

# Academy for College Excellence



*A Transformative*  
EDUCATION FOR THE  
DIGITAL AGE

by Diego James Navarro

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**a transformative  
education to bridge  
the digital divide**

# an introduction

*“Joining the Academy for College Excellence has helped me to look [at] and understand the world in [a] whole different perspective.” – Alex, ACE Student*

## The Academy for College Excellence

For a large and growing population of disadvantaged young adults, the path to higher education seems impossibly steep. Far too many emerge from high school academically and personally unprepared for college work. For low-income and under-prepared students community colleges represent the only realistic avenue to higher education. Unfortunately, these students have not been well served by our community colleges. We need to find new ways to approach these students with a transformative educational experience that will enable them to overcome their history of low academic achievement.

At the same time, with the world’s economy increasingly driven by digital technologies and a growing demand for knowledge workers with college degrees, the United States can no longer afford to let significant numbers of students drift away from community colleges without the essential knowledge, technical skills, and credentials employers seek.

The Academy for College Excellence (ACE) targets the needs of under-prepared and at-risk students while equipping them to succeed in the technology-driven 21st century economy. With higher retention rates than the average community college student population and improved academic success for students, ACE has been remarkably successful. A highly collaborative enterprise that teaches teamwork and personal responsibility, ACE’s approach also promotes individuals’ self-exploration, self-improvement, and persistence. The result is a transformational learning experience unlike any its students have previously known.

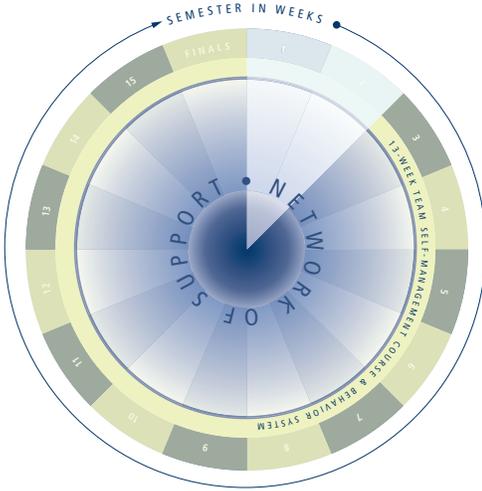
ACE’s curriculum includes an array of proven and innovative strategies that give at-risk students the best chance to move successfully into regular community college academic programs. ACE’s semester of college-credit courses lights the fire of intellectual curiosity in students and accelerates the acquisition of skills essential for academic success. Most importantly, ACE helps students take charge of their learning through innovative teaching methods that create conditions supportive of learning in their minds, bodies, and lives. The ACE semester lets students reclaim the educational experience as their own and gives them a secure foothold on pathways to knowledge-based careers.



*“ACE had a substantial impact on the self-efficacy of students, as reflected in their relative improvements in GPA, retention, persistence, and willingness to risk letter grades, which are necessary to accumulate credits required for a degree.”*

**– Norena Norton Badway**  
National Science Foundation-funded  
External Evaluator

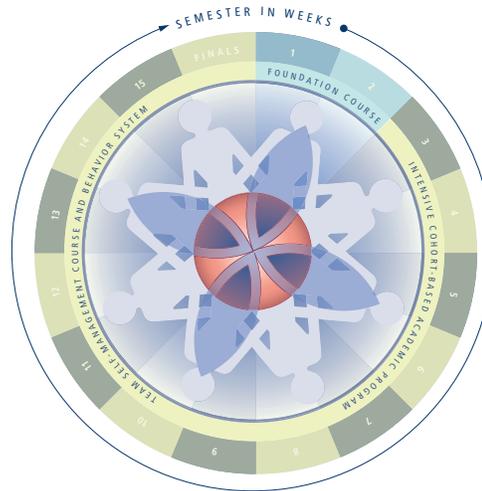
# Structure of ACE



## GETTING STUDENTS TO BELIEVE THEY CAN DO IT

### CREATING A NETWORK OF SUPPORT

- 2-WEEK FOUNDATION COURSE
- 13-WEEK TEAM SELF-MANAGEMENT COURSE AND BEHAVIOR SYSTEM



## ACE INTENSIVE COHORT-BASED BRIDGE SEMESTER

- WITH NETWORK OF SUPPORT IN PLACE, ACADEMIC PROGRAM CAN BE ADDED
- THIRTEEN-WEEK COHORT-BASED ACADEMIC PROGRAM COMPRISES:
  - CORE SOCIAL JUSTICE PROJECT-BASED COURSE
  - PLUS 4 FEEDER COURSES IN: LITERACY; INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY; MOVEMENT; CAREER PLANNING

