

Evidence of Success

Faculty Experiential Learning Institute



Since its inception at Cabrillo College in 2002, the Academy for College Excellence (ACE)—formerly called Digital Bridge Academy (DBA)—has been rigorously evaluated qualitatively and quantitatively. Ten independent external evaluations have been conducted, all demonstrating significant impacts on vulnerable students and community college faculty.

SUMMARY

The Faculty Experiential Learning Institute, or FELI, is a short course that provides professional development for faculty, staff, and administrators. Designed for community college audience, the FELI improves interpersonal skills, increases participants' self-awareness, and develops affective skills that support learning. Since its inception in 2006, over 1,500 college faculty, staff, and administrators at over 90 colleges nationwide have completed the FELI.

This document highlights findings from three independent studies of the FELI and its outcomes, spanning over an 11-year period (2006-2017). These studies analyze the FELI's impact, effectiveness, transferability, and replicability—and illustrates how this training empowers faculty, staff, and administrators as they help students develop the skills needed to succeed in the advancing knowledge-based economy.

BACKGROUND

The FELI provides tools for faculty and administrators to introduce vital affective skills students need to compete in today's knowledge-based economy. See the brief "ACE 21st Century Professional Skills."¹ Many educators recognize the value of integrating these affective skills into their courses, but don't have the experience of affective learning modeled for them. The FELI strives to meet this challenge, providing faculty and administrators with solutions. Activities help them evaluate what they are already doing in the classroom, and consider how strategies learned in the FELI can support, enhance, or improve their

practice. Through its use of personal reflection and self-disclosure, this training helps faculty develop deeper connections with students from a variety of backgrounds.

WHAT HAPPENS IN A FELI?

In a five-day, all-day, experiential format, FELI participants actively engage in numerous exercises and activities, such as

- large group discussion
- small group sharing and presentations
- movement activities
- role playing
- reflection

The activities challenge participants to examine their working styles, listening abilities, and communication techniques. As a parallel with the student experience, the FELI treats faculty and staff as if they were students in the courses. Past FELI participants describe the "experiential aspect" of the training as "essential" to understanding affective learning that can be used to enhance student engagement and learning.

The FELI originally focused on helping faculty better serve disadvantaged students by developing self-awareness, their skills for interacting with students, their success in their relationships with colleagues, and their leadership abilities within their colleges. Since then, ACE has evolved into an effective (and greatly appreciated) professional development program for college faculty members, which also benefits all students.

¹ Download at <https://wgulabs.org/ace-supporting-documents>

STUDY RESEARCH QUESTIONS

PASSING THE TORCH

*An Evaluation of the Digital Bridge Academy Replication (2006)*²

Research Questions: To what extent can the success of the ACE Foundation of Leadership course (Foundation Course) be recreated in multiple settings? How effective is the training program in preparing the next generation of ACE faculty?

In the summer of 2006, ACE worked with the University of California's Center for Justice, Tolerance, and Community (CJTC)³ to pilot a FELI replication process to determine if other faculty could match its student success outcomes within the unique academic and demographic contexts of other colleges.

FEEDING THE FIRE

Professional Development and the Digital Bridge Academy Faculty Training (2007)

Research Questions: Can ACE methodology be effectively used in non-ACE courses? How does ACE training impact faculty's personal lives and professional relationships?

This study builds on the CJTC's 2006 ACE evaluation, analyzing the program's summer 2007 training. The study focuses specifically on how the ACE philosophy and curriculum aided faculty in teaching ACE and non-ACE courses after completing the first half of ACE training the previous summer.

THE HAYWARD STUDY

Analysis of the Impact of FELI Faculty Training on Pass Rates and Average Grade Points in their regular courses (2017)

Research Questions: Does the FELI produce more effective Teachers? If we measure the effect of teaching through outcomes, course completion, test scores—do average levels of student success improve from before to after faculty members experience the FELI?

Researchers collected data from three California Community Colleges (CCCs), examining average student success rates and grade point averages in

English, math, and "other" courses before and after faculty members completed the FELI training to determine if the FELI produces more effective teachers. The data set covers an eleven-year period from the 2005-2006 academic year through the 2015-2016 academic year.

