

Date: November 22, 2009
To: Jim Slempp, BHS Principal
From: Amanda Green and Sherene Randle, AC Co-Lead Teachers, and
Maggie Heredia-Peltz, AC Vice Principal
Re: Academic Choice Redesign

I. Rationale:

Academic Choice was originally designed for very few high achieving students. Today it is nearly half of Berkeley High and proudly reflects the diversity of the entire school population. Unfortunately it also reflects the equity gap in our school. We are at a critical point in Academic Choice where administrators, teachers, and students alike are tired of the consistent disparity and are eager to make changes to our program to close the gaps and better serve all students. We feel the need to make substantial shifts in our program to make it one that serves *all* students. We have spent much of this year investigating our program and beginning conversations that aim to send us in our new direction.

The data we examined to select our equity goals included the total number of students enrolled in Academic Choice Advanced Placement Humanities after two years in the program, California STAR test scores, 9th and 10th grade English Language Assessment, and literacy data gathered over the past two years – all of which show a large gap in achievement. In the case of AP enrollment the causes for this disparity seem connected to student and teacher perceptions of AP courses and beliefs about student ability. We believe that this is something we can work on changing to close the gap. Our theory of action is that if we align our curriculum, restructure our program, and work with our teachers to increase the number of historically underrepresented students in our most rigorous courses, our program will be stronger. All students will benefit from a redesign of our lower level classes to create consistency and accountability in our program and to scaffold in student academic skills that we view as essential to achievement in upper level courses. If our theory of action is sound, we will successfully minimize the equity gap in Academic Choice.

II. Design Components:

In order to move forward with program redesign our team would like to incorporate the following elements to promote equitable instruction, personalization, and a college preparatory skill building culture in Academic Choice:

1. **Looping** from 10th to 11th grade beginning 2010-2011. If possible this would allow teachers to build relationships with students and work more closely on their skills.
2. **Redesign and potentially rename** our core classes in the lower grades as “Pre-AP” courses.
3. **Spiraling** our core curriculum grades 9-11 based on the National and State standards, rich content, and the skills all students need to successfully complete at least **two** Advanced Placement courses of a student’s choice during their four years at BHS.
4. **Repackage** and remarket every AC Advanced Placement course.

Please see the attached three-year plan for implementing required humanities APs in the 11th grade. Implementing these design principles is a 3-4 year goals for AC leadership. *None of these design components or resource requests are contingent upon anything other than AC leadership and its teachers.*

III. Resources Requested:

1. \$4,000 to pay teachers to align all AC Course curriculum for the 2010-2011 school year.
2. \$10,240 for a two-day summer retreat on campus to train all AC teachers in the implementation of the new curriculum. (June 28-29, 2010)
3. Funding for two AP instructors to perform an in house AP training session for all AC History and English instructors. (June 30- July 2, 2010)
4. The recruitment of more teachers of color hired for AND assigned to AC, in conjunction with the distribution of teachers whose instructional vision and performance evaluations are not based in serving all students in an equitable fashion. (Over three years)

IV. Budget Breakdown

\$4,000 to pay the following teachers to align all AC Course curriculum for the 2010-2011 school year. (Dates in January, 2010)

English Team

Matthew Carton
Amanda Green
Leslie Tebbe
Kate Rosen
Phil Provost/Eileen Jacobs

History

Alex Angell
Heather Sadlon
Tim Zoeletzi
Ben Sanoff
Maggie Herdia-Peltz

\$10,240 for a two-day summer retreat on campus to train all AC teachers in the implementation of the new curriculum. (June 28 and 29)

V. Academic Choice Three-Year Plan For Implementing AP Courses for All Students

2009-2010

Goal 1: To encourage more students of color to enroll in AP Courses for their junior year. This first year we hope to improve student of color enrollment in AP through better advertising, and information campaigns to boost student self-selection into an AP. This first year there will be no required junior year AP.

Goal 2: Begin to prep the freshman class to expect the requirement of one humanities AP by the time they are juniors.

Strategy

1. Better Advertising and Information Campaigns.
 - a. Before course sign ups we will have students and teachers from current AP Language and Composition and AP US History go into sophomore classes to talk about the courses and their benefits.
 - b. Have AP teachers come into sophomore classes to give a sample lesson in April.
 - c. Have counselors explain to sophomore students how APs are weighted differently than other courses.
 - d. Work with ACAC to get more diverse parents to our curriculum information night.
 - e. Possibly hold a sophomore course options night with students and teachers discussing APs.
2. Work with teachers on how AP can be more accessible to all students. Have conversations about teaching methods and teaching to different types of learners.
3. Have conversations within AC about letting go of hang-ups on our AP scores and think more about exposing more of our students to rigorous and interesting curriculum. Work to redefine our expectations and goals and our overall vision of what we want our students to get from AP.
4. Have freshman teachers begin to talk to their students about what AP is and why it can benefit them. Clearly explain that as juniors they will be expected to sign up for either AP Language and Composition or AP US History.
5. Conduct information gathering polls with students to find out what kind of support they feel will help them most and they will most likely take advantage of in an AP course. (EX. Study Groups – we could then help them set up study groups within AP.)
6. Complete the alignment of our curriculum so freshman and sophomore classes scaffold students toward AP in the 11th grade humanities and build specified necessary skills for those upper level courses.
7. Train all AC teachers in AP.
8. Solidify the Summer Bridge Program and advertise to get students enrolled in the program to help them with preparation work in the summer. Also begin to discuss the quantity of work that is appropriate for the summer to prepare students, but not discourage them from taking AP.