The academic semester is preceded by an intensive, two-week Foundation Course that focuses on students' personal development. There is an intentional departure from traditional teaching methods that have been unsuccessful in the past for these under-prepared adult students, in order to reset their approach to formal education. As the students gain insights into their strengths and working styles and learn new communication skills, they prepare to take on the accelerated academics that follow during the Bridge Semester.

All ACE's components work together to make the semester—which is the first semester of college that most ACE students attend full time—positive and productive, which proves to students that they can successfully carry a full load of college-level courses. The 16 associate degree credits that students can earn during the Foundation Course and Bridge Semester also add momentum to students' degree aspirations. Researchers consider acquisition of 20 credits during the freshman year critical to degree completion; ACE gets most of its students more than halfway toward this crucial benchmark. ACE students persist in college-level courses at higher rates than similarly under-prepared students in the general student population at Cabrillo College.

Underpinning ACE are the tandem effects of its Behavior System and its Team Self-Management Course, which together make up ACE's Student-Centered Self-Efficacy Persistence Model. The Behavior System provides structure for the Academy's high expectations of student responsibility that are commonly held through all of the ACE courses. The Team Self-Management Course reinforces the Behavior System, as it explicitly teaches students how to navigate college and encourages them to help one another. It also teaches the soft skills—the ability to work in groups as well as to write and speak effectively for group presentations—that are essential for success both in college and in knowledge-based workplaces. In part, the Behavior System and Team Self-Management Course incorporate insights from recent neurological research to improve concentration and cultivate mindfulness. Student support is also provided by the students themselves in this cohort-based program.

As other California community colleges adopt the ACE model, it is proving to be as effective with urban, minority students as it has been with rural, Latino students. As a classroom-based solution with funding based on the usual calculation of full-time equivalent students (FTES), ACE is sustainable and scalable.

ACE's innovative approach moves at-risk students from the margins of higher education onto knowledge-based career paths. Most ACE students graduated from high school with low grades and few college preparatory courses. Some of the students are not high school graduates. The program's accelerated curriculum and unique pedagogy help launch these under-prepared adult students in associate degree programs, including transfer degree programs in engineering, healthcare, information technology, counseling, social work, business, management and education. All of these fields depend on digital technologies and knowledge-based skills.

## The Nature of Under-Prepared Students

Under-prepared students are by definition at-risk. Their previous educational experiences may have been negative, and in any case they have not been adequately prepared for college work. Often at-risk students are also people of color who have historically been underrepresented in higher education institutions; many have low incomes, the most common factor associated with being under-prepared for college. Many ACE students are considered at-risk due to their status as the first in their families to attend college. Some of the students are older than traditional, college-age students. Many have full-time jobs and family responsibilities competing for their time and attention. The realities of most ACE students' lives mean their days are filled with challenges far more difficult and complex than simply having to support themselves while going to college.



facts

- ACE students range in age from 17 to 55 years old.
- 91% of the students are Latino or are from other underrepresented minority groups.
- 70% did not speak English as their first language.
- 63% have parents who work in migrant labor occupations.
- 65% are the first in their families to attend college.

### Demographics of Students at ACE in Watsonville, California

78% or more of ACE students enroll at Cabrillo College again after the Bridge Semester.

Many of ACE's students have lived in violent or socially unstable environments. In these settings, just getting through the day requires a hyper-vigilant awareness of one's surroundings and potential dangers. While useful for self-preservation, hyper-vigilance creates a constant state of alertness in the nervous system, which makes it difficult to concentrate in school or at work.

