

# Passing the Torch: An Evaluation of the Digital Bridge Academy Replication

Rebecca A. London  
Miranda Smith  
Breana George

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Center for  
Justice, Tolerance  
& Community  
University  
of California  
Santa Cruz

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# **PASSING THE TORCH: AN EVALUATION OF THE DIGITAL BRIDGE ACADEMY REPLICATION**

## **Executive Summary**

The Digital Bridge Academy (DBA) is a program at Cabrillo College's Watsonville campus that offers students an accelerated academic community college program and the opportunity to experience a positive learning environment. The DBA program philosophy is based on the concept of "lighting the fire within," helping students to reassess their educational experience, develop a true sense of self-efficacy and potential, and reclaim their motivation to learn.

In the summer of 2006, the DBA Founder and Director, Diego James Navarro, undertook a pilot replication process of the DBA, by training a set of 15 faculty and administrators to teach part of the DBA curriculum at their colleges. Participating in the training were faculty and administrators from Cabrillo College, College of Alameda, Las Positas College, Merritt College, Berkeley City College and San Jose City College. Faculty at College of Alameda, Las Positas College, and Merritt College went on to teach the first week of the two-week Foundation Course in August, without teaching assistance from the DBA staff.

In evaluating the pilot replication, the Center for Justice, Tolerance, and Community (CJTC) at the University of California, Santa Cruz observed training activities, interviewed faculty trainees and administrators, analyzed responses to faculty trainee and student questionnaires, and conducted a focus group of trainees after the summer trainings and pilots were completed. Below we list each of our six research questions and provide responses based on these research activities.<sup>1</sup>

*Can faculty other than the DBA Founder and Director successfully teach the Foundation Course?*

We used three criteria to examine faculty success: (1) The ability of faculty to engage the students throughout the Foundation Course; (2) whether Diego and the other DBA staff members thought that the teachers had been successful in co-teaching the curriculum with them during the second phase of the training; and (3) whether students gave favorable feedback regarding their experience in the course. Based on these criteria, we firmly believe that other faculty are fully capable of teaching the Foundation Course with the same or even greater level of success as the DBA founder. In other words, the success of the DBA does not rely solely on any unique characteristics of the DBA founder. However, not everyone would be a high-quality DBA instructor. Commitment to the DBA principles, a willingness to be introspective and share one's life stories with the students, and a willingness to participate in an experiential-based training are necessary criteria for all faculty trainees.

*Can the Foundation Course be adapted successfully for other ethnicities and in urban or suburban locations?*

The Watsonville DBA has served primarily Latino youth from a rural area. It is critical that the program be able to reach young people from other ethnic backgrounds and in other locations in order for replication to succeed. The student participants at the three replicating colleges were from

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<sup>1</sup> Throughout this report, when we refer to trainees we are discussing the faculty and administrators who were trained in the DBA curriculum. When we refer to students, we mean community college students who are participants in the DBA.

diverse ethnic backgrounds (African-American, Latino, Southeast Asian, and White) and lived in both urban and suburban areas. At one college the majority of the student cohort had learning disabilities, some quite severe. Staff and student reports, as well as our own observations, confirm that all these students gained tremendously from the DBA curriculum and left the week-long Foundation Course ready to immerse themselves in college learning. However, faculty trainees reported that the classes seemed to work better with a group of students who have mixed ages. In the classes with more homogeneous aged students (students in these classes were young), it generally took a bit longer for the “fire to be lit” and for students to bond as a group.

*How does the DBA create conditions conducive for successful replication, including support for student recruiting and intake?*

Although trainees’ confidence levels in teaching the course were high, they expressed concern about their abilities to fulfill some of the non-teaching requirements of having a DBA program at their school. Among the most challenging aspects of replication were student recruitment, scheduling issues related to their other teaching responsibilities, and other administrative issues, such as the timing of the Foundation Course and planning for classes in the semester that followed it. A necessary condition for successful replication is an administrative champion who is willing to commit upfront resources to the DBA so that these issues can be addressed and adequate procedures can be established.

