

1/8/16 Academic Choice Advisory Council (ACAC) Meeting
Jan. 8, 2016, 7:30-8:35AM Berkeley High School Conference Room B

Minutes

In Attendance:

Who	Role	E-mail address
Amanda Green	AC Co-Chair and AC Lead English Teacher	amandagreen@berkeley.net
Felicia Phillips	AC Vice Principal	feliciaphillips@berkeley.net
Phil Halpern	Video Production Teacher	philhalpern@berkeley.net
Alecia Harger	ACAC Student Representative	aleciaharger@students.berkeley.edu
Veronique Anxolabehere	AC Parent	anxolabehere@me.com
Sam Arriola	AC Webmaster	sarriola@gmail.com
Alan Dyck	AC Parent	alan@dyck.net
Catherine Ference	AC Parent	candsfer@gmail.com
Rene Kvidahl	AC Parent	
Lisa Miller	AC Parent	lisa@classroommatters.com
Rakhi Rao	ACAC Treasurer	rakhiprao@gmail.com
Johanna Reneke	ACAC Parent Rep at Large	j.reneke@gmail.com
Candy Rupp	AC Parent	candyrupp@aol.com
Christine Staples	AC Parent	christineannestaples@gmail.com
Donna Storey	ACAC Secretary	donnageorgestorey@gmail.com
Deborah Thompson	AC Parent	

Academic Choice VP Felicia Phillips chaired this meeting.

Study Skills Workshop for AC Students to Be Rescheduled

Ms. Phillips explained that Lisa Miller's study skills workshop would not take place before finals this semester because of confusion in reserving the room and too short a lead time for publicity. Ms. Phillips asked Ms. Miller if she could reschedule the workshop for the beginning of the spring semester and change the focus to general study skills to set students up for success. AC parents in attendance agreed that holding the workshop as soon as possible was a good idea rather than waiting for spring finals when the benefit to students would be less. Ms. Miller arrived at the meeting in the middle of the discussion and agreed to work with Ms. Phillips to reschedule. The workshop will be advertised on the AC etree and to students when it is scheduled.

Public Comments

Deborah Thompson asked about the problems getting access to PSAT scores, which have been available online since January 7 but require an access code that Berkeley High students do not have, so the students have to wait until the paper results are sent to the school at the end of January. Ms. Phillips said she did not understand why students could not have access to their scores and she would contact the College Board.

Another parent asked about the fire alarm on Thursday, January 7. Ms. Phillips said it occurred between second and third period, around 10:30. Since students were moving between classes, the evacuation was not as smooth as scheduled fire drills during class. She said the administration would debrief and come up with a better between-class plan.

Student Representatives' Report

ACAC Student Representative Alecia Harger said that January is a stressful month for students as they prepare for finals. Thus it is a slow month for leadership activities.

Donna Storey suggested that a date for the AC graduation celebration be chosen early so that it would be easier for parents to plan to attend. Ms. Phillips said that John Villavincencio, the coordinator for student leadership, was already asking the small learning communities for dates for their graduation events. AC should have their date by next month. Ms. Phillips asked if parents had a preference for May or closer to graduation in June. Parents who replied preferred a later date. Phil Halpern said that CAS used to hold their graduation over Memorial Day weekend, but they've moved away from that and one benefit to having the event at the end of May is that June is a very busy time for students.

Treasurer's Report

ACAC Treasurer Rakhi Rao distributed the latest Statement of Activities as of January 1, 2016. Academic Choice has a balance of \$83,906. We brought in \$25,650 in donations this year so far, which is more than the total amount of donations for all of last year.

Ms. Rao reported on the recent Berkeley High Development Group meeting where BUSD Superintendent Donald Evans spoke about technology. He said the goal is for the district to provide all teachers with what they need in their classrooms. He was not a proponent of providing laptops to teachers to take home as they tended to disappear and/or get stolen.

Ms. Phillips said we'll need to think strategically about technology for teachers.

Funding Phil Halpern's Computer for BHS Video Production Classes

Phil Halpern has been teaching since 1992 and one and a half years ago he took over the video program at Berkeley High. His long-term goal is to procure 31 up-to-date computers, but for the short-term he would like one computer as an editing workstation for his classes. Two classes are all CAS students and two are students from the other small learning communities. The Regional Occupational Program bought the current 25 computers because the video production class prepares students for college and careers. He wants to provide students with a separate workstation on which they can produce high-quality, motion graphics with industry-standard hardware and software (Adobe Aftereffects). Students will cycle through in turn and each will be able to use the workstation for two weeks per school year.