ACE, therefore, endeavors to teach students how to learn more effectively. It focuses on building students' self-efficacy to promote learning. It affirms the core conviction that at-risk adult students possess the capacity to master new skills quickly, and are able to succeed in accelerated learning environments where college-level academic performance and mature behaviors are expected, as long as their complex needs are addressed. ACE experiential exercises help students set high personal goals, such as continuous college enrollment. They also cultivate students' acquisition of mature self-awareness. This helps students understand how their personal histories influence their strengths and weaknesses. ACE prepares students to acquire academic and career skills simultaneously because the real world demands mastery of both. ACE cultivates self-motivation as a means for persistence in degree programs, yet recognizes that self-motivation is much easier to maintain when support systems are handy and reliable. ACE recognizes that many of its students have not experienced success in other educational environments and that the sometimes-lengthy process of remedial education can discourage students and prompt them to drop out. It accommodates the messiness of learning and considers mistakes to be potential sources for growth, and not exit points.

*"I learned a lot about myself, and what my strengths, weaknesses and challenges are. These are things that I did not know about myself. I also learned that in order to have a happier life I need to not only know but apply everything I have learned."*

– Felipe, ACE Student

## The Culture of Evidence and Continuous Improvement



**Model Program selected by U.S. Department of Education—Community Colleges Can! 2008.** One of eight programs selected from 100 community college programs nationwide.

**Honorable Mention, Excelencia! In Education Award, 2007—What Works for Latino Students in Higher Education.**

**Model Program Highlighted in Practices with Promise Report, 2007—**A collection of working solutions selected by Campaign for College Opportunity.

**Winner, John W. Rice Diversity and Equity Award, 2007,** California Community Colleges Board of Governors.

**Model program featured in “Bridges to Careers for Low Skills Adults”** by Women Employed, Great Cities Institute (UIC) and the Chicago Jobs Council, 2005.

**Exemplary Basic Skills Program, by The Center for Student Success & The Research & Planning Group for California Community Colleges (aka “Poppy Copy”), 2007.**

A culture of evidence and continuous improvement permeates ACE. ACE systematically uses an array of instruments to gather quantitative and qualitative data about students and their progress, about the effects of its faculty training program and about other aspects of the program. This information informs decisions about operational practices and refinements to ACE’s curriculum and pedagogy and about the kinds of support that students and faculty need. It also provides data for external evaluations that help understand the broader impacts of ACE and meet the requirements of ACE’s funders..

“We want to acknowledge from the outset that we have not previously encountered *any* program that collects such a range of data and uses such a variety of methods to collect the data,” Norena Norton Badway wrote in her first formative assessment of ACE in 2005. Badway is an independent evaluator whose studies of ACE cohorts examined student outcomes and the overall impact of ACE on students’ lives. The Center for Justice, Tolerance & Community at the University of California, Santa Cruz, has examined ACE’s faculty development institutes and its approach to program expansion. The ACE Center has planned a five-year longitudinal study, looking at how and why ACE works, as well as issues of selection bias. The ACE Center has chosen MPR Associates, based in Berkeley, CA as our external evaluator for this study of all ACE Partner Colleges’ implementations.

ACE systematically collects data in layers over time as students progress through the program. It also collects feedback from faculty during ACE training institutes. Intake data collection includes a rich set of student demo-

graphic data. Through forms, interviews and standardized assessment tools, including academic placement tests and tests of self-esteem and academic vulnerability, more layers of data develop. Data collection is especially intensive during the Foundation Course and continues in a somewhat less intensive manner after that. In the Foundation Course, students are tested for their learning styles and asked for feedback on course activities on a daily basis (described in some detail below). ACE also surveys students before and after the Foundation Course and at the end of the Bridge Semester.

