

**Proposal for Enriched Virtual AP Courses**

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University Academy Charter High School (UACHS) is a small, lottery-based, public charter school located in Jersey City, New Jersey. Established about 18 years ago, the school serves an urban population accepted by lottery. The school population was 436 students for the 2018-2019 academic year, with 73% eligible for free or reduced lunch, and a majority of the students identifying as Black (59%) or Latinx (30%) (NCES, 2019).

As a relatively small school, the courses available to students are limited. For example, Spanish I and II are the only languages offered, and there are just four Advanced Placement (AP courses) available per year for the student population. Because larger schools have more access to AP courses, the limited curricula of UACHS lead to a discrepancy in AP courses' access, which then reduces students' future college enrollment and completions (James et al., 2017). This inequity can be addressed by imperatives Collins and Halverson (2018) summarize as “customization, interaction, and learner control” (p. 109) implemented through a new curriculum design for optional advanced courses in UACHS.

### **Purpose**

This proposal outlines a plan to incorporate a new curriculum design into the current UACHS curriculum. This plan will ameliorate the limited course offerings, address student interest and goals, and improve the school's academic standing. Through the use of equipment UACHS already possesses, teachers UACHS already employs and space already available, the school can expand its curricula to include additional AP courses with limited expenditure, thereby increasing equity at a low cost (Collins & Halverson, 2018).

### **Statement of Problem**

Currently, UACHS is unable to increase its course offerings because of several factors. Because the population is small, though diverse in ability, it is difficult to establish viable enrollment for new course offerings. With only 41 teachers on staff, it is not economically feasible for teachers to lead micro-courses. Also, because the building is small, the architecture cannot sustain multiple small classes. These reasons create an equity issue for the mostly Black and Latinx population of UACHS (James et al., 2007) and a lost opportunity to engage students through their goals and interests (Collins & Halverson, 2018).

### **Solution**

One solution to the inequity of limited AP courses is to create multi-content, Enriched Virtual courses. According to Palevich and Honeck (2017), online learning is a viable option for gifted students who cannot take advanced courses because of their schedules or limited availability. Enriched Virtual courses are a form of blended learning in which students complete their coursework online but are also required to meet face-to-face with their teachers (Horn & Staker, 2014). Students are free to complete their online work at their own pace.

With Enriched Virtual courses, content teachers can teach several “online” courses at once with no additional prep time. One classroom might have 20 students with self-paced Khan Academy coursework; 5 students taking AP US Government & Politics, 10 students enrolled in AP US History, and another 5 taking AP World History. As students master sections, they move onto the following section or revisit a problematic area. If the courses are AP certified, the students would have access to AP Central and online AP assessment modules. The students will be able to take the AP courses regardless of whether they are AP certified (College Board, n.d.a) and possibly earn college credit.

In addition to earning college credits, AP coursework prepares students for college, and an Enriched Virtual modality teaches 21<sup>st</sup>-century core competencies. These students are more likely to be accepted into college, already have the study skills and time management necessary for college success, and graduate on time (College Board, n.d.b). According to Capone et al. (2017), blended learning affords students autonomy, feeds their interests, and develops “foundational literacy, competencies and character qualities required” 21st-century skills.

### **Cost**

The cost of enhancing the curriculum through the adoption of Enriched Virtual AP courses is relatively low. UACHS does not need to purchase the equipment as one to one devices were established in 2020. Courses outside of Khan Academy will need to be purchased, subscribed, or created. However, the first phase of the program can include only those AP courses available from Khan Academy. Teachers assigned to the additional mixed-level content course will need professional development training in AP and Enriched Virtual instruction. Those teachers will also require an additional payment for the additional course-load. As previously mentioned, multiple courses can run simultaneously in the classroom during the same period with only one teacher. Whereas one teacher will require extra compensation as per the contract, it is a cost-saving over an additional teacher. To ensure equity, the school should fund the cost of the AP exam for each student.

### **Conclusion**

While UACHS is unable to increase its traditional course offerings, incorporating a new curriculum design can be beneficial. Multi-content, Enriched Virtual courses are a reliable option for students who cannot take advanced courses because of limited availability or their schedules. Students can practice autonomy while learning higher-level material at their own pace. Teacher

support is available during class to supplement online learning. Finally, this system is cost-effective. The school will provide an enhanced learning experience for all students who show interest, thereby leveling the inequity surrounding AP courses in secondary education.

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