

Academic Choice Fall Meeting November 16, 2011, 7:00 – 8:30 PM

Meeting Notes

AC Houses – a commitment to rigorous teaching (Ben Sanoff)

After brief introductions Lead Teacher Ben Sanoff described the goals behind establishing the two AC houses – Moellering House (lead teacher Matt Carton) and House B (still to be named, lead teacher Ben Sanoff). The main two goals are for students to feel more part of a community and for teachers to work more closely with 35 – instead of 70 – peers in building a common rigorous curriculum. The houses are closely associated with English/History cored courses for freshmen and sophomores, who take their classes within their houses. Juniors and seniors, who have more course choices, take courses in both houses. House teachers create common assessments and prepare freshmen and sophomores for AP courses in their junior and senior years. Parents should note that it is NOT expected that students take 5 AP courses – taking 2 is fine.

Clarification of class choices students may make (Matt Carton)

Next year there will be more choices for non AP junior English courses. The first semester will be composition, followed by literature choices in the second semester: currently proposed are women's lit, African American lit, Asian lit, 20th century American drama. AP Language & Composition will continue to be offered.

A parent asked whether Chemistry could be taken freshman year. No, the science curriculum follows a set sequence with integrated science or advanced biology freshman year, followed by chemistry or AP chemistry sophomore year, then a much larger set of offerings in the junior and senior years.

A parent requested that procedures for signing up for 0 and 7 period science labs be better communicated to both students and parents. A show of about a dozen hands indicated problems students have had signing up for science labs. Science questions can be sent to science teachers Monique Debrito (moniquedebrito1@berkeley.net) or Evy Kavalier (evykavalier@berkeley.net).

The electives available in the freshman and sophomore years include languages, arts, music, sports, dance and physical education. It is permissible to take two languages.

Advisers and Counselors – what's the difference? (Matt Carton)

Students have advisory classes once a month with an adviser who is one of their classroom teachers (this will occasionally not be an AC teacher – for example if the advisor is a language teacher). Advisers have about 25 students each. They check in with their students about grades, serve as advocates for students' needs, and teach materials prepared by the professional development team.

Counselors have a case load of about 500 students across all of Berkeley High (not by small school). They authorize course changes. Some worries were expressed that counselors take too long responding to requests for course changes, so that it becomes too late to do anything.

Resources for struggling students (Jessie Luxford)

New this year, and partially paid for by AC Advisory Council fundraising, is Jessie Luxford, the Resource Coordinator who supports three groups of students. She works with (1) freshmen who need to strengthen their studying skills (she teaches organization and course taking skills, provides homework support, shows them how to be advocates for themselves); (2) sophomores who failed freshman English (English teaching so that they can make up that class, homework support, work with a computer program that prepares them for the exit exam); (3) students who got a 2-3 GPA freshman year, but are now getting one or more Ds or Fs (she acts as their advisor and meets with them during lunch and before/after school).

Matt Carton reported that he has already seen results from her work with these students.

Academic Choice Advisory Council -ACAC (Lawrence Grown)

The parents elected to the ACAC described the work they do for AC. Lawrence Grown is the Parent Coordinator. His eldest daughter graduated from AC last year and he has a sophomore daughter in AC now. He has a lot of experience with AC, so if you have any questions about anything send him an email at lawrence@metrolighting.com. Also, be on the lookout for his emails requesting volunteer help.

Lawrence also presented the report from Barbara Anscher, ACAC parent rep for student support:

- After school tutoring is available in the College & Career Center until 6pm, staffed by teachers and UC students, and coordinated by Wyn Skeels (wynskeels@berkeley.net).
- Computers are available after school until 6 in the College & Career Center for any students that need them.
- UC Readers give feedback on 9th and 10th grade history papers in the spring.
- Parent writing tutors are sought for supporting English students – if interested please send an email to Barbara Anscher barbaraanscher@yahoo.com

A brief history of Academic Choice (Alex Angell)

About ten years ago small communities were created within Berkeley High with the belief that they would be more effective at delivering education. Some of these small learning schools wanted to promote opportunities beyond academic preparation. In response a group of parents and teachers created Academic Choice

with the primary goal of providing rigorous academic preparation for college. Its success resulted ultimately in the creation of the Berkeley International High School (under principal Slep) and in increasing academic rigor in the other small learning communities (under principal Scuderi). Parent commitments of time, ideas and money can help AC in its goals of academic rigor and providing the learning support for all students to have the opportunity to take AP courses.

ACAC Finances and Fundraising (Olga Volodina)

In the 2010/2011 school year ACAC funds provided:

- \$20,000 for the newly created (proposed and lobbied for by ACAC) position of Resource Coordinator
- \$4,000 for UC Berkeley student readers who provide Freshman and Sophomore students with feedback on their history research papers
- \$4,000 for the newly instituted AC commencement
- \$1,000 for a 3 day teacher workshop to introduce the AC Humanities teachers to common AP concepts, expectations and curriculum
- \$1,000 for teacher appreciation lunches

As you can see, the funds parents provide to ACAC allow it to create new opportunities for learning and community building within AC.

To date for the 2011/2012 school year ACAC has raised \$17,000 against planned expenditures of \$40,00, which include:

- \$20,000 towards the resource coordinator position
- \$5,000 for UC Berkeley student readers
- \$3,000 for graphing calculators
- \$5,000 for AC commencement – each senior will receive an AC sash as a gift
- \$1,000 for teacher appreciation lunches
- \$2,000 for mailing, copying and communications

ACAC needs your continued support to make this possible!

ACAC Volunteer Committees (Lawrence Grown and Lenore Goldman)

Parents are encouraged to sign up for volunteer opportunities in the following areas. Send email to lawrence@metrolighting.com if interested:

- Fundraising (House Parties, Grants, Direct Mail, BHS Live)
- Academics/Enrichment (UC Reader, Writing Tutors, AP World History, Social Living)
- Parent/Community Outreach (Latino Parent Liaison/Parent Resource Center, Community Building Events, Community Service Events, General Meetings, Diversity, PTSA events)
- Commencement
- Communications (Website, e-tree, middle school presentations)