Students’ daily evaluations of the Foundation Course are one example of ACE’s detailed data collection. Each eight-hour day of the Foundation Course ends with students rating

every experiential exercise by placing colored dots in a visual evaluation—green for “fantastic,” yellow for “OK,” and red for “needs work” on the day’s agenda flip chart. The students are expected

*“The evidence to date is that under-prepared, at-risk students thrive in this full-time, thoughtfully designed intervention semester. ACE (Academy for College Excellence) evidence suggests a need to re-examine beliefs about sheltering at-risk, under-prepared students.”*

— Norena Norton Badway  
National Science Foundation-funded  
External Evaluator

to reflect on the day's activities overnight and to discuss what they learned the next morning. Students also share their reasons for grading exercises with particular colors and explain which lessons resonated with them. Getting students to reflect on particular topics and articulate what happened to them in the previous day's exercises is a skill-building activity for knowledge-based workplaces that depend on reflection for innovation. The detailed evaluation process of the Foundation Course by students also informs ACE's continuous improvement efforts. Students' comments during the discussions are recorded on flip charts, which are preserved along with photos of the colored dots visual evaluation. Faculty members refer to them and other data when they revise the curriculum for the next semester. ACE Director Diego Navarro estimates that about five percent of ACE's curriculum and pedagogy are being re-crafted at any given time.

The continuous feedback loop serves other purposes in addition to program improvement. It provides immediate evidence to students that their opinions matter and that they are part of a community of learners. It also prepares students for knowledge-based careers that expect people to strive for continuous improvement. "Our goal is to create a community of practice based on reflections because we are all learning together," Navarro said. Faculty also have the opportunity to assess and reflect during weekly meetings.



## The Foundation Course – Lighting the Fire Within

The Foundation Course is where the transformation begins. It explicitly teaches students to understand themselves as individual learners, to work in teams, and to be comfortable operating in knowledge-based cultures. It does all this through experiential exercises that help students gain new understanding of themselves and academic culture.

ACE helps individuals accomplish dramatic changes in a short period of time because of the design of the Foundation Course. Just as one learns a new language best when living in a foreign country, the immersive quality of the Foundation Course resets students' learning patterns and facilitates students' bonding with each other in their Academy cohorts. The Foundation Course meets for six to eight hours each day for two weeks; it focuses on students gaining self-understanding and acquiring more sophisticated communications skills. Classroom activities and assignments help students appreciate their own and other students' learning and communication styles. Students learn about the history of the industrialization of public education and examine their previous school experiences in the context of national trends. They learn how to deal with different teaching styles and how to work in teams. The students are surrounded by peers and instructors who support their academic and career ambitions. The bonds that develop within the cohorts become a round-the-clock, readily available support system that helps students deal with distractions and difficulties in their complex lives.



## ACE's Student-Centered Persistence Model

### THREE APPROACHES

#### 1. Lighting the Fire for Learning & Attitude of Success

- Approach 1: ACE Foundation Course

#### 2. Focusing the Mind and Building Student's Success Capacity

- Approach 2: ACE Low-Cost Student-Centered Self-Efficacy Persistence Model—Team Self-Management Course & Behavior System

#### 3. Accelerating to Full-time College-Level Performance

- Approach 3: ACE Intensive Cohort-Based Bridge Semester

*"The evidence is strong that something happens in the Foundation Course that seizes the attention and motivation of this population of predominantly ethnic minority students for whom English is a second language and whose families are migrant laborers, even when those students have not completed high school."*

— Norena Norton Badway  
National Science Foundation-funded  
External Evaluator

*"I want to acknowledge everything I learned in the two weeks, and apply it to my life, for as long as I can. This class is one of the most interesting things that I have ever taken in my entire school years."*

— Alondra, ACE Student

*“The knowledge I have acquired within the two-week Foundation Course of the Academy for College Excellence is knowledge I can use for the rest of my life. I feel as if the depth of my perception has been expanded, enabling me to pinpoint what I can do in order to improve my learning environment.”*

– Ruby, ACE Student

*“So much of me has changed in just two weeks. I find myself to be a more open-minded person now. It’s a really great feeling to be able to wake up everyday and know what I’m actually going to do in my life. I don’t feel like I’m trapped in the shadows anymore.”*

– Gabi, ACE Student

*Effective practices from business, education, psychology, and other fields used in the Foundation Course include:*

The Foundation Course’s highly interactive pedagogy generates a positive dynamic between students and faculty. Faculty members create affirming, safe learning environments in order to reach ACE students who may have experienced unsafe situations. Most under-prepared students have had negative school experiences, so ACE faculty members purposely engage students in experiential activities—some are fanciful while others are emotionally challenging—that differ markedly from their previous schooling. At times, faculty share aspects of their personal lives in order to capture students’ attention, to reinforce certain points, and to build trust. The haven that faculty create at ACE, where put-downs and other negative behaviors are not allowed, also frees students. Consequently, students willingly work on exercises to reevaluate their past educational experiences and think critically about what they want from their community college education. By engaging students in Socratic dialogue, faculty further guide students to tap into their life experiences and recognize their strengths and innate talents. The experiential learning cycle of action, reflection, generalization, and application also prepares students to use organizational practices that are essential for knowledge-based careers.

