

## A Desire to Serve

The idea for the Academy for College Excellence (ACE) was born in 1999 as founder [Diego James Navarro](#) envisioned a program through which he could help people in poverty transform their lives through higher education.



Diego applied process design methods he had learned as a researcher at Hewlett-Packard Labs. Using the tools of his corporate experience, he assessed the needs of underprepared and at-risk youth and set out to design a program that would enable these members of our society to transcend their poor educational experiences of the past to become successful community college students and successful professionals.

## The Beginning

During 18 months of research, Diego interviewed 125 experts around the country whom had worked with young adults. He thoroughly reviewed 36 existing curricula. Selecting nine of these curricula, he held five pilots to determine the elements of each that could make the new program most effective. Student feedback was collected after each pilot to continually improve the curricula. Different elements of these pilots are now incorporated into the two-week intensive known as the *Foundation Course*, the cornerstone of the ACE Semester.

In the fall of 2003, the first student cohort was taught at the Cabrillo College Center in Watsonville, California. The targeted population was Latino students from the local rural agricultural community. An outstanding team of faculty from Cabrillo College joined Diego to refine and develop the specialized curriculum. They included Sue Nerton, Marcy Alan Craig, Deborah Shulman, and Regina DeCoss.

The original program was named [Digital Bridge Academy](#) (DBA) to express the idea of helping poor and unprepared students bridge the digital divide that separates them from careers in our knowledge-based economy. In 2010, the name was changed to [Academy for College Excellence](#) (ACE) to better represent the delivery of transformative educational experiences that result in exceptional student outcomes.



## College Partnerships

As the successes of ACE became known, other colleges sought to adopt the program and adapt it to the unique needs of their communities. In 2006, three other community colleges in northern California conducted cohorts: Las Positas College (Livermore), College of Alameda (Alameda) and Merritt College (Oakland). Today, ACE cohorts are in place at Cabrillo and at these other community colleges in California: Hartnell (Salinas), Los Medanos (Pittsburg), Las Positas (Livermore), Berkeley (Berkeley); and at these community colleges on the East Coast: Delaware County (Media, PA), and Southwest Virginia (Richlands, VA).

## Evaluations

Since its inception, ACE has been collecting data and subjecting its curricula, educational outcomes, and faculty training methods to rigorous external review. See [ACE Studies and Evaluation Designs](#) for more information.

## Awards and Recognition

### ◆ The Association of Community College Trustees

Diego James Navarro honored with the 2009 national [William H. Mearly Faculty Member Award](#). The DBA [ACE] was cited as one of major factors for the selection of Cabrillo College for the 2008 [Pacific Regional Equity Award](#)

◆ **The James Irvine Foundation:** Diego James Navarro recognized as a finalist for the 2009 Leadership Awards

### ◆ American Youth Policy Forum (2009) [Effective Program](#)

The DBA [ACE] was selected as one of 23 programs nationwide proven to help young people with college and career readiness

### ◆ U.S. Department of Education (2008) [Exemplary Program](#)

One of 8 programs nationwide selected to be studied by the US Dept. of Education's *Community Colleges Can!* initiative to improve student preparation, access and persistence in community colleges

### ◆ Research & Planning Group for California Community Colleges (2007) [Example Program](#)

Sited in the report, *Basic Skills as a Foundation for Student Success in California Community Colleges*

◆ **Campaign for College Opportunity (2007) [Practices with Promise: A Collection of Working Solutions for College Opportunity](#)** Selected as one of 15 practices from California colleges and universities that show "exemplary efforts that improve college access and success."

### ◆ **iExcelencia! in Education (2007) [Honorable Mention](#)**

Recognized as one of 8 associate-level programs nationwide "at the forefront of boosting Latino enrollment, performance and graduation."

### ◆ **California Community Colleges Board of Governors (2007)**

**[John W. Rice Diversity & Equity Award](#)**. Chosen as one of two recipients "that clearly demonstrated an outstanding achievement in student equity."

### ◆ **Women Employed with Chicago Jobs Council & UIC Great Cities Institute (2005) [Model Program](#)**

Recommended as one of 11 model "bridge" programs nationwide that prepares "adults who lack basic skills to enter and succeed in post-secondary education and training leading to career-path employment."