

10/22/15 Academic Choice Fall Information Night

October 22, 2015, 7:00-8:30 PM Berkeley High School Library

Meeting Notes

The Academic Choice team held its Fall Information Night on October 22, 2015. Amanda Green and Tim Zolezzi represented the AC teachers with Nakia Baird representing the Math Department. Brenda Kitagawa spoke for the AC Counselors. The AC Vice Principal, Felicia Phillips, the senior AC Advisory Council student representative, Avi Peltz, and eight AC Advisory Council parents also represented the AC Advisory Council. Approximately 120 AC parents were in attendance. Parents of freshmen in particular were well represented. The AC Advisory Council provided cookies, fruit, coffee and sparkling water for refreshments.

Handout Package:

A handout package was provided that included information on the a-g requirements, counselor information, student schedule planning, AP requirements and support, teacher tutorial schedule, athletics, the PE Waiver program, invitation to participate in the Academic Choice Advisory Council and a fundraising appeal for Academic Choice. The packet is available online at: http://berkeleyschools.net/ac/wp-content/uploads/2015/10/Fall_Info_Packet_2015.pdf

The agenda was as follows:

AC Vice Principal Felicia Phillips

Felicia Phillips (feliciaphillips@berkeley.net) introduced herself as the new Vice Principal for AC this year. She said she was honored to be at Berkeley High and to support the adults who support our children. Ms. Phillips asked how many parents in attendance had students in the freshman class (the majority), the sophomore class (about 20), the junior class (about 15) and the senior class (several). She invited parents to write down questions on the index cards that were available at every table and said that the cards would be collected and the questions answered at the end of the meeting.

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

Mr. Zolezzi is in his seventh year of teaching at Berkeley High. He usually teaches history and sociology, but this year is only teaching sociology, an AC elective he encourages all students to consider.

Academic Choice has 1190 students, large enough to be its own high school. The freshman and sophomore classes are cored up (students have same group for English and history classes) to give students a sense of community. Officially, Academic Choice involves the humanities teachers in history and English, which form the core of the AC experience, but Mr. Zolezzi appreciates that families see all of their students' classes as part of AC.

Mr. Zolezzi introduced the Academic Choice Information Night Packet, which addresses questions that usually come up for families new to the small learning community. The first page has contact information. The second page lists graduation

and University of California (UC)/California State University (CSU) requirements. Page 3 has contact information for the guidance counselors and information on when and how to consult your counselor. Page 4 has a list of courses offered, which is a helpful guide for students to plan out their program at Berkeley High. He encourages students to think about which courses they would like to take even if they change their minds later.

Page five outlines the AP requirements in AC. At the current time, seniors are required to take AP Government and juniors are encouraged to take an AP class of their choice, especially AP Language and Composition. Mr. Zolezzi said that AC has the widest array of AP classes offered for students, but that the AP designation doesn't mean a "better" class. Pages 6 and 7 provide contact information for athletics and information about the PE Waiver.

Page 8 is an invitation to become involved in the Academic Choice Advisory Council, a group of teachers, parents, students and our VP, who meet on the first Friday of the month on which school is in session from 7:30 am to 8:30 am. Parents are free to attend just once or regularly in order to advocate for their child and all children in AC. Page 9 is a pitch for donations to AC.

Mr. Zolezzi has been leading the history department for two-and-a-half years. This year they have a stellar staff in history with three new teachers who bring lots of experience to the job. This year the freshman history course is called "Freshman Seminar" with two components, Ethnic Studies and Social Living. This course covers pressing subjects that are meaningful to students including social issues, gender, race and ethnicity. He repeated that all seniors in AC take AP Government and this is the third year of this requirement. AC leadership believes this is a good idea because civics touches every student's life.

English Team Lead Teacher Amanda Green (amandagreen@berkeley.net)

Amanda Green introduced herself as the English lead teacher. She's been involved with AC for 13 years and served as English lead several years ago before she had children. Ms. Green outlined the course progression in English at Berkeley High.

Ninth-grade English is a language and composition course, which provides a crash course in argument writing, then moves to literary analysis, personal memoir and essays and finally Shakespeare. The focus is depth of analysis.

Tenth-grade English covers world literature and the focus is tragedy. All classes do Shakespeare. Argument writing is further developed with more rhetorical strategies introduced to sophomores.

All juniors are strongly encouraged to take AP Language and Composition, which is an excellent preparation for college writing.