By the end of the two-week Foundation Course students are able not only to identify their strengths and weaknesses, they know how to build on their strengths and to compensate for their weaknesses. The emphasis on self-knowledge and authentic communication results in students knowing the conditions that they need to create for themselves to be successful learners. The development of intrinsic support systems within cohorts underpins ACE and adds to its portability, flexibility, and affordability.

Michael Sturm’s “Spherical Dynamics” ([www.5dynamics.com](http://www.5dynamics.com)) optimizes the strengths of individuals so that they can focus their learning and social interactive processes at work and in school. Students identify, become aware of and explore their own dynamic learning strengths and the different style strengths of others. This focused energetic process becomes the basis of the Foundation Course’s applications with students on how they successfully learn as individuals and teams; how they maximize their relationships with others; and how they and other people complete various learning tasks differently. The class’ programmed experiences guide team leaders and paired students on how to use the complementary learning strengths of others to achieve excellence more effortlessly and efficiently.

The Dynamic Leadership Program by Conversant Solutions, LLC, which is used by corporations nationally to educate top executives and managers in effective communication and leadership. The Foundation Course uses aspects of this program to teach students how to lead, negotiate, and how to give and take directions.

The Alternatives to Violence Project, which is used by communities, schools, and prisons to help people live nonviolently. It helps people build relationships using affirmation, respect, cooperation, humor, and trust. The Foundation Course uses the project’s learning games and has adapted its structure and rhythm to build community among cohort members.

Nonviolent Communication, which Psychologist Marshall B. Rosenberg developed to help people respond compassionately to each other and resolve conflicts without violence. The Foundation Course uses aspects of Rosenberg’s communications skills to help students understand the difference between needs and feelings. It also guides students in ways to communicate effectively during disagreements without using negative language.



## Student-Centered Self-Efficacy Persistence Model – Creating Networks of Support

Underpinning the entire Academy for College Excellence is its system of Student-Centered Self-Efficacy Persistence Model. The two components of this system are the student Behavior System and the Team Self-Management Course. The Behavior System integrates behavior-shaping activities, rewards, and natural consequences to help students learn the cultural and behavioral requirements for success in knowledge-based environments. The Team Self-Management Course focuses on the choices students make and decodes the hidden rules of academe and work that may not be obvious to at-risk students. The Behavior System also tracks students' attendance, timeliness, completion of assignments, academic attentiveness, and use of appropriate language. Because of the cohort structure of ACE and its emphasis on teamwork, students form close bonds. As a result, students also gain much of the support they need to persevere in this demanding system from each other.

Beginning with the Foundation Course and continuing throughout the semester, faculty members model and explain why it is necessary for professionals to arrive on time, and also emphasize interacting appropriately with instructors and students, studying, refraining from side conversations, and avoiding other behaviors that interfere with learning.

During the Foundation Course, the behaviors that the faculty focus on with students are arriving on time to class, turning assignments in on time, and appreciating school. The two-week course is a period during which students experience what it takes for them to come to campus daily, arrive on time, stay for eight hours, and interact continuously with faculty and other students.

The Behavior System reinforces the behaviors, personal skills, and supportive relationships that are explicitly cultivated among the students during the Team Self-Management Course. In the Team Self-Management Course students learn to focus, to plan, to understand how their personal background affects their learning process, and how to make informed choices. Involving students in support networks for each other taps their capacities in ways that add to the educational effectiveness of the entire endeavor.