CAS agreed to pay for the software and he is hoping AC and BIHS will split the cost of the computer. It will be an iMac and will be chained to the desk. The cost for AC would be \$1,396.40.

Christine Staples asked how much the software costs. Mr. Halpern said \$240 per year for an annual license.

Ms. Storey asked how many AC students he had in his classes. Mr. Halpern said he didn't know which small learning community his students belonged to, but some subset of the 60 non-CAS students.

Sam Arriola asked if he needed such a powerful computer. Wouldn't four less powerful computers be a better investment? Mr. Halpern said he always thinks about cost-saving measures, but he's not a PC person and thinks it's worth it to pay a premium for a Mac for the quality of the final product and you have to replace PC's more often. Mr. Arriola added that our fundraising appeals ask parents to donate to both AC and the Berkeley High Development Group. Has he asked BHSDG for funding? Mr. Halpern said he has already gotten a lot of support from them. They funded half of a media tech position (the other half is funded by BSEP).

Ms. Staples moved that we fund half of Mr. Halpern's computer at \$1,396.40. Mr. Arriola seconded the motion.

Action: The motion was unanimously carried.

Funding for the AC Sophomore Class Field Trip to See *Macbeth* at the Berkeley Rep

The Berkeley Rep offered Berkeley High the opportunity to purchase tickets to a student matinee on April 7 to see *Macbeth*. Ms. Green wanted to buy tickets for the AC sophomore class--\$10 per ticket for 285 sophomores. Because Berkeley Rep wanted an answer quickly, the ACAC voted by email to fund the field trip (moved by Amanda Green and seconded by Donna Storey) for \$2850 plus tax and substitute teacher payments as necessary.

Action: The motion was unanimously carried.

Funding for the AC Freshman Class Field Trip to See *Much Ado About Nothing*

AC would like to take AC freshmen to see *Much Ado About Nothing* at Cal Shakes in June. The field trip fits in with the AC freshman curriculum because students study a Shakespeare comedy. The cost of the tickets for 292 AC freshman is \$4380. The cost of bus transportation is likely \$4500, although the amount is not finalized. Catherine Ference is helping to arrange the trip and will have details at a later meeting.

Ms. Staples moved to fund the field trip at approximately \$8880 plus substitute teacher costs. Candy Rupp seconded the motion.

Action: The motion was unanimously carried.

Funding for World of Media Field Trip to See *The Revenant*

Ms. Green wants to take the three sections of her World of Media class to see the movie *The Revenant* on Wednesday, January 27 in downtown Berkeley. The cost will be 85 tickets at \$9 each, and the cost of a substitute teacher for Ms. Green's 4th period class.

Ms. Staples moved to fund the field trip. Ms. Rao seconded the motion. Tim Zolezzi voted to fund the field trip by email to make a quorum as Ms. Green could not be in the room to vote on her own funding request.

Action: The motion was unanimously carried.

Q&A With Glenn Wolkenfeld

Glenn Wolkenfeld, the co-chair of the science department and Professional Development (PD) lead teacher, agreed to speak with the ACAC on issues brought up at our last meeting about the science course progression and homework load.

Ms. Staples is the parent of an AC sophomore who is currently taking AP Chemistry. She asked why an AP class is taught to sophomores.

Mr. Wolkenfeld said that it is unusual for sophomores to take an AP class in many schools, but students need Chemistry before they take AP Biology and there is also a demand in the community for the opportunity for students to take three AP science classes and that is the only way this can be possible. He added that Berkeley High doesn't have departmental standards for teachers.

Johanna Reneke asked why we don't have standards.

Mr. Wolkenfeld said they are moving toward that, but it is hard to mandate in our school. Based on our email invitation inviting him to dialogue on the homework load, he asked around and knows teachers assign different levels of homework.

Ms. Harger said that homework varies a lot, even within one class, so that it is very difficult for students to plan their lives. She suggests no more than one hour of homework per teacher per night and ideally teachers would divide the homework more evenly. Sometimes there is four days of no homework, followed by a time-consuming assignment. This would be more supportive of student mental health.

Mr. Wolkenfeld invited the group to send him a confidential email about their specific experiences.