*How effective was the Foundation Course faculty training?*

Faculty training for the first week of the Foundation Course took place over two weeks: one in June during which trainees experienced the Foundation Course as taught by Diego, and one in July during which faculty observed and co-taught the course with Diego. This experiential approach to training was greatly appreciated by the trainees, who expressed their enthusiasm for having first experienced, then observed, and then taught the Foundation Course. In particular, it is critical for the faculty trainees to first experience the curriculum as students in order to fully understand the effects of the Foundation Course and to teach it successfully. Instructors reported feeling prepared for teaching the Foundation Course, and indeed many reported that it was a highly transformational experience for them personally and professionally.

*What are faculty experiences with the DBA curriculum exercises?*

In general, trainees were highly supportive of all the DBA exercises and very strongly believed in the DBA approach to engaging high-risk college students. Their feedback regarding specific aspects of the curriculum centered around: constructing new words to describe two of the four learning styles; designating certain exercises as required so that faculty know where they can modify the curriculum; and providing more specific guidance regarding enforcing the DBA behavior system in class.

*What is the support needed for creating and maintaining a DBA faculty community of practice to help faculty learn, problem solve, and get the support they need?*

When asked in the September focus group who of the trainees would be interested in participating in a community of practice—meaning staying in ongoing communication with one another about their experiences and insights in teaching the Foundation Course— all trainees indicated they would be eager to be involved. They were very bonded as a group and were interested in maintaining

contact with their peers in order to share experiences and continue to develop professional relationships across disciplines. In short, trainees agreed that a community of practice to support DBA activities is a worthwhile endeavor. They hoped to both contribute to and gain from such collaboration.

This summer pilot of the replication of the DBA proved highly successful from the standpoint of all stakeholders. At the end of the September focus group, all trainees agreed to come back in the summer of 2007 for another two weeks of training to learn about the second week of the Foundation Course and to begin to train other new faculty members. We believe that with the few recommendations for improvement detailed in this report, the replication process can proceed successfully.

## Chapter 1: Introduction and Research Questions



“I want to make the implicit explicit: the Foundation Course is about a journey into yourself.”  
*The DBA Founder and Director, Diego Navarro, during the June training*

“One of my goals is to honor the roles that I am less comfortable in and the learning styles I am less comfortable working with.”  
*DBA faculty trainee during the June training*

“I learned skills for school and skills to be a better person.”  
*Student at College of Alameda during the July course*

### Introduction

On a typical day in the Digital Bridge Academy (DBA) Foundation Course this summer students often arrived for class early. Despite having known one another only a few days the students often all ate lunch together, and they coordinated study groups in preparation for the college semester. Many said that they truly enjoyed spending the week in a classroom together. They each spoke with confidence about their particular strategies for being successful in school and said that they were even excited about their upcoming fall courses. This type of behavior and feedback is unlikely in almost any educational setting, but it is especially unusual considering that most of the DBA students have faced multiple challenges in their personal lives, have struggled in school, possess below grade reading and math skills and are, by most definitions, under-prepared for college.

The DBA is a program at Cabrillo College’s Watsonville campus that offers students an accelerated academic community college program and the opportunity to experience a positive learning environment. The DBA program philosophy is based on the concept of “lighting the fire within,” helping students to reassess their educational experience, develop a true sense of self-efficacy and

potential, reclaim their motivation to learn and envision a future for themselves that they perhaps did not see before.<sup>1</sup>

In addition to a fast paced interactive curriculum, the DBA utilizes several strategies to engage students, create the conditions in which the cohorts bond as a group, and give students tools to help them to succeed in college. For instance, teachers use self-disclosure, in which they share introspectively from their own lives, as a way to authentically communicate with students, building their trust and capturing their attention. In the DBA classroom mistakes are framed as learning opportunities. The students form a ‘learning community’ or cohort and support one another throughout the course and into the college semester. At the center of the DBA strategy is a desire to make school relevant and meaningful for students, to teach them skills for success in both school and the workplace and to create for them an educational experience in which they are able to express emotions and have time to reflect.<sup>2</sup>

The DBA founder and staff are cognizant of the need for specific skills in the increasingly knowledge-based economy and have recognized that many schools are not teaching or training students for this new workplace. The DBA operates in the spirit of the quote: “Success in the knowledge economy comes to those who know themselves—their strengths, values and how they best perform.”<sup>3</sup> In order to help students better know themselves, the DBA program uses a learning styles framework, developed by Spherical Dynamics Inc., which provides a “remarkably accurate, quick and easy-to-use roadmap to detect and utilize an individual's optimal learning style.”<sup>4</sup> The learning styles framework contributes to greater self-awareness, supports the development of individualized strategies for success in school and encourages individuals to form learning groups in which members’ learning styles are likely to complement one other. The goal is to help students move toward a higher level of achievement, success, and satisfaction.

