Sarah Woods

Course: AP Seminar

The AP Seminar course deals heavily with critical thinking and argumentation. Essential elements of the course include identification of arguments, explanation of claims and reasoning, evaluation of evidence, and construction of argument. Additionally, the course places emphasis on the ability of students to articulate and present arguments and concepts, as well as respond to critical questions.

Summit Threshold Concepts:

1. In civil discourse, we must come from a desire to understand, not a desire to persuade.
   1. Course application - Students must be able to listen and critically evaluate concepts that they read and hear from others (both peers and other external sources). Students must be able to participate in discussions (Harkness, for example) that allow for civil discourse that improves understanding, rather than simply people on soapboxes.
2. It is essential to understand and articulate all possible perspectives on an issue.
   1. Course application - Students must be willing and able to read a variety of diverse perspectives on any issue, in order to fully research and understand an idea. Furthermore, College Board establishes that students must be able to identify and explain a variety of stakeholders and perspectives on topics. Students must learn to look to reputable sources from a variety of perspectives. Additionally, students should be able to examine counter argument and different lenses, in order to fully construct a balanced argument.
3. At times, peer/social influence can have as much of a censorship impact, as government.
   1. Course application - As a student group in a course based on critical thinking, the ability to have a community discussion is integral to the understanding of the various lenses and points of view. However, if students (or citizens) fear reprisal or ostracization for their beliefs, the community loses out on the perspective. Because it is imperative to understand all perspectives (see the previous concept), the loss of a perspective in discussion harms group and individual progress. Thus, in practice in the classroom, students must create an environment of open discourse that maintains respect and is free of domination by individuals. Students should be educated on what ad hominem attacks are and why they must be avoided.
4. Tribalism and polarization in the political realm, though understandable, can cause the deterioration of civil discourse.
   1. Course application - In order to get a full understanding of a topic, students must be careful about assuming a position based on tribal affiliation and then allowing emotions to escalate and cause a lack of civility in discussion and discourse. Students should understand that passionate beliefs are good, but aggressive and emotional “arguing” can further increase polarization, inhibit discussion, and (as a result) limit overall learning and understanding. Students should actively participate in articulating the ideas of those on the other “tribe”, in order to increase understanding of the full issue.