



SPOTLIGHT ON SUCCESS



STRATEGIES FOR
EQUITY & ACCESS

Boot Camp for AP[®] Students

San Pasqual High School (Escondido, California)

Preparing for AP

Several years ago, AP students at San Pasqual High School did not reflect the school's diversity. Teachers came together to include a broader population in the program, including underserved students, and worked to remove barriers for them. Faculty realized that many students who were taking an AP class for the first time would need to improve essential skills to succeed. To make sure the students were ready, Jacob Clifford created a boot camp for AP students, a program designed to develop students' essential skills through experiential learning activities.

Boot camp does not put its focus on the content of any particular AP course but, instead, focuses on developing five essential skills: teamwork, communication, organization, reading and problem solving (aka T-CORPS). Improvising on the idea of a military boot camp, students create platoons and compete in skills events to practice each of the T-CORPS skills. Each event includes specific hands-on learning activities that allow students to reflect upon their performance, discuss how they can improve, and set goals for the future.

The Spider Web is one example. A web is constructed using rope or string and PVC pipe frame, trees or even pillars, and all the participants must get from one side of the web to the other following a specific set of rules. In a debriefing session, students talk about the practical application of the activity and how it directly relates to the classroom. The Spider Web becomes an analogy for their AP class. Students learn that they cannot get through obstacles (physical or academic) without working together. Stronger students have a responsibility to help their peers because the class can't move forward if they leave people behind. Students also learn the benefits of planning and taking time to do something correctly the first time.

Gaining Confidence

Students can participate in one AP boot camp for multiple subjects. Students are more willing to help each other understand challenging concepts and participate in class discussions. Student who were weak academically, but strong in boot camp, gain confidence in the classroom.



"Open access in AP is great as long as there is something in place to make sure the kids are ready, and that their skills are up to speed. You don't want to knock out those kids who are trying for the first time, and then they drop out and tell their friends that AP is too hard."

— Jacob Clifford, AP Economics Teacher

San Pasqual High School's underserved AP students increased their 3+ scores from 42% to 68% from 2007 to 2010.



What you need:

- Faculty and/or former students to act as boot camp instructors and supervise platoons, guide them through the different activities and keep track of scores.
- Supplies for the skills events.
- Meeting space, and time to hold the boot camp (possibly the first four days of school, or three days during the summer, shortly before school starts).
- T-shirts and/or bandannas to help create team spirit (optional).

What you need to know:

One of the biggest challenges in starting a boot camp is administrative buy-in. Clifford prefers holding boot camp in the first four days of school because more students are able to attend. He views the 3 percent of the year that he spends on boot camp as an invaluable investment. Boot camp students are more productive because they are excited and prepared.

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Demographics

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