Rationale:

We conducted a panel discussion of students to learn the student perspective on why APs are not selected by students of color. Our students said that the fear factor was high and they had no one dispelling the myths. Students of color who had elected to take AP said they were not as intimidating as they had been told and felt more students could handle the classes than had signed up. They also stated that one of the main reasons they had signed up for AP was because they knew someone who had taken an AP class and could tell them how it really was. Since this student-to-student information was vital to their choice to enroll in AP and because of the reported levels of fear and misinformation, we believe a first strong step to integrating our AP program is to clarify what AP is and have teachers and AP students demystify what the actual lessons may be like for sophomores. Another important thing we learned from our students is that a key factor for students of color in taking AP was to have friends in the classes who they could form study groups with. They believe these student run study groups are the most helpful support option available to them. We believe this is worth exploring more as a support system for students in our AP classes. We recognize that continual student input will help us develop a program that best serves the needs of our population.

As teachers we recognize that one of the mistakes we have made in the past that has prevented equity is actively trying to scare our students into taking AP with a level of dedication that makes our work easier. We see how this has made our AP classes less accessible to our students of color and we will cease this practice.

Additionally, we will work on training our teachers to diversify the methods they use to teach all courses, including AP, so they appeal to more types of learners. WE need to create consistency among our staff in terms of course goals, skills, and expectations, as well as greater AC consistency of certain student skills such as note taking and annotation that students will use throughout their four years and be prepared and practiced in by the time they reach the 11th grade.

2010-2011

Goal 1: Prepare all sophomores to enroll in one required humanities AP, either AP Language and Composition or AP US History in their junior year.

Strategy

1. Begin implementing curriculum in the freshman and sophomore classes that scaffolds all students toward having the skills they need to enter APs in their junior year.
2. Continue to evaluate the alignment of our curriculum and assess any changes that need to be made.
3. Gather student input on AP enrollment, AP support, and AP skills readiness.
4. Continue the advertising practices established in 2009-2010 to help students decide which AP they are interested in taking, encourage them, and be sure they understand the benefits of AP.

Goal 2: Ensure the success of our students enrolled in AP.

Strategy

1. Support students of color enrolled in AP classes.
2. Connect our students to available tutoring through Christina Mitchell, BHS Student Academic Support Coordinator.
3. Help students create student run study groups and find them space to conduct these study groups.
4. Continue to work with our teachers to make sure they employ and continue to learn diverse and equitable methods in their teaching practice.
5. For AP LANG encourage a diversity of literature be used in the class.
6. Evaluate the work of the previous year and assess where we currently stand.

Goal 3: Build the freshman class with standardized Academic Choice Student Skills and move them toward electing two APs in Humanities Junior Year. (One would be required.)

Strategy

1. Use advisory to establish these AC student skills including organizing, note taking, annotation skills, advocating for themselves with teachers, how to study, how to ask questions on multiple levels, bibliography format, manuscript format, understanding rubrics, creating a four-year plan, understanding weighted grades, a-g requirements, the testing they have in front of them, etc. How to individualize and personalize their AC

- experience.
2. Make sure the standardized skills are being applied in the AC English and Social Studies Core and that these classes are teaching the skills we have decided will scaffold our students toward AP.
 3. Get all students who need extra support help, including filling our Accelerated Reading Courses.
 4. Continue to work with our teachers on the methods they use with freshman to create equity in the classroom.

2011-2012

Goal 1: This school year would be the first in which all AC students are required to take at least 1 Humanities AP. The focus of this year is to support our students and evaluate our support systems to improve them.

Strategy

1. We will exit poll our new seniors on their AP experience and the support services they believe are still needed, as well as how existing supports can be improved.
2. We will continue to facilitate student run study groups.
3. We will work with our teachers to encourage equitable teaching practices and diverse strategies in delivering material.
4. We will work to measure our success and failure in closing the achievement gap by monitoring the D/F rate in APs closely and adjusting our instruction when needed to change patterns.
5. We could put together a team of teachers to be in charge of evaluating the progress and continuing to work on coming up with strategies to make the APs successful for all students.

Goal 2: The freshman and sophomore years will continue to scaffold students toward AP in the junior year. Students will continually be informed of the benefits of AP and their educational options and expectations.

Strategy

1. We will continue to use the strategies of the previous year in addition to evaluating and tweaking the freshman and sophomore courses to be more effective as we discover potential improvements.
2. The year's sophomore class will be required to sign up for one AP, but encouraged to consider trying two.
3. We will identify juniors taking both humanities AP classes and gather information from them about work load and the experience in general. In the following year we should do the same.

The final decision about whether to go to all AP Humanities is one that we can either decide on now, or gather information as we go and decide after we see how the first two phases of increased advertising and information campaigns and then requiring one AP for the students.

While there are arguments for each side, the effects on our program cannot be entirely predicted.

However, during this time the courses in English will move toward teaching the curriculum of AP Language and Composition in the junior year. Whether or not a student chooses the AP title they will receive AP curriculum. We strongly suggest that AC prep all students for the AP exam and allow any who wish to take it in June and have the AP title added retroactively to their course title.

In the end we could end up with ALL AP in the junior year OR one required AP with all classes taught to prepare kids to take the AP giving them the option to try the exam at the end of the course.

We will no longer accept having two tracks within our junior year as this is something that continually has prevented us from achieving equity and progressing toward closing the achievement gap.

VI. Bibliography

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