STUDY FINDINGS

In the Passing the Torch study, researchers found that after completing a two-month study with college faculty from six California community colleges, participants demonstrated that faculty other than ACE staff can successfully teach the Foundation Course, and that it was relevant for students of varied ethnicities, genders, and ages living in both urban and suburban regions. Based on the findings of the study, faculty believed participating in the FELI training was a positive and transformative experience.

The participants reacted positively to the experiential model of the FELI and reporting it as an effective method for internalizing and enacting the key principles of the Foundation Course. Participants also reported they would be interested in a "community of practice."

The results of the Feeding the Fire study uncovered three main findings about the ways faculty incorporated the ACE curriculum into non-ACE courses a year after their 2006 training. For some faculty, the FELI affirmed techniques they used already or had used in the past. For others, the training introduced them to a variety of tools they had not considered before.

The courses that seemed most conducive to incorporating ACE included

- English
- Basic Skills
- Race and Ethnicity
- Geology
- Mechanics

In faculty interviews, researchers found three areas of change for faculty that impacted their approach to teaching and their professional relationships:

- (1) internal changes related to self-awareness;
- (2) views of their students and different ways of inter-

² Digital Bridge Academy is a previous name for Academy of College Excellence.

acting with them; and (3) changes in their interactions at the community college level. These changes lead to:

- increased self awareness
- changes to their views of students and interactivity with them
- stronger relationships between students
- improvements and expansion of relationships with colleagues
- an opportunity to build community on campus

The FELI’s intensive learning experience is valuable in building a supportive campus learning community and introspective teachers.

The Hayward Study evaluated the average student success rates and grade point averages before and after FELI faculty completed the training, and compared it against analysis of the same factors for non-FELI faculty. The researchers found there was no difference in student outcomes (in terms of average grade points earned) between the FELI faculty and the non-FELI faculty at Time 1. Note Time 1 occurs before faculty participated in the FELI.

However, at Time 2 (after the faculty had completed the FELI), a significant difference in outcomes developed. The difference-in-differences analysis showed that both average success rates and average grade points were significantly higher after faculty participated in the FELI training. After controlling for course type (i.e., English, Math, or Other), the estimated net gain in average student success rates for FELI-trained faculty was 3.2% percentage points higher (see Figure 1).

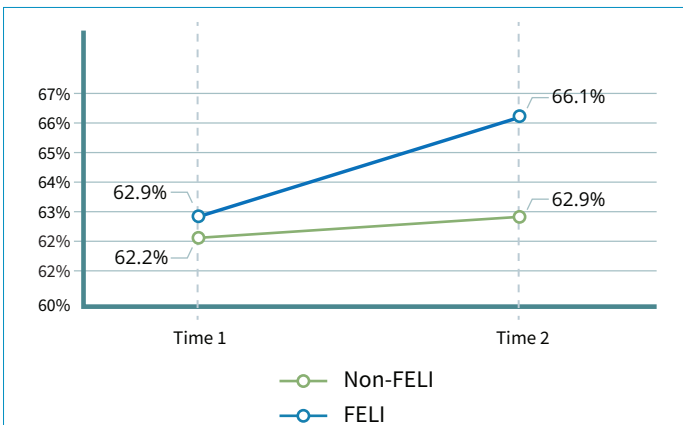


Figure 1. Estimated Marginal Means: Course success rates.

The estimated net gain in average grade points awarded was 0.12 grade points (see Figure 2). While there was some indication of a maturation effect resulting in a slight apparent improvement in student outcomes for non-FELI faculty members at Time 2, the increase was not significant.