Senior-year English offers a range of electives including Reading and Writing the Short Story, World of Media (taught by Ms. Green) which is a film theory and critical theory class, AP Language and Literature, and Chicano-Latino Literature which can be taken for English credit this year (it was previously only available for elective credit).

This year the AC English department staff is very motivated and is working to build a team of teachers. They also are working to build strong writing and academic argument writing skills in our students.

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

Nakia Baird outlined the sequencing for math at Berkeley High. Math classes have students across the learning communities, not just AC, and even at the AP level, not all students are in AC. This year most freshmen are taking Math 1 (there are a few freshman classes of Honors Algebra 2). Math 1 includes a study of algebra, geometry, and statistics. Students can see how these topics are related. Mr. Baird is teaching Math 1 classes this year and is excited about the depth of the material. Math 1, 2 and 3 prepare students for AP Statistics, Calculus or Math Studies.

This year, thanks to funds from the Berkeley High Development Group, there is an after-school Math 1 Tutoring Lab exclusively for Math 1 students. Math 1 teachers, tutors and student tutors are available and students can also work together with their peers. The Math 1 Tutoring Lab is held Monday through Thursday after school in room G210A. Mr. Baird encouraged parents to mention the Math Lab to their students.

AP Counselor Brenda Kitagawa (brendakitagawa@berkeley.net)

Brenda Kitagawa is one of three AC Counselors. She is responsible for AC students with last names beginning with the letters Gr-Mu and English Learner students in AC. This year AC has two new counselors, Sandra Gomez (A-Go) and Terrance Christianson (My-Z).

The role of counselors is to help students be college eligible and ensure they graduate from high school, but also to help guide them with social issues that come up from year to year. Counselors meet with students before or after school. They can drop in or preferably email or call for an appointment. Parents, too, can make appointments with their student's counselor, and she encourages parents to do so if they have a question or concern.

Ms. Kitagawa highly recommends that students look at page 4 of the handout and map out their courses. This is a good exercise even if you aren't certain what you want to do. She recommends students fill this out and bring it to a meeting with their counselor.

AC Advisory Council Representative Catherine Ference

Ms. Phillips introduced Catherine Ference, a representative of the parents on the Academic Choice Advisory Council (ACAC). Ms. Phillips encouraged parents to get involved with the ACAC and praised the group's efforts in supporting AC events to launch the school year.

Ms. Ference said she wanted to do three things in her presentation: tell parents what the ACAC is, encourage them to get involved and talk about the need for financial support.

She said the ACAC is similar to the PTA in that it includes AC parents but it also includes the AC lead teachers, Mr. Zolezzi and Ms. Green, two student representatives, VP Phillips. The group decides how AC funds are spent, organizes events like tonight's Information Night, raises funds and communicates AC news to the community. Ms. Ference came to her first AC meeting to get some information and ending up sticking around for future meetings. The first part of every meeting is devoted to AC community concerns and questions.

Next, she would like to encourage AC families to get involved. Read the BHS e-tree and especially the AC e-tree to keep up with the latest news. Parents can also chaperone a field trip, contribute to a teacher wish list (<http://www.signupgenius.com/go/10c0944a8ae28a0fe3-wishlist>) or help out at an event like the teacher appreciation lunch. Our school needs you and our kids need you. Please get involved in any way large or small.

Finally, Ms. Ference asked parents to consider making a financial contribution. In November, families will receive requests for contributions both from the Berkeley High Development Group and the ACAC. The Development Group is a non-profit organization that raises money for all of Berkeley High, including classroom grants, support of the College Career Center and providing planners free of charge for all students. AC needs money of its own for AC specific projects such as field trips, graduation events, community building and especially funding a position for an AP Coordinator in the 2016-2017 school year. This position would involve one or two periods of release time for a teacher to support AC students who need extra help in AP classes.

The small learning communities and the Development Group will be working together this year on fundraising. It would be great if parents could give to both organizations. All checks or online donations go through the Development Group so you will be able to designate where you would like your donation to go. For example, if you donate \$100, you can divide it 50-50 or 60-40 between the two organizations (write this on the check or make a note online). Ms. Ference encouraged parents to give some to both. She concluded by saying it was great to see so many people come to this event and she hoped to see them again.

AC Student Representative Avi Peltz (Senior Class)

Avi Peltz is a senior and a morning announcements leader. He gave an unofficial student view of the student experience in AC. He said that students take many of the same classes across schools in freshman and sophomore years. However, by junior year, AC students can choose to take more rigorous AP courses or easier courses. Often courses begin to get more challenging by the spring of sophomore year.