To date, the Foundation Course has served predominantly Latino youth from the Watsonville area, and has been taught exclusively by program Founder and Director, Diego James Navarro. An external evaluation has shown the success of the whole DBA program—which includes both the two-week Foundation Course and an accelerated Bridge Semester—in keeping these students enrolled in school and helping them to improve their grades, increasing their potential for high-wage and high-demand careers.<sup>5</sup> Importantly, Watsonville DBA students reported strong increases in motivation and self-efficacy as a result of the program. They rated the program very highly, in many cases calling it “life changing.”

Faculty members and administrators in other community colleges have recognized the tremendous value the DBA could bring to their own student populations. Based on the success of the DBA at Cabrillo College’s Watsonville campus, and the interest expressed by other colleges, the DBA Director sought and obtained funding from the James Irvine Foundation to train other instructors

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<sup>1</sup> For more information about the DBA, see: Navarro, Diego (2005). “Digital Bridges to Community College,” *Community College Journal*, August/September 2005.

<sup>2</sup> Text describing the DBA in this section and in other places in the report comes from a variety of materials produced by the DBA and its partners.

<sup>3</sup> Drucker, Peter. (1999). “Managing Oneself,” *Harvard Business Review*, March/April 1999, p65.

<sup>4</sup> Spherical Dynamics, Inc., <http://www.sphericaldynamics.com/learn/LDdescription.htm>. Last accessed September 25, 2006.

<sup>5</sup> Badway, Norena Norton (2005). *Watsonville Digital Bridge Academy Report I: Student Outcomes Evaluation Cohorts 1 & 2*. The Higher Education Evaluation & Research Group (HEERG), unpublished evaluation report.



to teach the DBA curriculum. The training and replication involves scaling up the program at Cabrillo College and bringing the DBA to other California community college campuses. The pilot phase of training was initiated in the summer of 2006, with the first newly trained instructors teaching the DBA curriculum to students in August, 2006.

This study examines the training and replication processes, focusing specifically on questions about whether the replication effort successfully “passed the torch,” giving other instructors the tools and knowledge they need to “light the fire within” students at their own colleges. Passing the torch in this program replication is more than just teaching a curriculum. It involves teaching the faculty members how to communicate with students in new ways and to create a classroom environment that is student-driven and low-risk. Using data collected through observation, interviews, questionnaires, and a focus group, we provide an assessment of the efficacy of the training and offer recommendations for improvement as the DBA implementation continues.

### **The Digital Bridge Academy Approach**

The DBA is a classroom and curriculum based program that brings the knowledge of successful behaviors and communication skills from the workplace into the classroom, helping students learn to work together in a team setting and give each other support. It is a cross-disciplinary program, preparing students to operate in a variety of knowledge-work environments, with a focus on methods and basic skills rather than a specific curriculum, occupation or degree major. The program serves students who are in various stages of educational progress, but are similar in their under-preparation for college. The Watsonville DBA program has deliberately drawn a mix of students, including: those who have previously attempted some college work but who are at risk of leaving college; those who graduated high school but have not attempted any college work; and those who have not graduated from high school or received a GED. The target age is 18 to 25, but the Watsonville DBA has served students as old as 55. Most of the Watsonville DBA students have faced personal challenges that make success in school especially difficult. These challenges include: being raised in a family that frequently migrates in search of employment, speaking English as a second language, experiencing homelessness, dropping out of high school, parenting young children, earning low incomes or living on welfare, having a drug or gang related background, or being on probation or parole.

Each cohort of DBA students (up to 30 students) begins with a two week Foundation Course—an immersion-style program in which students work intensively to get to know each other as a cohort, understand their own and others’ learning and communications styles, and learn ways to work together in teams. Students gain skills to reevaluate their past educational experiences and think critically about what they want from their community college education. The goal is for students to leave the Foundation Course motivated and ready to learn.