Ms. Harger said she wasn't sure what the ACAC can do about this issue. Ms. Storey suggested that parents and students partner on trying to get some attention for this. When parents approach the administration, they are told that the message would be more powerful coming from the students. Ms. Phillips said that at Berkeley High, advisory groups (such as the School Site Council) can make formal recommendations and this means a formal response from the administration, but with union rules, the administration has limits on what it can do. Ms. Phillips said she would talk with counselors to encourage students to plan their course selection strategically. For example, if a student wanted to take four AP classes s/he would have to have a meeting with her/his counselor and Ms. Phillips to discuss it.

Ms. Staples suggested there was a confusion of heavy homework load with academic rigor. Ms. Ference proposed we do a meaningful survey to get a real sense of the student experience. Ms. Harger said at this point many students feel powerless to go up to their teachers and say they have too much homework. Ms. Ference added that teachers don't seem to want to hear from parents about this either, so we all feel powerless. Ms. Reneke said the goal of Professional Development should be to create a situation where students in the same class don't have a wildly different experience.

Ms. Staples said that when her daughter went to her pediatrician for a check-up recently, the doctor said that she sees a lot of stressed-out students from Berkeley High. Also overlooked is the use of private tutors to help students deal with the demands of classes. Ms. Miller said she sees a lot of Berkeley High students at Classroom Matters. Ms. Staples said there is no dedicated AP Chemistry tutor at Berkeley High, AP students are told to consult a regular Chemistry teacher-tutor, but half of the hours they are available conflict with the AP Chemistry lab times in the afternoon. Mr. Wolkenfeld replied that teachers' classrooms are packed during lunch with students seeking help, but he will do more fact-finding and check in with teachers. There is a lot of pressure for students to take AP classes.

Ms. Phillips said it is hard for students to drop down from AP to a regular class during the year, so they are trying to talk with students before they register. Mr. Wolkenfeld said students know how hard AP classes are and especially with AP Chemistry it is three years out of sync. The freshman science course, Advanced Biology, is designed as a survey and it is not difficult. AP Chemistry has been offered for 40 years at Berkeley High.

Ms. Phillips said she and Mr. Wolkenfeld would meet for further discussion. Ms. Harger said she is taking two AP classes, AP Statistics and AP Art History, as a sophomore, but they are in classes of interest to her whereas many sophomores are not interested in AP Chemistry but feel they have to take it. On the other hand one of the benefits of Academic Choice is the opportunity to take a variety of AP courses. She suggests students take AP classes and push themselves in subjects they like.

Ms. Green thought it would be a good idea to revisit the idea of a course fair for students before registration where experienced students could answer questions about classes. She agreed it is a good idea to take AP classes in subjects students are passionate about. Ms. Phillips suggested we have our Spring General Meeting before

course registration so we could answer these questions for families.

Alan Dyck asked Mr. Wolkenfeld if Computer Science classes were included in the science department. Mr. Wolkenfeld said these classes were part of the math department, and that a new introductory course on principles of programming was being developed.

We agreed to have further discussion of surveys at our next meeting.

Mr. Dyck agreed that it would be beneficial to do a survey on the homework load. Ms. Harger said she could do one as part of her AP Statistics project. Ms. Phillips said that all teachers at Berkeley High are being encouraged to survey their students and to tailor the survey to their classes' needs. Mr. Dyck asked if teachers assigned homework to practice concepts learned in class or as a focus on new learning. Mr. Green said for freshmen she assigns homework for practice and reinforcement, but for seniors she can expect independent thinking. Mr. Wolkenfeld said it's the same in the science department.

Update on Long-term Substitutes

Ms. Phillips announced that Brittany Beard has started as the new Ethnic Studies teacher. Concerning other staff leaves, Ms. Phillips will meet with Tasha Jackson about her upcoming replacement during maternity leave and is also addressing substitutes for Amina Sheikh and Madalyn Theodore. Tim Zolezzi is going on paternity leave in April and they are currently arranging a substitute to cover his classes. Managing staff family leaves has been challenging, but the administration is doing better at coordination.

We did not have time to discuss technology needs, and especially laptops for teachers, but this will be on the agenda for next month.

Next ACAC Meeting

Our next meeting will be on Friday, February 5, 2016, 7:30-8:35 a.m. in BHS Conference Room B in the D Building.