

4/5/16 Academic Choice Spring Course Selection Meeting

April 5, 2016, 7:00-8:30 PM Berkeley High School Library

Meeting Notes

The Academic Choice team held its Spring Course Selection Information Night and General Meeting on Tuesday, April 5, 2016. AC Vice Principal, Felicia Phillips chaired the meeting. Amanda Green and Tim Zolezzi represented the AC teachers with Nakia Baird representing the Math Department, Glenn Wolkenfeld representing the Science Department, John Piazza representing World Languages and Ira Holston representing Computer Science. Five AC Advisory Council parent members were present. Approximately 60 AC parents were in attendance. Parents of freshmen and sophomores were well represented.

AC Vice Principal Felicia Phillips (feliciaphillips@berkeley.net) welcomed parents to the meeting and stated the two main purposes: to elect parent leaders for the Academic Choice Advisory Council for 2016-2017 and to talk about course selection, because she knows that many parents want more information about the offerings. She also planned to discuss the BHS Academic Choice Advanced Placement/Honors Course Commitment form, which is a new guideline for the maximum number of AP/Honors courses recommended for each grade level (1 for freshmen, usually honors math; 2 for sophomores; 3 for juniors and seniors). 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 teacher presentations.

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

Mr. Zolezzi said he would begin with sophomore history, because freshman courses were not relevant to the audience. All sophomores are required to take Modern World History. Recently the History Department has made a concerted effort to de-Europeanize the content of the class and now they start with the Golden Age of Islam. In junior year, AC students have three choices for history: traditional US History, African American History, and AP US History. The amount of homework for each class is specific to the teacher. Generally AP US History involves one hour of homework a night and the others average one to two hours per week. What are the deciding factors as to whether to take AP or not? The AP class involves more reading, writing and memorization. If your student enjoys the minutiae of history, this is a good course to take.

All seniors are required to take the AP Government course for one semester, although they can choose whether or not they want to take the AP exam at the end of the year. For the other semester, seniors are required to take an economics class. Economics focuses on budgets, bank accounts, loans and microeconomics. AP Economics is a macroeconomics course and African American Economics focuses on economics and the African American community.

Seniors (and some juniors) can also choose a variety of electives in the History Department. Mr. Zolezzi teaches Sociology / Anthropology which explores the criminal justice system, the education system and the mental health system among other topics from a social sciences perspective. Theoretical Psychology and Black

Psychology/Sociology & Anthropology, as well as Politics and Power and Globalization are also offered.

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

Ms. Green outlined the AC English curriculum. All sophomores take World Literature, and the course will be revamped for the 2016-2017 school year. Juniors can choose AP Language and Composition, which is nonfiction-based with a lot of writing. Students learn 200 to 250 rhetorical strategies and terms, and there is a lot of close reading and analysis. "AP Lang" is one of the best courses to practice the kind of writing you will do in college. Teachers are conscious of the various levels of students in the class, so students should not hesitate to sign up. The other junior English class is American Literature, which will also be revamped and will be taught along the lines of AP Language and Composition. American Lit students will also be encouraged to take the AP exam.

AC seniors have five courses from which to choose. AP English Literature and Composition focuses on fiction and develops students' literary analysis skills. They study diverse authors; this year they are doing a deep analysis of The Bible among other works. Chicano Latino Literature is taught by a very strong teacher and the course covers classical and contemporary literature. Reading and Writing the Short Story deals with short stories in a variety of genres: mystery, children's literature, and others. Students have a lot of fun in the class and are able to do a lot of creative writing. Ms. Green teaches World of Media, a film theory course. Students study film from different angles such as formal analysis, cultural studies, genre studies and directorial theoretical approaches. The class involves a lot of writing and college level reading and is an academic approach to film studies, not just "watching movies." African American Literature focuses on African American authors and takes aesthetic, cultural, social and historical approaches to the works.

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

Mr. Baird described the change in the math curriculum. The Math Department is rolling out a new sequencing for students in the class of 2019 and later, regular or Advanced Math 1, 2 and 3. The new math sequence contains the same material as the older courses—Algebra I and II and Geometry--they are just packaged differently and include more statistics.

After Math 3 or Math Analysis, students can choose AB Calculus, which covers one semester of college calculus, or BC Calculus, which covers two semesters of college and is more intense. They can also take AP Statistics, a lighter course than Calculus, but that allows students to deal with data and understand how it can be misleading, which is important in today's world. The other option, Math Studies, reinforces what students have learned to make sure they are solid in mathematics.