After successful completion of the Foundation Course, students move into the Bridge Semester, an integrated academic program of college level courses that prepares them for individual immersion into their community college’s typical courses and programming. Students do much of their work as a cohort in self-managing work teams, a technique used widely in high-tech and other knowledge-work companies. The DBA offers students an experiential educational program and gives them the academic and behavioral tools they need to move forward into technological and other majors, and associated professional fields.

## Digital Bridge Academy Replication

From its inception in 2002, the DBA was designed to be replicable at community colleges throughout California. During the summer of 2006, the DBA Director began the pilot phase, training faculty and administrators at six California community colleges to replicate the program (Cabrillo College, College of Alameda, Las Positas College, Merritt College, Berkeley City College and San Jose City College). For this pilot phase, training focused exclusively on the first week of the Foundation Course. Faculty trainees<sup>6</sup> at three of these sites (College of Alameda, Las Positas College, and Merritt College) went on to teach the first week of the Foundation Course at their own colleges in August. It is the DBA Director's intention that training for the second week and the Bridge Semester occur in the summer of 2007 as Cabrillo College attempts to scale the program to 25 percent of the student body, and each of the other colleges continue to grow their programs. The training process is as follows:

- *Experiencing the DBA Foundation Course*—For five days in June 2006, faculty and administrator trainees lived in residence at the Quaker Center in Ben Lomond and experienced the first week of the Foundation Course as students. There was minimal interpretation of exercises and activities, with the goal of having trainees fully understand how it feels to go through the Foundation Course as a cohort.
- *Observing and Co-Teaching the DBA Foundation Course*—Following the June training, trainees observed the DBA Director teach the first week of the Foundation Course to students at either Merritt College or College of Alameda. During this observation period, faculty had the opportunity to teach certain exercises and observe their colleagues doing the same.
- *Teaching the DBA Foundation Course*—In August 2006, faculty at College of Alameda, Las Positas College, and Merritt College taught the first week of the Foundation Course to students at their schools. DBA staff were not present for these weeks, though evaluator staff were on site observing the process. By design, this phase of training included co-teaching in teams so as to promote faculty supporting each other during their first DBA teaching experience.
- *Continue to Teach the Foundation Course in the Future, either unaccompanied or with Teaching Assistants*—In the future, trained DBA faculty will teach the Foundation Course unaccompanied or with teaching assistants, who themselves went through the DBA curriculum as students at the college. This phase is intended to start as early as the summer of 2007.

In the spring of 2006, the Cabrillo Community College District contracted with the Center for Justice, Tolerance, and Community (CJTC) at the University of California, Santa Cruz to evaluate the DBA training and replication effort. Three CJTC researchers worked with DBA program staff to conduct the study. This report is the culmination of our research activities related to the replication process. A separate report examines the policies at community colleges and at the state level that are necessary for a program such as the DBA to be adopted.

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<sup>6</sup> Throughout the report, when we refer to trainees, we are discussing faculty and administrators who were trained in the DBA curriculum. When we refer to students, we mean community college students who are participants in the DBA.

## Study Research Questions

This study focused on two main issues regarding replication: (1) To what extent can the success of the current DBA be recreated in other settings, and (2) How effective was the training pilot at preparing the next generation of DBA faculty? Within each of these questions, we have a set of sub-questions as outlined below:

1. *To what extent can the success of the current DBA be recreated in other settings?*
  - a. Can faculty other than the DBA Founder and Director successfully teach the Foundation Course?
  - b. Can the Foundation Course be adapted successfully for other ethnicities and in urban or suburban locations?
  - c. How does the DBA create conditions conducive for successful replication, including support for student recruiting and intake?
  
2. *How effective was the training pilot in preparing the next generation of DBA faculty?*
  - a. How effective was the Foundation Course training?
  - b. What are faculty experiences with the DBA curriculum exercises?
  - c. What is the support needed for a community of practice to help faculty learn, problem solve, and get the support they need?

## Report Outline

The remainder of the report addresses these research questions and provides a set of recommendations. In Chapter 2 we discuss the study methodology. Chapters 3 and 4 focus on the two primary research questions respectively. Chapter 5 concludes and ties together a set of recommendations.

## Chapter 2: Study Methodology



To conduct the evaluation of the DBA replication process, the research team from the Center for Justice, Tolerance, and Community engaged in the following activities, which are discussed more fully below: observation of training, interviews with key informants, a focus group, and analysis of data collected in a series of questionnaires.