In junior year, students decide how they want to appear to colleges and what kind of student they want to be. AP Language and Composition was one of the best classes he took because he learned to write. He encouraged students to get active in the school community and school-wide activities such as sports and leadership. This allows students to make more diverse friends than they otherwise would.

Mr. Peltz said AP classes are more rigorous, but you can reach out for help. He goes to the College Career Center every day. This is a place where Berkeley High students can get help in any subject. He also visits his counselor a lot and encourages students to visit their counselor often. He urges parents to make sure that students are advocating for themselves.

These presentations were followed by a Q&A Session

Questions for Nakia Baird (math)

Are analytical geometry and trigonometry covered in the math core curriculum?

Yes.

How do curriculum items match common core testing?

The math teachers are not teaching to the test, but the tests ask students to show a depth of understanding, and classroom activities support this. Students in Algebra 2 this year will get the material in a different order, but all math students will end up in the same place.

Who leads Math Lab 1?

Two math teachers who are teaching Math 1 during the day are in charge of the afterschool math lab. Tutors and student tutors also provide support.

What about the tutoring requirement for honors math classes?

Each quarter, honors math students have to complete a certain number of tutoring hours, which are specified on the course syllabus. Mr. Baird is teaching Honors Math Analysis which requires two tutoring hours per quarter. Students are encouraged not to do all the hours early on as it will help them to have more material with which to help others. Tutoring benefits both the tutors and the students they help.

If you have other questions about math at Berkeley High for Mr. Baird, he encourages you to email him (nakiabaird@berkeley.net).

Questions for Tim Zolezzi (history)

What is an AP class?

The historical roots of AP, or Advanced Placement, classes lie in a response to Sputnik in the late 1950s when Americans felt they were falling behind the Soviets in math and science. AP classes were created to provide more challenge, and there was a test at the end of the year that could earn a student college credit for the class. The Cold War ended, but the AP program did not. Fewer colleges take them for credit today, although with some colleges you can still save a lot of money by having AP credits and shortening the necessary time to get a degree.

A student in an AP class at Berkeley High does not have to take the AP test in the spring or report her/his score to colleges. Berkeley High provides subsidies for the test, if needed, because they currently cost \$92 each. AP classes are structured by the College Board and are similar to the Honors classes of the 1970s and 1980s when tracking was popular in schools.

AP classes may or may not have more homework. Mr. Zolezzi said he doesn't believe in assigning a lot of homework and studies have shown diminishing returns, although some might be necessary for math and foreign languages where students need more practice in the subject.

Does Ethnic Studies satisfy the World History requirement?

No. The World History class is offered in tenth grade. Ethnic Studies does satisfy the Berkeley Unified School District's requirement for an ethnic studies and social living course.

My child's teacher is going on maternity leave in the spring. What are you doing to find a substitute?

There is a shortage of teachers in the Bay Area right now. We are looking to hire student teachers who are fulfilling their requirements for accreditation now.

Questions for Brenda Kitagawa (counselor)

Where can I find a list of AC required classes and electives?

The current Berkeley High course catalog is available online in pdf form at the Berkeley High website (see the left-hand menu under "Documents"). That is the best place to look for this information.

Are the UC required "a-g" courses a good measure of requirements for other colleges?

Yes. If a student meets those requirements s/he will be pretty well-prepared to enter most four-year colleges. Page 2 of the handout is a good reference.

Are SAT subject tests required for colleges?

You don't need SAT subject tests for UC's. Many private colleges don't require them, but some Ivy League colleges do, so talk to your counselor or the Berkeley High college advisors.

How often do you talk to students about course progression?

Every year in March counselors work together with students to create schedules for the following year (meeting with them in English classes). Parents and/or students are encouraged to make a private appointment with their counselor if they have specific questions.

How can students get foreign language credit for seventh- and eighth-grade Spanish?

There is a place on college applications for students to put down this information along with the grade received. Colleges will recognize this as a year of foreign language.

Can students take Advanced Biology in tenth grade?

Yes, transfer students and students who did not pass the class can take Advanced Biology after freshman year.

Are there resources to support high school study abroad?

Most students at Berkeley High arrange this on their own, but we do support it. Common programs are AFS Intercultural Programs and CIEE (Council on International Educational Exchange). A student should meet with her/his counselor to discuss which courses to take to accommodate study abroad.

What resources are available for bright kids who don't want to go straight to college?

