: $UCGPA = aHSGPA + \beta SAT I + \phi SAT II$

Explained Variance in First-Year UCGPA

HSGPA Weighting	1998		1999		2000	
	R ²	Rank	R ²	Rank	R ²	Rank
No Bonus Point	21.32%	1	21.46%	1	23.54%	1
Half Bonus Point	20.67%	2	21.10%	2	22.87%	2
Full Bonus Point	19.22%	3	19.82%	3	21.19%	3

Explained Variance in Second-Year UCGPA

HSGPA Weighting	1998		1999		2000	
	R ²	Rank	R ²	Rank	R ²	Rank
No Bonus Point	14.91%	1	13.88%	1	16.37%	1
Half Bonus Point	14.33%	2	13.34%	2	15.79%	2
Full Bonus Point	13.16%	3	12.28%	3	14.65%	3

Source: UC Corporate admissions and longitudinal data for first-time CA resident freshmen entering in Fall 1998, 1999, and 2000. N = 50,472.

Assessing the power of high school GPA to predict performance of UC freshmen entering in 1998, 1999, and 2000, (a base of 50,472 students), **Table 1** demonstrates that the bonus points currently calculated for honors/ap/ib/ccc reduce the squared multiple correlation between high school performance and grades earned at UC. The best predictor of UC performance is *unweighted* HSGPA. This holds true for each of the three cohorts and with respect to first year or second year performance, although all of the squared multiple correlations between HSGPA and UCGPA decrease markedly in the second year. Because the task force was also interested in whether these data would hold true for all disciplines, data by major were also analyzed, as was the relative strength of other variables in predicting students’ performance at UC.

Table 2
Standardized Regression Coefficients for Specified Variables
in Predicting Second-Year UCGPA by Major Disciplinary Area

Regression equation: UCGPA = α HSGPA + β School API + ϕ Parents' Ed + θ SAT I + μ SAT II + ψ AP/Honors

Major Field	Standardized Regression Coefficients						R ²	N
	Unweighted HSGPA	School API Quintile	Parents' Education	SAT I Scores	SAT II Scores	Number of AP/Honors		
Biological Sciences	0.24*	0.03	0.06*	0.09	0.22*	0.00	21.2%	2,283
Math & Physical Sci	0.32*	0.00	0.06*	0.05	0.19*	0.05*	23.5%	3,038
Social Sci/Humanities	0.26*	0.07*	0.08*	0.08*	0.17*	0.01	22.3%	4,069
General/Undeclared	0.24*	0.06*	0.08*	0.09*	0.14*	0.00	18.3%	7,122
Other Professions	0.34*	0.01	0.07	0.04	0.13*	-0.08*	17.8%	729
All	0.25*	0.05*	0.08*	0.04*	0.16*	0.01	17.4%	17,245

Source: UC Corporate admissions and longitudinal data for first-time CA resident freshmen entering in Fall 2000 who completed second year.

"Number of AP/Honors" includes only courses taken in 10th or 11th grade and known at point of UC admission.

"Other Professions" includes majors such as Physical Education, Education, Law, Social Work and Journalism.

* = statistically significant at .01 level.

As **Table 2** demonstrates, the number of Honors/AP courses adds little, if anything, to our ability to predict academic performance at UC. It is unweighted HSGPA and SAT II examination scores, both presumably measures of a student’s mastery of a body of knowledge, that most clearly, and across disciplines, predict UC grades. While unweighted HSGPA is the stronger of the two, each of these variables far eclipses any other possible factors measured in predicting second year grades at UC: HS API quintile, parents’ educational attainment, SAT I...or the weakest of all, the number of Honors/AP courses taken in high school.

Having determined at a rather high “comfort level” that the grade bump was not useful in helping us identify students on the basis of their likely success at UC, the Task Force reached the preliminary conclusion that we cannot justify the current policy of a whole grade bump in the calculation of UC eligibility. The six members of the group were, however, divided as to whether the appropriate recommendation is to end the bump entirely for calculation of eligibility (allowing for preferential treatment of these courses in only the campus “selection” process where issues including relative access to such courses may be evaluated and factored), or rather to endorse a reduction in the number of courses for which students would be able to obtain the bump, reducing the current eight semester courses to four. Notwithstanding, there was unanimous agreement, that the current policy is not appropriate.