### **Observation**

During each of the three phases of training, discussed in more detail in

Chapter 1 (experiential training in June, observation and co-teaching with Diego in July, and teaching in teams in August), research team members were present to observe the training. For the five day June training, our team observed two and a half days. For the five day July training in two sites, our team observed two days at each site. Finally, for the August sessions of the Foundation Course taught at the three colleges, our team observed two days at each college. Using an open-ended guide, we focused our observation on five key issues related to the research questions: confidence and preparation of instructor; students' engagement; instructor/student interactions; timing of activities; and "lighting the fire."

### **Interviews**

While observing the training and teaching activities, we spent time interviewing key informants for the study, focusing primarily on faculty and administrators from the participating colleges. The topics covered in these interviews varied depending on the informant, but generally related to the three key research questions. With the faculty our interviews focused on their comfort with teaching the DBA curriculum and any challenges they have faced in implementing it. We also discussed the relevance of the curriculum for different sub-populations of students. With administrators, we focused our questions largely on the necessary factors for successfully implementing the DBA model at their college. Student recruitment was a key issue for discussions with all informants.

### **Focus Group**

In the first week of September, after all training and pilot Foundation Courses had been conducted, the faculty and administrators who had been involved with the DBA training gathered at College of Alameda for a focus group about their experiences. Facilitated by both CJTC researchers and Diego Navarro, and attended by nearly all trainees, the focus group provided a final mechanism to gather information on: trainees' views of the training; trainees' experiences teaching the Foundation Course;

the challenges of implementing the DBA at the three colleges, including necessary conditions for replication; and next steps for DBA faculty training.

### **Questionnaires**

Finally, our analysis relies on faculty responses to a series of repeated questionnaires during the course of the training. In particular, at the end of the June and July trainings, faculty were asked to rate their level of understanding and comfort with facilitating each DBA exercise and with the DBA philosophy on a variety of issues (e.g., using self-disclosure to have authentic interactions with youth, building learning communities and framing mistakes as learning opportunities). These questionnaires use a five-point scale. We have tabulated responses only for faculty and administrators who attended the June and July trainings (15 trainees in June and 13 in July). In both sessions, there were two administrators and the remainder were teaching faculty. Seven faculty went on to teach the Foundation Course in August, one faculty person taught just one day of the course, and the remaining faculty trainees plan to offer and teach the Foundation Course at their colleges in the future

In addition, we also rely on responses to student questionnaires that are primarily used by the DBA staff to assess students' experiences in the DBA. Although students are not the primary focus of this particular study, positive student experiences are a key indicator of program success and therefore an important part of the pilot replication story.

## Chapter 3: The Replication of the DBA in Other Settings



In this chapter, we examine the extent to which the success of the Watsonville DBA can be recreated in other settings, namely the three community colleges which offered the first week of the Foundation Course in August 2006. Toward this end, we focus on three main research questions which comprise the main headings of this chapter: whether new faculty can successfully teach the Foundation Course; whether the Foundation Course is relevant for other ethnicities; and how the DBA can create conditions

conducive for successful replication, including support for student recruiting.

### Faculty Trainees and the Foundation Course

#### *Other Faculty Can Teach the Foundation Course*

Perhaps the most critical question to the success of the DBA replication process is whether the success of the DBA is dependent on the charismatic teaching style of the DBA Director, Diego Navarro. If the success of the Watsonville DBA is due more the personality of one particular leader than the DBA curriculum itself, then the replication would be sure to fail.

It is clear from our all of our research activities that the faculty who have been trained can teach the first week of the Foundation Course—and they can teach it well. However, at the onset of training, even some faculty members were unsure if the replication would be a success. Several reported to us that initially they wondered if the success of the DBA program was due to something unique about Diego. There was some concern, especially among those who self-identified as being somewhat quiet or shy, that if they did not model Diego’s style, they would be unable to connect with the students and successfully facilitate the students’ learning processes. These concerns did not come to fruition; as is detailed in this section, all faculty members who taught the Foundation Course were able to connect with students using their own teaching style.

