

Frank Dilley Award: Assessing Minority Students' Success in AP Courses

Dr. Kristal D. Ayres '11 studied the efficacy of a program implemented in a Florida school district designed to increase AP course participation among minority students.



Dr. Kristal D. Ayres

September 2012—Dr. Kristal D. Ayres '11, who received a [Doctor of Education \(Ed.D.\)](#), was awarded [Walden University's Frank Dilley Award for Outstanding Doctoral Study](#) for her research titled, *A Summative Program Evaluation of a Systemic Intervention on Student Achievement and AP Participation*.

Her research explored the implementation of SpringBoard, a foundational component in the College Board's College Readiness System that prepares a greater diversity of students for success in Advanced Placement (AP) courses. The goals of Dr. Ayres' research were clear: If the program was implemented, would there be an increase in minority students' academic achievement? Would there be an increase in minority student enrollment in AP courses? Would those students see increased performance in those AP courses?

The short answer is a resounding yes. Dr. Ayres, who is now the director of professional learning for the Atlanta, Georgia, Public Schools, says that her evaluation demonstrated the value of SpringBoard in the Florida school district she studied. The program improved the quality of education in the district because it provided a rigorous instructional environment.

What's more, her research could have long-term effects that extend to other districts. "This study has the potential to impact how educators view students' abilities, their expectations for student achievement, and their belief that all students should be granted access to participate in advanced courses," she says.

Dr. Ayres plans to continue her research by following up to learn if there are particular AP courses in which minority students excel. Ultimately, that study could inform future delivery models of SpringBoard, she says. Beyond that, she recommends that individual schools be analyzed to learn if professional development, administrator support, demographics, or teacher beliefs affect the program's implementation and successes.

Her research would not have been possible without the support she found at Walden, she says. Dr. Ayres' doctoral study committee consisted of Dr. Marlene Munn-Joseph (chair), who received the [Rita Turner Award](#), [Dr. Michelle Brown](#), and Dr. Louis Milanesi. "Dr. Munn-Joseph provided direction, focus, and clarity. Dr. Milanesi provided hundreds of hours of assistance. Without his expertise, this study would not have been possible," she says. "Dr. Brown provided phenomenal feedback and guided me to narrow the study with meticulous precision. Her suggestions refined and enhanced my study."

About the Award

The Frank Dilley Award for Outstanding Doctoral Study is bestowed annually upon a Walden graduate whose dissertation or doctoral study is judged as meeting the highest standards of academic excellence. It honors Dr. Frank Dilley's singular academic contributions to higher education and, specifically, his dedication to Walden's academic programs. An active contributor to the university programs and, in particular, to residencies, Dr. Dilley personifies Walden's innovative spirit.

Read more about the [Frank Dilley Award](#) and past recipients.