Gap years are more and more common. One possibility is taking classes at Berkeley City College. There is a new program at Berkeley High where students can take courses at BCC and get credit at both the high school and the community college.

Are letter grades given for PE?

Yes.

Do you need AP classes for UC and CSU?

No. However in AC, all students are required to take AP Government and colleges encourage students to challenge themselves.

Do only varsity athletes get special tutoring support?

Varsity athletes do have a special academic advisor, but other athletes can get tutoring at the College Career Center or with their teachers.

What support do you give for students with IEP (Individualized Education Program) and 504 (students with disabilities)?

Students with IEPs have their own case managers. Students with a 504 should speak to their own counselors individually to talk about what they need.

For students considering a gap year, do you recommend they apply to college in their senior year and then defer?

This is preferred, because it is very challenging to come back and get teacher recommendations later. The UC's don't defer and you must apply again if you get in and decide you want to take a gap year.

Nakia Baird on homework

Mr. Baird said he appreciates that managing a workload at Berkeley High can be difficult. Some classes have more homework than others. Parents should monitor their students and see if tutoring help is needed. He recommends students look at their courses and balance their workload. Some of his students are overwhelmed, but he encourages them to be realistic about course choices. Students don't need to take the highest math course at Berkeley High to major in math in college. High achievers have difficulties saying "no." He encourages students to appreciate that other activities are important, and it's okay not to do everything. He also encourages students to come to teachers for help with managing their workloads.

Questions for Ms. Phillips (Academic Choice Vice Principal)

Do you recommend any online resources like "Alex" to help with AP classes?

I don't know. I'll check and get back to you through the AC e-tree.

What do I do if a teacher doesn't reply to my email?

Try again one more time. If the teacher doesn't reply, email Ms. Phillips. Teachers are busy and may overlook an email unintentionally.

Given the departure of a key teacher, is the African-American Studies department safe?

I have many more questions about the class that was supposed to be taught by the African-American Studies teacher who resigned right before the school year began. I'll answer in more detail later.

What do you do for a class without a qualified substitute teacher?

When we know a teacher will be gone for more than twenty school days, we are obligated to find a teacher credentialed in that subject to replace him/her. In the current environment, it is very difficult to find a credentialed substitute for a part-time position. English teacher Mr. Saliverry went on family leave and it took three and a half weeks to place a long-term substitute in his class. For other classes, we will need to go through the same process. We are aware of planned leaves by other AC teachers and are trying now to plan for that. I take responsibility for not communicating the situation to families and I will do better in the future.

Regarding African-American Studies, it is a challenge to find a credentialed social sciences teacher. It's hard enough to find an Ethnic Studies teacher, but this position also requires a teacher skilled in African-American Studies. So far, we haven't been able to find a qualified teacher. There was a communication failure in that we'd promised the problem would be fixed in late September and that hasn't happened. I plan to share updates on the BHS e-tree and PowerSchool.

Our short-term plan is to cobble together a team of qualified teachers to stabilize and recover learning in the affected classes (i.e. different periods will have different

qualified substitutes). Ms. Green and Mr. Zolezzi are partnering to make sure these teachers are prepared until the long-term substitute is found. Periods 1 and 4 are settled, period 2 should be settled next week, and periods 3 and 6 soon. We currently have a team of people interviewing candidates for a permanent position now.

We know that parents care about their students having a grade for the course. What's going to happen? For students who are not seniors, their semester grade will be the grade they get for the second quarter and there will be no grade in the first quarter. My unofficial opinion is that all students should be given an A for the class time they spent without a teacher.

Seniors need a grade that will stick for their college applications. We will probably give all students A's so as not to penalize them for this situation. The second quarter will become the semester grade, which is what the colleges will see.

We will have hired someone before the end of 2015, before the winter holiday break. I will provide weekly updates via PowerSchool related to this issue. Please contact me with any questions.

We plan to modify the Ethnic Studies curriculum so freshmen in the affected classes can get a concentrated experience of the material.

Will "cobbling together" be a standard practice for the future?

No. Our goal is to fill vacancies with the same teacher all day.

Will we have the same problem with other teachers going out on maternity leave this year?

No. We have notice of their plans and have months to work on this. We are actively looking for qualified substitutes.

The parents on the AC Advisory Council raised long-term substitute issue at the October meeting. All Vice Principals at Berkeley High are trying to be proactive about this problem. We are trying to be more aligned across the board this year and are looking for retired teachers and student teachers to help fill the positions.