The Task Force then turned its collective attention to the other consequences of the extant grade bump policy and to the consequences of modifying or eliminating it. These questions were also rather readily answered by turning to existing UC databases.

As **Table 3** suggests, the pattern of Honors/AP course-taking in California is heavily determined by the race of the student, and the parents’ income and educational level

at least among current applicants. Thus, while only 8.5% of UC applicants over a three-year period presented no Honors/AP courses, URMs, overall only 18.5% of UC applicants, constituted 23.2% of those who had not taken any of these classes. That under-represented minority applicants in the overall pool were notably less likely than other applicants to have taken Honors/AP classes in high school is clear from the further linearity of the data in **Table 3**. As the number of Honors/AP courses taken increases, the percentage of the students in that category who are URMs decreases, as does the percent who are first-in-family to go to college. Parental income is also positively associated with Honors/AP course taking (although not distinguishable as between the categories of 0 and 1-4 courses taken), while the pattern associated with high school performance level (measured by percent of its students attending UC) is curiously curvilinear. To try to understand why students from the underperforming high schools are “underrepresented” at both the lowest and highest levels of Honors/AP course taking, the Task Force also looked at the data on the numbers of such courses available at California’s high school by “performance quintile.” The predictable correlation was found between quintile and total number of Honors/AP courses offered in those high schools, although we have no information on how often these courses are actually offered nor the number of sections available to students at any time, the demand expressed by students, etc. We know only what is demonstrated in **Table 4**, that schools in the higher quintiles, those sending higher percentages of their students to UC, have more of these courses registered with UC than the lower-performing high schools.

**Table 3
Demographic Profile of UC Applicants by
Number of AP/Honors Subjects Taken**

Number of AP/Honors Subjects Taken	Number of Students	Percent of Sample	Percent of Total			
			Under-represented Minorities	First Generation Students	Students from Low-Performing Schools	Low Income
0	4,343	8.5%	23.2%	34.5%	13.8%	22.1%
1-4	9,305	18.2%	22.9%	34.7%	16.1%	23.1%
5-8	10,024	19.6%	19.9%	33.1%	18.4%	22.0%
9-16	18,169	35.6%	17.5%	29.8%	19.5%	20.6%
17-24	7,578	14.8%	12.6%	23.7%	15.4%	18.7%
25 or more	1,677	3.3%	11.2%	19.6%	15.3%	17.1%
TOTAL	51,096	100%	18.5%	30.5%	17.4%	21.1%

Table 4
AVERAGE HONORS/AP COURSES Registered with UC2002-03
By Quintile of High Schools

Quintile Of High Schools	Honors/AP courses
High 5	19.7
4	16.5
3	15.8
2	15.4
Low 1	14.2
All schools	15.5

On the bases of these several analyses illustrated in **Tables 1-4**, the Task Force reached the conclusion: that not only did the “grade bump” fail to serve the purpose of accurately identifying students likely to succeed at UC but also that minority students took fewer of these courses, arguably because they had less access to them. In sum, the policy may be undermining UC’s obligation to serve the 12.5% most promising students and simultaneously, it may be differentially negatively impacting actual or potential UC applicants from underrepresented minority racial and ethnic groups. The combination of these findings are important because the Task Force had agreed at the outset that if the grade bump was determined to be academically justified, the latter finding, if it were manifested, might not itself justify a change in the grade bump policy. Had “bumping grades” been found to be an educationally sound policy from the standpoint of predictive validity, the Task Force might have been willing to argue for amelioration of the racial/ethnic/class impacts via enhanced programs of access to such courses.¹²