In ACE students learn to accept responsibility for their actions, navigate the cultural terrain of college, and maintain academic momentum through the activities in the classrooms. Three times during the Bridge Semester, faculty rate students on more than a half-dozen areas that highlight their strengths, such as their work on teams, follow through, participation in large group activities, being focused, and not distracting others. It should be understood that the Behavior System is more than a tracking system. It is part of the curriculum—the content the faculty teach—and the pedagogy—how faculty teach—that guide students in their development of positive behaviors.

During the Bridge Semester, faculty members use composites of these various ratings to determine when they need to talk individually with students about their behaviors or otherwise intervene to support students' progress. During weekly meetings, the faculty members consider students' progress in the individual courses and as a group, and they also check each student's composite behaviors across all the Bridge Semester courses. The purpose of this weekly activity is to identify quickly which student behaviors might benefit from inquiry by individual instructors or the entire faculty group. This system accomplishes remarkable results while maintaining a very positive atmosphere.



### *ACE's Traits of Successful Students:*

- Trait #1 Successful students attend every class.
- Trait #2 Successful students come to class on time and stay for the entire period.
- Trait #3 Successful students take exams.
- Trait #4 Successful students are prepared for class and complete their homework on time.
- Trait #5 Successful students pay attention in class, stay focused, and do not distract others from doing their work.

# bridge semester

## ACE's Intensive, Cohort-Based Bridge Semester – Connecting Students to Knowledge-Based Careers

The Bridge Semester helps students gain academic momentum to follow up on the transformative experience of the Foundation Course. Its thorough integration of six, associate degree credit courses is an ambitious variation of a Learning Community, which is typically comprised of only two or three linked courses. The Bridge Semester is also distinctive because of the many opportunities it provides for students to apply immediately what they learn.

The Bridge Semester has two main components:

- Academic acceleration of its six linked academic courses
- ACE's Behavior System, which works in tandem with the Team Self-Management Course, one of the six courses

*“Before taking the bridge semester, I tended to be more of a follower than a leader. Now in my life I tend to be more of a leader [than] a follower. I'm now being a leader by just pursuing my goal of going into law enforcement. Maybe, I [will] inspire someone.”*

– Jose A., ACE Student

ACE students move as a cohort to the Bridge Semester after successfully completing the two-week, three-credit Foundation Course. The Bridge Semester is 13 weeks of accelerated academic work in six integrated courses (comprising 13 academic units). At the core of the semester's work is the project-based course in which student teams conduct research and report on local social justice issues. The project-based course sets the pace for feeder courses in Literacy, Information Technology, Movement (physical education, also coordinated), and Career Planning. In the feeder courses students learn academic and technical skills “just-in-time” to apply them to their projects. The Team Self-Management Course builds on the self-awareness, self-esteem, and communications lessons of the Foundation Course, and helps students manage the challenges that accompany their lives as college students and future knowledge workers. For pedagogical and practical reasons the Bridge Semester is structured as a full-time program.

Having a cohort of students attend six courses together builds a sense of community. Faculty members' investment of time and thought in the course integration process builds a sense of community for them as well. The opportunity to apply what they learn immediately to meaningful projects reinforces and energizes students' educational experience. From a practical standpoint, the block scheduling of the Bridge Semester ensures that students are not closed out of classes and that as full-time students they qualify for the full complement of financial aid. This is an important factor for the program's sustainability.

ACE's operating costs are supported by the college's usual funding streams from tuition, fees, and state appropriations, which are all based on calculations of full-time equivalent students (FTES).

The integration of the Bridge Semester curriculum is a detailed, systematic process that involves careful planning by ACE faculty members. At pre-semester meetings, faculty members identify mastery skills for academics, self-discipline, and leadership. They then analyze the mastery skills for each course, and sequence the skills across the curriculum for each

course that feeds into the project-based course. In addition, faculty members meet weekly during the semester to make adjustments based on the particular needs of each student cohort. During



### ACE Bridge Semester Courses:

- Social Justice Project-based Course
- Team Self Management Course
- Literacy Course
- Information Technology Course
- Career Planning Course
- Movement Course

## *Academy for College Excellence faculty work in teams to:*

- Provide safe and stimulating learning environments for students to explore, experience and understand their gifts, strengths, weaknesses, and inner voices
- Help students identify choices that will improve their lives and help them succeed
- Guide students to motivate and organize themselves
- Focus on academic acceleration, not remediation
- Treat students with trust, respect, compassion, and empathy
- Provide clear expectations and guidelines
- Deal with students on an individual basis that considers the complexities of students' lives and accommodates students' personal difficulties when necessary
- Teach both academic and knowledge-career skills
- Track students' performance in both academic and career skills

these weekly meetings, faculty also check individual students' progress within ACE's Behavior System.

