

Academic Boot Camp Subgroup Meeting Notes

February 5 and 8, 2010

We met to discuss planning for this summer's boot camp and report on feedback from faculty since our first FGI Planning Group meeting.

Questions, comments, and suggestions regarding boot camps included:

1. There was a question about what we would call the schools where we will draw students? "Feeder" schools, "association schools," and "partner schools" were suggested. The consensus seems to be "partner schools."

2. What partner middle schools will we recruit students from? 8 NativityMiguel schools: Chicago has two San Miguel Schools, two Catalyst charter schools (newly admitted to the NativityMiguel network), and one Jesuit Academy; 2 Nativity schools in Milwaukee; and 1 San Miguel school in Minneapolis. That means three students from seven schools and four from the remaining partner school.

3. What recruitment procedures and criteria will be used for selection of boot camp participants? (FGI Director) said that he would get entrance criteria for the Lasallian high schools where many of the San Miguel students go. We talked about academic records, vision and commitment to college attendance from the students and their parents, recommendations from teachers.

4. The proposed general structure of the boot camp includes aspects of successful pre-collegiate summer programs such as SOAR, plus some unique SMU aspects:

- SMU innovations:
 - Parents will be bused to camp with their children, arriving Saturday afternoon, for a fiesta that evening, and staying in the parent dorm. After mass on Sunday, parents will be given a tour of campus and an orientation, then bused back home. Students will begin school Sunday afternoon.
 - A teacher will be recruited from each of the partner schools and paid for assisting with teaching and supervision of the students. They will help us with how to teach eighth graders, and we will help them with strategies to increase academic success and college-attendance motivation for the students
 - With 8 partner school teachers and 4 SMU instructors, we will have close to a 2-1 student-teacher ratio! One way to maximize learning would be to create student teams of 5-8 students and have them rotate through class sessions with an SMU-partner school teacher team in each setting: For example--Math, writing, reading, study skills, technology research, vocabulary, interspersed with recreation, team building, etc.
 - Assessments to determine specific instructional needs and for documentation of program effectiveness. We have some quick screening tests that will ID kids who need more in-depth assessment (Wide Range Achievement Tests in math, reading, and spelling; Word Writing Café; Test of Written Language). Graduate teachers in the K-12 reading program or Literacy Clinic tutors could test those who score low on the screening tests. These assessments would serve the dual purpose of planning specific interventions this summer and providing a baseline for documenting academic progress and program effectiveness through the years.

- Aspects of SOAR and other successful pre-collegiate programs:
 - Keep the kids busy with a mix of academic, social, and sport activities from 8:00 a.m. to 8 p.m. (Faculty member-Arts) mentioned that it's important to make the learning experiences interesting for kids through technology, jeopardy vocab games, etc. Jane mentioned an "iPod lab" with math, spelling, and vocabulary apps.
 - Celebrate learning through frequent team contests, e.g., Vocabulary Jeopardy games 2-3 times a week.

5. Concerns and questions of the boot camp planning group:

- We will need air-conditioned classrooms.
 - SMU faculty: How will they be chosen if we have more than 3 apply for the first summer?
 - Need for curriculum planning time in May: We have some materials from the Puente program and SOAR, but they will need to be adapted for 8th graders
 - Can our partner schools administer a diagnostic math assessment this spring (e.g., April) so we can plan for specific needs? NAEP released items may be a good source, but will need input from the math dept. to choose the skills/items that are most crucial (and often missing) in college freshman.
 - Should we consider adding science to the curriculum, possibly the last two years?
 - What about attrition? If we lose some students after the 8th or 9th grade boot camp, should we invite new ones to attend?
 - Will students be graded for their work in the boot camp? Consensus was no, but quizzes and academic contests would be used to motivate and monitor progress.
 - Should we think of a different name for the boot camp? This is a name that is understood and liked by adults, but maybe students would respond to something more college-bound or catchy. (Faculty member-Arts) offered to design logos for both the FG Scholars and Boot Campers when we come up with names. Will put this on Thursday's agenda for the whole group.
- Feedback from faculty in our respective departments:
 - There's a concern that we are biting off an awfully big chunk to accomplish all at once. Perhaps it would be better to delay the FG Scholarship admissions until next year? But begin the boot camp this summer.
 - Concern that after 4 years there may not be funding to continue the boot camp, and some are hesitant to invest in a dream that won't be continued for lack of funds. (Faculty member) expressed the belief that success will guarantee continuation.
 - Concern that staffing will come out of existing services. (Director) reiterated that the boot camp is fully funded for four years, and does not require use of any existing funds.
 - Should preference be given to a teacher who is bilingual? (Not sure if this is in relation to the proposed reading specialist (no, not necessary), or the Coordinator for the boot camps (yes, definitely: This person will have substantial contact with parents, the majority of whom speak Spanish).