Risks and Incentives

A major issue addressed by the Task Force concerns the to-date untested “conventional wisdom” that the grade bump was nothing more than compensation for the risk students assume when they opt for more challenging high school classes. That Honors/AP courses may actually be more *challenging* is an open question as the scholarly and journalistic commentary on the AP program is mixed on this point, and other non-standardized “Honors” courses may vary dramatically from course to course, teacher to teacher and school to school. The Task Force was unable to operationalize “challenging” nor determine how this characteristic of course work ought to be understood. We were as a group, however, as committed as would be any academics to the value of students being “challenged,” and would accept, *ceteris paribus*, that encouraging students to take courses defined as “Honors/AP” is likely preferable to equally encouraging only standard high school courses. But we accepted this largely on faith as we had no evidence that a pattern of Honors/AP courses students take in high school has any discernible impact on a UC student’s

¹² Indeed, enhancing access through such initiatives as AP online, administered by Academic Affairs at UC, and access programs sponsored by the College Board may, nevertheless, be exceptionally worthwhile. The Task Force is not suggesting otherwise, and those decisions about resource allocation are entirely separate from a decision concerning bumping grades in such courses. What we have concluded is that the policy fails to meet its first test and primary purpose: to more clearly differentiate and identify the most promising of the University’s freshmen applicants.

performance at university, nor the quality of the education the student is able to access at UC.

On the other hand, “risk” to students of taking Honors/AP courses was subjected to analysis; but the design of the study to measure this required some conceptual creativity. While the Task Force defined “risk” as the earning of a grade lower than would be expected had the student not opted for an Honors/AP course, it fell to the Task Force Chair and one of its members, Michael Brown, from the Gevirtz Graduate School of Education at UCSB and current Chair of BOARS, working with Student Academic Services at UCOP, to structure the “experiment.” It was recognized from the outset by the Task Force that this is a very difficult phenomenon to measure with the data we have available; we addressed it with a small “quasi”-study only because of the commonly cited assumption that the grade bump policy is *justified* because students are likely to fare less well grade-wise if they opt for Honors/AP courses over standard courses.

Noting that there are problems of access to Honors courses, student self-selection, as well as effort extended, differential teacher grading in Honors-level classes, etc., that we cannot control, we have assessed a one-year snapshot of student performance in college-preparatory English courses. The data included in **Tables 5/5A** and **Tables 6/6A** is derived from student transcripts submitted in conjunction with the summer 2004 Eligibility in Local Context evaluation process.¹³

Table 5

10th Grade Spring Term English Semester Grade
By 11th Grade Fall Term Honors English Grade

Numbers Grade in 10th Grade English (Spring Term)	Grade in 11th Grade UC-Approved Honors English Course (Fall Term)					ALL
	A (5)	B (4)	C (3)	D (1)	F (0)	
A (4)	10,876	4,915	544	35	3	16,373
B (3)	1,400	2,346	503	30	7	4,286
C (2)	85	181	127	9	0	402
D (1)	6	3	5	0	0	14
F	1	0	0	0	0	1

¹³ The data set consists of 32,449 students attending the same institution in 10th and 11th grade in semester-termed schools who completed a college-preparatory English course in the second semester of the sophomore year and who enrolled in an English course in the first semester of the junior year. Students taking English in summer school or at a community college between 10th and 11th grade are excluded from the study, as were students who enrolled in an Honors-level English course in the 10th grade. Within the population included in **Tables 5/5A** and **6/6A** are 21,076 students (65%) who enrolled in a UC-approved Honors level English course in first semester of junior year (**Table 5/5A**) and 11,325 (35%) who enrolled in non-Honors, college-preparatory English (**Table 6/6A**). Perhaps most interesting, and indeed most surprising, is the proportion of high school juniors (nearly two-thirds) enrolling in Honors level English after taking a college-preparatory English course in their sophomore year.