The project-based course acts as the core for sequencing the mastery skills from all the other Bridge Semester courses. The projects provide opportunities for students to conduct primary research on local social justice issues that interest and affect them. Among the topics ACE students have studied are:

- Poverty's impact on children in Watsonville
- Gangs' appeal to youth
- The impact of domestic and other types of violence on the community
- The community's assistance in re-assimilating gang members.

Researching issues like these galvanize ACE students' attention and drive them to complete their academic assignments. The curriculum integration adds an immediacy to all the academic subjects that energizes and engages students.

The Bridge Semester intentionally contains a number of "stretch objectives," which are modeled on the business practice of setting extremely high expectations as a way of getting people to attain goals they would not otherwise attempt. "Expectations have a lot to do with success," Navarro said, explaining that while not every goal is met, more gets accomplished with high expectations than low. Part of what this means at ACE is that students do the critical thinking involved in primary research even before they possess the skills to synthesize secondary research. They craft quantitative and qualitative research questions, do needs analyses, write survey questions, conduct face-to-face interviews, code data on spread sheets, create PowerPoint presentations, and present their reports in large public meetings. ACE students, who in other settings would be placed in remedial classes, learn the scientific method and other higher order thinking skills by using them to complete their social justice projects.

Utilizing research on multiple intelligences, the Movement Course focuses on kinesthetic learning as a way of processing information through the body. Its main goals are for students to learn how to use their bodies as sensory vehicles that enable them to know themselves better, to gain kinesthetic learning skills, to develop self-discipline, and to build teams and understand how teams work.

## *Accelerated Elements of the ACE Curriculum:*

- Full-time attendance
- Self-knowledge
- Behavioral learning
- Culture of knowledge-work
- Community building
- Academic skills

### *Major influences of the Bridge Semester curriculum include:*

Marcia Heiman's Learning to Learn Curriculum, which helps students learn study skills, such as how to take good notes, prepare for exams, and ask good questions.

Hewlett-Packard Lab's product-development processes, which explain how knowledge-based businesses identify consumer needs.

Neurologists' research on neuroplasticity, which indicate that positive experiences, such as concentration, can improve the structure of the brain.

# change...

## A Time for Change



*"I have always wanted to do well in school but I always had trouble learning; I was always getting distracted and getting bored in class. Now I have joined an academy that has taught me useful things I will need for my learning and for my future."*

– Juan Diego, ACE Student

*"My priorities in life now are not to worry about the past anymore but to complete my college career and make a wonderful life with my family."*

– Maura, ACE Student

It's time for community colleges to change the way they approach vulnerable students, giving them a better chance to succeed. While change is not always easy in an institution as large as a college, the rewards are far reaching. This requires challenging our assumptions about what students need and learning to interact with them in an authentic and respectful way.

Some practitioners and researchers are beginning to conclude that intensity of programs is important to the success of basic skill students. Intensity goes against the current adage that it is important that vulnerable students take only a few courses to get their feet wet, that we don't want to scare them away by asking too much of them. ACE is testing the hypothesis that intensity of the program helps students succeed and to commit to their own education. Students who have survived the harsh realities of life have the built-in capacity to succeed, thrive and persist given the right environment. They can withstand the sometimes alienating environment of our commuter college design if given the chance to learn in an intense community. These students are survivors, like the green blades of grass forcing themselves through the cracks in the concrete of our cities.

**The evidence to date is that under-prepared, at-risk students thrive in this full-time, thoughtfully designed intervention semester.**

**For more information, please contact:**

Academy for College Excellence  
831-477-3343, [info@my-ace.org](mailto:info@my-ace.org), or  
visit our website at [www.my-ace.org](http://www.my-ace.org)