Because the DBA curriculum was designed to be replicated, the training emphasized that, “The Foundation Course is not about knowledge, it’s about experiences with students—as a teacher you are not filling a pail, you are lighting a fire” (Diego Navarro, June training). Faculty learned through their training experiences that the program is not driven by a single leader, but instead the curriculum, and the time for personal reflection and sharing make the program meaningful and effective. Particularly during the June training, the faculty spent more time reflecting on their own

lives and educational experiences than attempting to model Diego's teaching style. This seemed to be a paradigm shift for many of the trainees. As early as the first few days of training, some faculty began to remark that they felt that their initial concerns were unfounded and that successfully teaching the course is "not just about being Diego." These sentiments strengthened over the course of the training. One trainee said that after participating in the July training it became clear to her that the course's success is not based on Diego or any one person's leadership but that the "curriculum delivers the structure for the course very effectively. Ultimately, the process is more about the students than the instructor. They drive the process, not the faculty." Another remarked that, "this is trainable" and several other trainees echoed these same opinions.

The research team used classroom observation and interviews to assess the extent to which faculty other than Diego can teach the Foundation Course. We used three criteria to examine faculty success:

1. *The ability of faculty to engage the students throughout the Foundation Course.* We examined whether students come to class and participated in exercises when there.
2. *Whether Diego and the other DBA staff members thought that the teachers had been successful in teaching the curriculum* (Diego and staff were present only in June and July).
3. *Whether students gave favorable feedback regarding their experience in the course.* We measured this by their expressions of what they had gotten out of the Foundation Course, their connection to their teachers, and their indications of motivation to succeed in college.

Using these three criteria we found that the teachers taught the first week of the Foundation Course successfully, though as would be expected, there was variation in experiences which is likely to be related to the characteristics of the students (we discuss this more fully later in this chapter). The students asked and answered questions and participated in the exercises. Diego and his staff repeatedly reported to us that they felt that the course had been successfully taught at both of the July trainings.

We also received impressive feedback from the students regarding their experience in the Foundation Course. While some students in each class seemed to be more engaged than others, almost all reported that they had learned something important about themselves or about how to be successful in school; and many said that they had enjoyed the personal sharing and sense of community within the classroom. With regard to learning about themselves students remarked that: "I learned to always value your own skills and strengths," and "I have more potential than I thought I had." With regard to understanding their learning styles in order to be successful in school one student said: "I learned what my skills were and how to meet my own needs and find those who can help." Many expressed that they were motivated to be successful in school and would apply the lessons they had learned in the course in their college classes—comments that were especially notable considering many of the students' histories of low educational achievement.

### *Skills for Teaching the Foundation Course*

Can anyone teach the DBA curriculum, or are there certain qualities that contribute to successful teaching? We believe that not just anyone can be trained to teach in the DBA. As one trainee explained, "Yes, others can present this curriculum besides Diego; however this group is a special group—a self-selected group." DBA staff designed a faculty selection rubric that they used in identifying faculty who might be appropriate for teaching the DBA curriculum. Included in the selection criteria are: (1) ability to facilitate experiential learning, (2) ability to establish a rapport with

high-risk students, (3) comfort sharing personal life stories with students, (4) comfort working and leading teams, (5) ability to collaborate with other instructors or outside speakers, (6) ability to respond to unexpected challenges, and (7) stamina to facilitate the intensive Foundation Course. All the faculty trainees met the selection criteria. We concur that these criteria are important in determining who might successfully teach the Foundation Course. Our study identified two characteristics for successful faculty that we feel are critical.

First, the program must be taught by faculty who are committed to the curriculum. The participants in this first faculty training clearly met this criterion. In fact, many of the trainees came into the training with a commitment to the same teaching strategies that the DBA employs. At the end of each week-long training session, we asked trainees to rank their experiences, understanding of DBA concepts, and comfort levels with facilitating the DBA exercises. As is demonstrated with these data throughout this report, even as early as June, trainees reported confidence in their understanding of key DBA concepts. As mentioned previously, the curriculum and core concepts are fundamental parts of the program—without a commitment to them it does not seem possible to teach the course successfully. In addition, if the DBA is not replicated using the core concepts of the curriculum, it is likely to be less potent and have less value to the students.