Table 5A

<i>Percents</i>		Grade in 11 th Grade UC-Approved Honors English Course					
Grade in 10 th Grade		(Fall Term)					
English (Spring Term)	A (5)	B (4)	C (3)	D (1)	F (0)	ALL	
A (4)	51.6%	23.3%	2.6%	0.2%	0.0%	77.7%	
B (3)	6.6%	11.1%	2.4%	0.1%	0.0%	20.3%	
C (2)	0.4%	0.9%	0.6%	0.0%	0.0%	1.9%	
D (1)	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.1%	
F	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	
ALL	58.7%	35.3%	5.6%	0.4%	0.0%	100.0%	

Despite the acknowledged limitations of the study, some tentative insights into the existence and degree of “risk” may be gleaned. **Tables 5/5A** indicate that among the 21,076 students who opted to take an Honors-level English course in 11th grade, 63.3% earned the very same grade as in their previous, non-Honors college-preparatory English course taken in 10th grade.¹⁴ Just over one-fourth (28.3%) earned a lower grade in the subsequent Honors-level course, whereas 7.9% improved their grade in the presumably more challenging course. Thus, if we subtract those who improved from those whose grades fell, the net performance difference is approximately a one-in-five who obtained a lower grade in the 11th grade honors course than they had obtained in the earlier 10th grade English course. This result should be tempered by attention to those 10th grade English students who took the path of standard college-preparatory English in 11th grade (the “control” group). **Tables 6/6A** present the data on student performance for those who took the same level (non-Honors) 10th grade English course and in the 11th grade took the standard college-preparatory (non-Honors) English course.

Table 6

10th Grade Spring Term English Semester Grade
By 11th Grade Fall Term Non-Honors English Grade

Numbers		Grade in 11 th Grade UC-Approved Non-Honors English Course					
Grade in 10 th Grade		(Fall Term)					
English (Spring Term)	A (4)	B (3)	C (2)	D (1)	F (0)	ALL	
A (4)	6,768	1,573	147	8		8,496	
B (3)	1,559	746	123	15	1	2,444	
C (2)	174	148	37	2		361	
D (1)	11	3	7	1		22	
F	1	1				2	
ALL	8,513	2,471	314	26	1	11,325	

¹⁴ Note that only grades A through C are included in the analysis; D-F grades are negligible in significance.

Table 6A

Percents Grade in 10th Grade English (Spring Term)	Grade in 11th Grade UC-Approved Non-Honors English Course (Fall Term)					ALL
	A (4)	B (3)	C (2)	D (1)	F (0)	
A (4)	59.5%	13.8%	1.3%	0.1%	0.0%	74.7%
B (3)	13.7%	6.6%	1.1%	0.1%	0.0%	21.5%
C (2)	1.5%	1.3%	0.3%	0.0%	0.0%	3.2%
D (1)	0.1%	0.0%	0.1%	0.0%	0.0%	0.2%
F	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%
ALL	75.1%	21.9%	2.8%	0.2%	0.0%	100.0%

Source: ELC Database, Class of 2005

Table 6 and **6A** suggest some striking similarities in student performance across the Honors-taking and non Honors-taking 11th graders. Among these students in the “control” group,¹⁵ 66.4% of the students earned the same A through C grade in 11th grade English as they had received in the previous English course. Thus, generally speaking, a sizable majority of high school students, of either course-taking pattern, earn the same grade in 10th and 11th grade English. In contrast, there is some discernible difference in “risk.” Whereas 28.3% of those 10th grade English students taking Honors English in 11th grade experienced a decline in their earned grade, for those 10th grade English students who continued in non-Honors English courses instead, 15.2% earned a lower grade in the later course. Considering that 15.2% a baseline likelihood of obtaining a lower score in a subsequent 11th grade English class, the data suggest that relative risk of taking Honors-level English in junior year, attributable to the course-level itself, appears small (the difference between 28.3% and 15.2%).