In terms of choosing which math course to take, Mr. Baird encourages students and families to think about the whole package and consider their other classes and activities. It's okay not to do college in high school and you don't have to take an AP class in every subject. In terms of homework, AB Calculus and AP Statistics have 45 minutes to an hour of homework a night. BC Calculus is more variable depending on the student—

usually one hour or more of homework. Math Studies has about 30 minutes of homework a night. Again, he suggests parents talk to their students and look for balance in their course selections.

Science Co-Lead Glenn Wolkenfeld

Mr. Wolkenfeld agrees that the idea of balance is important in student scheduling. In terms of the science course sequence, ninth graders take Advanced Biology. In tenth grade, students have the choice of Chemistry or AP Chemistry. Although the latter is challenging, for some students, it's the right choice. He suggests you ask yourself honestly—can my child handle a college level course now? AP Chemistry is a lot of work, but it's thrilling and challenging material. In eleventh grade students can take Physics, AP Environmental Science, Honors Anatomy and Bio Tech. Bio Tech is a great program that gives students hands-on skill in bio-tech and some students can work in a lab after graduation. Not enough students sign up for the program and he encourages students to sign up for it. Another possibility for juniors and seniors is AP Biology. It's a difficult course and has a lot of homework, but it's fantastic stuff. In twelfth grade, AP Physics opens up as a possibility because students take it concurrently with Calculus. Seniors can also take the courses offered to juniors.

AC Parent Representative Rene Kvidahl on the Class of 2016 Graduation Celebration

Ms. Kvidahl spoke in place of Elisabeth Ross, the ACAC parent coordinator for the 2016 graduation celebration. On Tuesday, June 7 at 6:30 pm, the ACAC will hold a reception to honor our graduates in the Berkeley High Community Theater. The graduates will receive their graduation stoles as they exit the ceremony. The student-designed stoles will be funded by the AC Advisory Council. A dessert and fruit buffet will be provided for students and their guests in the courtyard in front of the theater. This will be a green event.

The committee invites parents of students in all grades to help out and get a preview of graduation. We need volunteers to help procure local flowers, drinks, desserts, cheeses and fruits from local businesses and farm, organize the homemade "finger-food" desserts pot-luck, and help with set-up and cleanup. Parents of juniors are especially encouraged to help out as we hope to make this a tradition to have multi-class participation.

Parents were invited to sign up at the meeting. There will be a general volunteers meeting at Cafe Clem (2020 Kittredge) at 8:30 am on Friday, April 15

World Languages Teacher Representative John Piazza

Ms. Phillips reminded us that Berkeley High offers courses in five foreign languages: Spanish, French, Kiswahili, Mandarin and Latin. Mr. Piazza teaches Latin, but spoke as a representative of the entire World Languages Department. He said foreign language is an elective at Berkeley High, but most people understand how important it is to build proficiency in more than one language. Studies show the benefit of knowing another language. It improves brain function and provides knowledge of another culture on their terms. Students who study foreign language have a measurable increase in empathy. Regardless of the language they study, he hopes students choose to take a

foreign language, whether all the way to the AP level or whether they try a few different languages. Foreign language classes are also a way for AC students to work with students in other small learning communities. If parents have further questions, they can reach out to department lead Cory Henrickson (corehenrickson@berkeley.net) or himself (johnpiazza@berkeley.net).

Computer Science Teacher Representative Ira Holston

Mr. Holston is excited about the growing Computer Science Department, which enables students to learn how to program and think about how we use technology and basic programming in our lives. CS courses are electives, and this year there are 6 full sections of various classes in Computer Science. Introduction to Computer Programming introduces students to Python, Java Script, HTML, CSS and JQuery. AP Java Computer Programming is for students who have already taken a programming course. A new class, AP Computer Science Principles deals with the beauty and joy of computing, including big ideas along with some programming. The Computer Science Department has also organized field trips to Facebook and Pixar and is enjoying the donation of a 3D printer from a BHS parent. The Girls Who Code Club has also taken a field trip to Pandora.

Ms. Phillips concluded the presentation by reminding parents there are courses in African American Studies, Law and Social Justice, Physical Education, Visual and Performing Arts, and Leadership.

Q&A Session with Teachers

Q: My son is transferring to AC from BIHS. Is there anything special he needs to know?

