

10/22/14 Academic Choice Fall Information Night

October 22, 2014, 7:00-8:00 PM BHS College Career Center

Meeting Notes

The Academic Choice team held its Fall Information Night on October 22, 2014. David Borrelli, Matt Laurel and Tim Zolezzi represented the AC teachers with Nakia Baird representing the Math Department. The AC vice principal, the AC Advisory Council student representatives and two AC Advisory Council parents, as well as approximately 100 AC parents. Parents of freshmen in particular were well represented.

Handout Package:

A handout package was provided that included information on the a-g requirements, a glossary of acronyms, counselor information, student schedule planning, AP requirements and support, teacher tutorial schedule, athletics, the PE Waiver program, participation on the Academic Choice Advisory Council and fundraising for AC.

The speakers were as follows:

AC Vice Principal Nube (formerly Roose)

Daniel Nube (danielroose@berkeley.net) introduced the meeting and described Academic Choice as the learning community for students interested in a wide range of classes. The size of AC brings both challenges and opportunities.

History Team Lead Teacher Tim Zolezzi (timothyzolezzi@berkeley.net)

Mr. Zolezzi reported on this year's goals in the History Department:

On Mondays all teachers discuss their main objectives for the week and align curriculum so that all students get a similar experience.

Teachers are building in student talk time with peers and class discussion to promote active learning.

Teachers are diversifying perspectives students hear from, history through multiple lenses of race, sex and sexual orientation.

AC is conducting a student survey pilot with student feedback to all teachers in English and History.

Teachers go to colleagues' classrooms several times during the year to observe and learn.

English Team Lead Teacher Matt Laurel (mattlaurel@berkeley.net)

Mr. Laurel covered the following points concerning AC English:

Next year all AC juniors will be required to take AP Language and Composition. The development of essential communication skills junior year is critical for student success.

There is a shift to depth over breadth with the current Common Core curriculum, focusing on studying fewer novels, explored more deeply, and assigning more critical writing.

There is a wide range of teaching styles in the AC English department. The flexibility and freedom teachers have benefits the students.

AP Coordinator and English Teacher Dave Borrelli (davidborrelli@berkeley.net)

Mr. Borrelli discussed the new AP requirements for AC juniors and seniors:

AP Language and Composition for juniors focuses on argumentative analysis, an important real-world skill.

AP Government for seniors is essential for all students to be well-informed citizens.

AP Language and Composition is skill-based and focuses on writing well. Three out of five days students discuss literary works.

To support students who are particularly challenged by AP required classes, AC received a Chancellor's Community Partnership Grant from UC Berkeley for the second year in a row. The money goes to bring UCB undergraduates and/or graduate students into AP English classes once a week and they lead afterschool study groups once a week. The AP Scholars Program is funded by BSEP and targets students who need the most help with a format that includes two classes a week after school.

Math Team Lead Teacher Nakia Baird (nakiabaird@berkeley.net)

Mr. Baird discussed the transition to Common Core and the math class sequence:

The Math Department has focus groups of teachers who teach the same classes that meet in the morning.

Next year marks the transition to Common Core in BHS math; this year the math teachers are introducing a sampling of Common Core lessons in Geometry classes.

The sequencing in math is Algebra I, Geometry, and Algebra 2. Students can then choose Math Studies, Statistics or Math Analysis, which leads to AB Calculus.

The honors sequence is Honors Geometry, Honors Algebra 2, Honors Math Analysis and BC Calculus.

Mr. Baird suggests students look at their whole schedule and see what makes sense for each student. They should consult with math teachers in the spring about those choices.

Some students fear math, but Mr. Baird wants to build confidence and assure them that math reasoning comes from within. There are lots of tutoring resources for math at BHS. Mr. Baird encourages parents to email him with questions.

AC Student Representative Hannalina Kalonji (Senior Class)

Ms. Kalonji planned all of her courses as a freshman, but thinks that while it is useful to use the planning schedule on page five of the handout, sometimes your needs change, so be flexible.

In middle school she thought her strengths were math and science, but after taking AP Language and Composition as a junior she saw her writing improve in ways she didn't think possible. You never know what you're capable of, so take advantage of all the opportunities available.

AC Student Representative Finn Collum (Junior Class)

Mr. Collum is interested in the humanities but AC gives support in math and science as well. He enjoys the competitive, challenging courses. There are a lot of teacher office hours and other resources.

Because AC is a large learning community, students should take charge of their own learning experience. This will help in college. Time management is important, so encourage your student to write down his/her priorities.

These presentations were followed by a Q&A Session

What's the difference between AP and regular classes?

AP has more writing and the expectations are higher. All students are not required to take the AP test. The AP class is valuable in itself.

Will the information packet be available online?

Yes at <http://berkeleyschools.net/ac/wp-content/uploads/2014/11/Ac-Info-Night-Packet-1.pdf>.

Are 9th graders doing Common Core?

Yes, in English and History.

Is study abroad okay?

Yes, consult with your counselor about the details.

Can you change an elective mid-year?

It is not recommended, and difficult to accomplish, but consult with your counselor.

Are freshman grades sent to colleges?

Yes, freshman grades do count toward the GPA and colleges see them.

Can touch-typing be taught in the curriculum?

For now this is the student's responsibility. If parents want to change this, they need to lobby for it. Mr. Laurel recommends the benefits of writing with a pen and paper.

If everyone has to take AP classes, doesn't that defeat the purpose?

Mr. Laurel says no. Every student has something to learn from others. Everyone can succeed if the resources are there.

How can you tap into tutoring resources if your student has a 7th period class?

Many teachers and Cal tutors are available at lunch. Mr. Baird says music teachers can be flexible, ask them to let kids out of class once a week if needed.

Will math teachers give guidance about which path is right for a student?

Yes, in the third quarter of Algebra 2, talk with your math teacher. You can test into the honors track from the regular track at the end of the school year.

Can computer programming count as math?

Not now, perhaps in the future. BHS has an introductory computer science class, AP Computer Science and special projects class. Mr. Baird recommends you start exploring CS sophomore year.

Questions for AC leadership students:

My freshman student is doing well but drowning in homework. What can we do?

Get into a routine that works for you. Manage your time with help from teachers and counselor. For athletes, coaches can help, some have study halls.

What is the appropriate number of AP courses?

Talk to the student about his/her needs. You don't have to take AP just because your friends are. Take the AP courses you are interested in.

Tell me more about successful time management.

The College Career Center is a good resource, a home base for tutoring. Set aside a space at home with no distractions for studying. Use the BHS personal planner.

Questions for VP Nube:

Does BHS have a dress code?

Yes, but it's hard to enforce. He suggests parents have a conversation with their kids about proper dress.

Why are there no science or world language teachers speaking?

AC Information Night is not contractually required for any teacher. Come to Back to School Night to see science and foreign language teachers. Those who attended tonight are volunteers.

What about the fact that some students have long-term substitute teachers?

BHS attempts to hire replacements as soon as possible. Substitutes give P/F. VP Nube doesn't know how semester grades are calculated, but will look into the issue.

AC Advisory Council Representative Jeremy Thorner

Mr. Thorner outlined the oversight of the AC learning community that the ACAC (a group of teachers, students and any interest parents who meet once month) provides. He also described how the funds donated to the Berkeley High Development Group, but earmarked specifically for AC, are spent and how they support the many academic programs and social mission of AC. He asked for continued parent donations to help continue these important programs.

This concludes the report of the meeting. Please attend our Spring Information Night during the second semester.