Adding to this measure of grade risk associated with Honors-level courses is that students who take the honors course are significantly advantaged with respect to boosting their GPAs. Those 10th grade English students who obtained “A”s and also received “A”s in the 11th grade honors class are advantaged by the policy of the honors bump in terms of GPA credits. So are those 10th grade English students who earned “B”s but who received either “A”s (in which case they are greatly advantaged) or Bs in the 11th grade honors course. Consider also that those earning “C”s in the 10th grade English course who take the 11th grade honors course and receive As or Bs are tremendously advantaged by the policy; even if they earn “B”s. It is not clear whether these advantages are proportional to the small GPA risk associated with taking Honors/AP courses.

Finally, with respect to “risk,” we are also appreciative of the data compiled by Academic Student Services to illustrate more directly the probability of the risk to GPA. **Table 7** suggests that when probability (of a lowered grade in 11th grade college-preparatory English) is the focus of the analysis, the gaps in this probability are rather small between the two groups (Honors-enrolled and the control group) and mirrors the analysis of **Tables 5/5A-6/6A**.

¹⁵ Including grades A through C: as with respect to **Tables 5/5A**, D and F involve negligible numbers.

Table 7

Comparison of Probabilities of Earning a Lower Grade in 11th Grade English Than Earned in 10th Grade English by Honors/Non-Honors Course Completion

Grade in 10th Grade	Honors Level Course (11 th)		Non-Honors Course (11 th)		Difference
A	5497/16,373	33.6%	1728/8496	20.3%	13.3%
B	540/4286	12.5%	139/2444	5.7%	6.8%
C	9/402	<1%	2/361	<1%	<1%

Table 7 yields the conclusion that for “A” students, taking the Honors level course may result in a somewhat greater probability of a lower grade in the 11th grade (13.3%) when compared with the same probability for those who do not take Honors. For B students the difference in probability is halved (6.8%). If we combine the A and B level students in 10th grade English performance, the probability of a lower grade in the subsequent Honors course is 29% for those taking Honors and 17% for those in the standard course: in sum, an overall net probability of a grade-danger of circa 12%...one in 8 students. Setting aside design problems and the “unknowns,” and assuming that compensation for risk is itself a good-enough reason for a grade-bump policy, an ancillary question thus raised is whether this level of measured “risk” can justify a policy for 100% of students, the vast majority of whom may actually face no meaningful risk by enrolling in Honors classes.

The Task Force believed it was imperative that it seek to analyze “risk” as it affects students who have access to and opt to take Honors level classes. We fully appreciate that there are myriad contextual factors that we are unable to account for in an analysis of “risk.” Our goal is (at minimum) to take into account that possible concern of students in any recommendations for change that we might put forward. The data presented above are subject to various interpretations¹⁶ and indeed, the significance of the whole enterprise may be limited with respect to the larger questions that the Task Force has addressed...to wit, whether we depress the predictive validity of HSGPA when the grade bump is employed. Yet, acknowledging that for the possible risk associated with the Honors-taking decision appears rather small (as per the probability analyses above), bumping the grades for taking these courses has little justification grounded in “risk.” Indeed, the grade bump, rather than appropriately compensating for risk to student GPA, quite to the contrary, appears to provide an arguably excessive advantage.

Incentivizing Honors/AP

The Task Force has assumed that students should be encouraged to take the most challenging courses while in high school and that Honors/AP/ IB/CCC are such classes. The question, then, naturally arises how do we provide an incentive to make such choices if we do not employ a grade bump. This is the most critical question to be faced by the Academic Senate.

¹⁶ Indeed, the assessment the Task Force offers of **Tables 5/5A** and **6/6A** is not identical to that offered to us by staff at the Office of the President. However, we do all share concerns about the limitations of what we are able to discern about the matter.

Indeed, it is precisely because of the concern that students will decline to take the most challenging academic classes available to them that some members of the Task Force remain committed to a full one grade bump for such classes, though they advocate reducing by half the number of such courses that would be subject to bumping (from the current 8 course limit to 4). The logic is sound. Despite the apparent inequality of access to these courses across demographic divisions (demonstrated in **Table 4**, suggested in **Table 3**) it is, nevertheless, likely that high school students currently headed for university will have access to four one-semester Honors/AP courses. Thus, it was reasoned by those taking this position that the playing field would be relatively leveled, when compared with the status quo, and the grade bump incentive would still be in place to take such courses.

