Dr. Meng Academy
Math, STEM, Chinese Learning

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Introduction to AP Calculus Courses

Advanced Placement courses aren't required by high schools, but taking them can raise students' weighted GPAs and improve their standing in the eyes of colleges and universities. Taking AP Calculus classes, especially the BC class, shows admissions committees that you're passionate about the field of study and will work hard to achieve your goals at the collegiate level. It also provides students with a more solid foundation for succeeding in college math classes.

Both Calculus AB and Calculus BC are designed to be comparable to college-level calculus classes. To that end, high school students need to take pre-Calculus before enrolling in either course. Based on your academic interests and goals, you may opt to take AB only, take BC only, or take AB and then BC.

AP Calculus AB covers university-level Calculus I – the first semester of college calculus. The AB exam counts as one semester of college calculus. Just because AP Calculus AB is the easier of the two courses, doesn't mean students should expect to breeze through this class. If you opt to enroll in this class, expect to study a wide array of sophisticated topics, including functions, graphs, and limits; derivatives and their applications, and integrals and their applications. Students who plan to major in humanities may consider signing up for Calculus AB. Even though Calc AB isn't necessarily easier than BC, it tends to move at a slower pace due to the fact that there's less material to cover. As a result, students who aren't especially strong in math — or simply have busy schedules — may have an easier time succeeding in the course. Humanities majors are only required to take one course in mathematics in colleges. In most cases, students who earn a 4 or a 5 on the Cal AB test can satisfy their college's math requirement and start college ahead of the game.

AP Calculus BC covers university-level Calculus I and II – the first two semesters of college calculus. BC Calculus includes everything in AB Calculus, plus a few extra topics such as polynomial approximations and serieses of constants. Students actually get an AB Calculus sub-score when taking the BC exam. The BC exam qualifies as two semesters. Students who plan to pursue a math, science or engineering degree should take the AP Calculus BC exam. Students who anticipate having to take two or more core math classes in the college may be better off in the BC class.