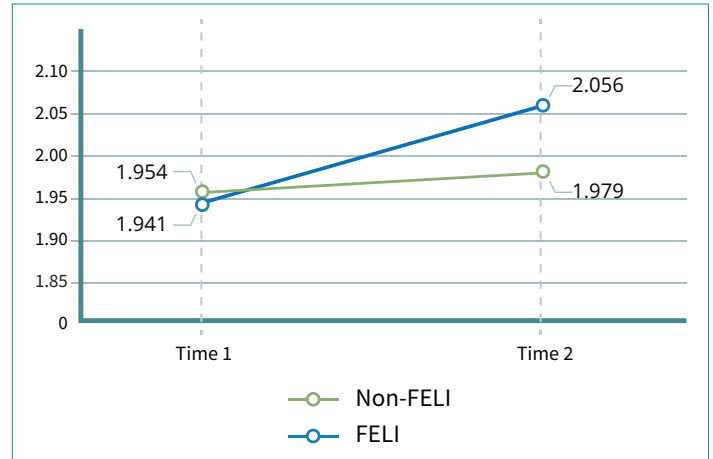


Figure 2. Estimated Marginal Means: Grade Points

CHALLENGES

Studies also provided valuable insight into the challenges faced by the participants in implementation and during the Foundation Course.

In defining the following challenges, ACE has been able to avoid or prevent common problems when introducing such impactful content to faculty, staff, and administrators.

The Passing the Torch study asserted there are various non-teaching issues that are critical to replication, most notably student recruitment strategies, fitting the new curriculum into the faculty’s other responsibilities, and administrative buy-in.

The Feeding the Fire study found most faculty members integrated the ACE curriculum, tools, and principles into their non-ACE courses; however, the degree to which this occurred varied.

They also reported some faculty encountered challenges in weaving concepts from the training into their non-ACE courses, and some instructors struggled to determine the best way to add it to their subject area or did not have time to determine the best way to do so. Though these were reported as problems, instructors were open to suggestions

about which aspects of ACE worked well in non-ACE courses.

To address this challenge, ACE developed the FELI Guidebook which is provided to FELI participants after they complete the FELI. The Guidebook provides them with FELI activities and exercises that can be used with their students. These activities and exercises are from the Foundation Course.

DISCUSSION

From these study findings, the FELI training appears to accelerate the professional development of community college instructors, increasing the rate at which students are able to demonstrate learning for passing grades. While there is a non-significant tendency for all instructors to improve in this regard, a difference-in-differences over time analysis suggests that FELI-trained instructors are able to effectively double the natural rate of improvement, on average.

As well, the FELI was successful and relevant for students of many ethnicities, genders and ages in both urban and suburban settings. Combine this finding with the FELI remaining effective when taught by faculty other than the ACE Founder and Director, it allows an effective curriculum to be replicated at other institutions.

Given the limitations of the current analysis, the question of rigor and student learning cannot conclusively be answered. The observed increases in average success rates and grade points are open to interpretation, though the logic model of the FELI would suggest that such increases are due to instructors learning to be more effective teachers with an array of students from different backgrounds.

CONCLUSION

This brief summary illustrates the effect and impact the FELI has on faculty and students. As the *Feeding the Fire* study observed, the Foundation Course instills a sense of possibility to those who come in close contact with it, and it is this collective momentum that will take the impact of ACE to the next level.

Collectively, these three studies suggest that the success of the FELI can be replicated in different

contexts, has a personal and professional impact on the trainees, and creates more effective teachers. The FELI curriculum or philosophy could be applicable to faculty in many of their courses.

The ACE curriculum might also be relevant to community college faculty who never intend to teach ACE courses but want professional development training to better reach their students. The Hayward study suggests that the improvement may be that teachers learn to reach students who exist on the margins of their classes.

The Center for Student Success and the Research and Planning Group for the California Community Colleges suggests, "According to the literature, the importance of comprehensive training and development opportunities for faculty and staff who work with underprepared students cannot be overestimated. Programs with a strong professional development component often yield better student retention rates and better student performance . . . than in [programs] without such an emphasis"². Based on the findings outlined in this document, the FELI has the potential to make an important impact in the lives of the faculty it trains and the students it serves.

Footnotes

1. As a University of California applied research center, the Center for Justice, Tolerance and Community studies issues of social justice as educational equity and strives to inform policy debates and community-based efforts.
2. Center for Student Success and the Research and Planning Group for California Community Colleges. 2007. Basic skills as a foundation for student success in California community colleges. Sacramento, CA: California Community College System Office.



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