A (Zolezzi): BIHS students take economics as sophomores, while AC students take the class as seniors. Your son will also have to make up one semester of World History, but we will look into what needs to be done. These transfers occur regularly, so it will work out.

Q: Can you address advanced math in the Common Core program and explain the difference between AP and honors classes?

A (Baird): Our Common Core math program includes Advanced Math 1, 2 and 3. Both regular and advanced prepare students for AP Statistics and AB Calculus. Only the advanced courses prepare students for BC Calculus. Honors courses under the old system are accelerated in terms of the material covered. It requires a huge investment of time to do the homework for the advanced math classes. The payoff is one extra semester of college credit, so it may not be worth it for some students. Mr. Baird likens advanced math to taking a math class plus participating in an afterschool sport called "math."

Q: Can you tell me more about the new AP Computer Science course?

A (Holston): AP Computer Science Principles is more like an art class. It includes a major project or two, and students earn AP credit by submitting a portfolio as well as

taking a smaller AP exam. The curriculum was developed by UC Berkeley Professor Dan Garcia and there is more information and previews online.

Q: Realistically speaking, how important is it to take AP classes to improve a student's college choices?

A (Phillips): Ms. Phillips will channel Ms. Price, Berkeley High's senior college counselor, to say that it is better to take a few AP courses and do them well than to take many and perform poorly. This is a good opportunity to talk about the Academic Choice Advanced Placement/Honors Course Commitment form. It is recommended that juniors and seniors take no more than three AP/Honors courses in one year, sophomores two and freshmen one. If students would like to take more, they must discuss their choice with their counselor. Currently the counselors have 70 requests and will begin meeting with these students soon.

Q: What is the total homework load for a sophomore who takes AP Chemistry?

A (Wolkenfeld): Mr. Wolkenfeld can't speak for the total homework load, but AP Chemistry will require at least one hour of homework a day, sometimes more. Plus all AP science classes—AP Chemistry, AP Biology and AP Physics—require two or more extra lab sessions, usually in the morning at 7:30 am. AP Environmental Science requires only one extra hour of lab in the morning or afternoon. This is a semester college course taught over a whole year, so the workload is more reasonable.

Q: How long do students have to change their schedules?

A (Phillips): Students have until Friday, April 8 at 4 pm to make schedule changes. Changes can only be made in the computer lab in the library.

Q: If a student took Bio-Tech as a junior, how important is it to continue as a senior?

A (Wolkenfeld): The course was designed to be a two-year program, so he would encourage taking both years, but please email him and he'll contact the teacher about this.

Q: Can you tell me the difference between Math Analysis and Honors Math Analysis?

A (Baird): Math Analysis prepares a student to take AP Statistics or AB Calculus. Honors Math Analysis is required preparation to take BC Calculus, although these students can also choose AB Calculus or AP Statistics.

Q: Can a student jump from Algebra II to Calculus?

A (Baird): No, but a student can take AP Statistics or Math Studies after Algebra II. You cannot skip Math Analysis and go straight to Calculus.

Q: What are the options for post 7/8 language classes?

A (Piazza): There are more options for French and Spanish. AP happens after the 7/8 class. For Latin and Mandarin, AP and 7/8 are the same class. If you max out, you have to be creative. He has a student who took AP Latin as a junior and is now proctoring for Mr. Piazza and taking a Latin class at UC Berkeley. Another option is to start studying another language.

AC Parent Representative Christine Staples on the Parent/Guardian Survey on Homework

Ms. Staples wanted to send a shout out to the Academic Choice Advisory Council, a place where parents can gather and have a chance to discuss issues related to their students' experiences at Berkeley High. Lead teacher Amanda Green and Vice Principal Phillips listen to our concerns and give the ACAC a chance to do things like organize this informational meeting for parents.

The ACAC has also developed a survey for parents concerning how much homework students are assigned and their stress level. The survey has ten questions and takes five minutes. Parents were encouraged to take the survey immediately in the library's computer lab or to do it later online at:

<https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/ACHomework2016>

AC Advisory Council Elections

The ACAC Spring General Meeting includes elections for the follow year's ACAC officers. Rakhi Rao ran for treasurer, Catherine Ference ran for at-large council member and Donna Storey ran for secretary. All were elected by a unanimous vote of the assembled AC parents.

ACAC Student Representative Alecia Harger was invited to speak and she mentioned that students who participate in student leadership can receive two semesters of credit for executive leadership positions and one semester of credit for the Senate. She recommends this as a valuable experience and an addition way to earn course credit.