Others on the Task Force concluded that sufficient and effective incentives to take Honors/AP courses exist without reliance on any grade bump. Several reasons for this perspective were offered including the most important academically: that students should understand that enhancement of their academic preparation for a university education and high achievement in that context is what is most valuable about challenging high school courses. Their understanding is that Honors/AP courses should be among those most expertly taught at a high school, in class sizes that are small and that optimize curricular engagement, and which include a more select group of students motivated and prepared to pursue deep exploration and understanding of the advanced subject matter. In addition, such courses should ideally prepare students to demonstrate better performances on entrance examinations. In addition, students who take honors/AP courses enjoy the reputation among their peers, parents, and school officials as the most capable and academically engaged students. Finally, honors and advanced courses, if properly taught and mastered, should better prepare students for the rigors and joys of college course taking and mastery.

Second, there is strong evidence that *eligibility* and *selection* need to be understood separately. If bumping grades based on taking Honors/AP were ended, the taking of such courses could remain “incentivized” during campus selection processes as well as placement (and the granting of unit and course credits). While the findings of the Task Force would speak against the automatic, mechanical, and universal awarding of “grade bumps” even during selection, campuses could be encouraged to effect nuanced considerations of “bumping” which evaluates the taking, and successful completion of, Honors/AP courses, while factoring in access to such courses. Some campuses already have such processes and formulae.¹⁷ This recommendation is supported in part by the importance of campus-of-choice to UC applicants. Students, who seek UC admission, typically seek admission to only *some* UC campuses. While their campuses of choice vary, students are very unlikely to accept redirection,¹⁸ thus an incentive system operating at the point of *selection* is likely to be at least as important as any incentive aimed at the *eligibility* index. Third, BOARS is on

¹⁷ Indeed, in principle there is no reason why the *eligibility index* itself could not be structured similarly, to incorporate taking Honors/AP as access permits, but the Task Force has been assured that this would create an administrative “nightmare.”

¹⁸ Historically, at UC no more than 5% of *eligible* students who are unsuccessful in seeking admission to a campus of choice accept the offer of redirection to another UC campus. This is a measure of the importance students place on acceptance at *particular* UC campuses, rather than simply having the opportunity to attend the University generally.

record¹⁹ as expressing the view that admissions credit for mere participation in academic preparation programs should never be awarded because a de facto benefit can not be said to accrue to students merely by having been involved with the program.

Finally, it should be noted that dropping the grade bump may have a very minor statistical effect on *eligibility*. A simulation analysis done at the Office of the President suggests that 4.4%²⁰ of students currently eligibility would fall below the minimum GPA, if unweighted grades were used in the Eligibility index. This finding is, of course, based on the assumption that the *Eligibility Index* would not be revised slightly downward to compensate for ending the GPA inflation associated with the current bumping policy. But what the finding suggests, assuming the simulation reliably predicts future behavior, is that at most 4.4% of the “bottom band” of UC eligible students may change, different students taking those places. This is indeed quite small, but is also important, and until we are able to factor in changed policies at each of the UC campuses, some of which currently do not cap GPA and/or the number of Honors/AP courses they “bump” during selection, the overall consequences of ending the policy is not entirely clear. What is clear to the Task Force is that the practices currently associated with Honors/AP grade bumping are fundamentally unsound. They do not enhance our ability to distinguish and identify the most promising students to admit as freshmen, our most important decision making affecting tens of thousands of California’s high school seniors, and access to these courses vary considerably across demographic groups in California. The Task Force looks forward to a dialogue with our colleagues on the matters raised herein, with the goal of reaching an appropriate consensus on how best to proceed to revise the existing policy on grade bumping.

Respectively Submitted,

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¹⁹ BOARS’ December 16, 2004 letter to Director of Admissions Susan Wilbur

²⁰ “Honors Point Value in Determining Index Eligibility and GPA Distribution” (DRAFT, 2004), on file with the author.