Second, successful DBA Foundation Course teachers must also have relevant personal stories that they can share authentically with the students. It is not necessarily the case that the faculty member must have a troubled past that will engage the students. Rather, they must be introspective in viewing their life experiences and frame them in such a way that students can relate. The appropriateness of the content of the stories is relative to the students in the classroom—who they are, what will capture their attention, what they might have in common with the teacher. In Alameda, one student shared that she really connected to the teacher's story because her family also speaks another language at home. During the reflections exercise students stressed that they most valued the personal stories told by students, faculty, and outside speakers, particularly those who had similar backgrounds. As one student explained, "The DBA needs people like y'all, people that don't mind sharing. The program is great but it's all about the people."

These two characteristics are heavily related to two key DBA concepts: building a learning community and using self-disclosure to be authentic with high-risk students. In addition, these are aspects of the Foundation Course that both faculty and students value. Because they are also concepts that are not used in traditional educational settings, they are therefore key areas for training.

Building a Learning Community. Much of the feedback shared by the students was related to the DBA's goal of 'building a learning community' through sharing personal stories and using authentic communication. To the DBA staff, this concept is critical for student success. They believe that feeling supported by others in the classroom and being able to connect one's personal life to one's educational experience can help remove some of a student's negative feelings about school and make the educational experience relevant for him/her, leading to greater engagement and retention in school.

We asked trainees after the June and July trainings about their comfort with building learning communities. Trainees responded to the questions using a five-point scale with 1 being the lowest level of comfort or understanding of the concept and 5 being the highest. We report average scores



in the table.<sup>7</sup> As is reported in Exhibit 3.1, after the June training faculty felt less sure of this concept than they did after the July training experience.<sup>8</sup> Notably, every trainee present in July reported that their experience observing and co-teaching the Foundation Course substantially affected their understanding of building learning communities. This is an important concept for the DBA curriculum, and one that faculty appear to have embraced after the training.

*Exhibit 3.1: Trainee Rating of 'Building Learning Communities'*

	Average Score (5 point scale where 5 is the highest)	
	June Training	July Training
How would you rate your current understanding of how to build learning communities?	4.0	4.5
How much did your experience this week affect your understanding of building learning communities?	4.6	5.0
How would you rate your comfort level for building learning communities?	4.1	4.4
How much did your experience this week affect your comfort level for building learning communities?	4.6	4.7
Number of respondents (N)	15	13

Students also agreed that a learning community had been formed at the end of the week-long Foundation Course, and believed that it was the result of personal sharing by peers and instructors. At one college the students described their group as a “family,” and at another they said, “We’re all on the same team.” One student explained, “Learning about the challenges that others have been through helps you through your own challenges.” The DBA’s theory about how learning communities can contribute to student success was validated by one student when she explained: “I’ve been through one of these ‘how to learn’ things before, but this time I am really challenging myself to follow through. Now I feel like I’ve got eyes following me [others in the class] and I’ve got to follow through.”

Using Self-Disclosure to be Authentic. In order to foster learning communities, the DBA curriculum includes the telling of personal life stories. Students may volunteer to share their story, but faculty are required, to some extent, to be willing to self-disclose in order to really connect with their students.<sup>9</sup> A key question is whether faculty must have the “right” sort of stories in order to connect to their students. We asked trainees about their personal stories in the set of questionnaires they completed at the end of the June and July trainings.

As is reported in Exhibit 3.2, trainees felt they understood and were comfortable with the concept of using self-disclosure for authentic communication with their students. However, particularly after

<sup>7</sup> See Appendix 1 for more detailed tables for responses to these and other questions in the questionnaires.

<sup>8</sup> Because the total number of surveys collected is small, differences between the June and July responses are likely to be statistically insignificant. However, the responses do provide some interesting insights into the change in the trainees understanding and comfort levels with the concepts and curriculum over time.

<sup>9</sup> A “life story” is the sharing of one’s personal life with an introspective lens. It can take anywhere from 15 minutes to an hour and is as revealing as the storyteller intends it to be. Some life stories we heard were emotional explorations of how students ended up in the DBA. Others were more matter of fact histories of students’ lives. The stories serve as a bonding mechanism for students and faculty, who gain greater perspective about each other after learning about where people have come from.

the June training, some trainees felt less sure that their personal stories were relevant. On a scale of 1 to 5, with 5 being the highest, trainees rated their personal stories at 3.9 in June, but at 4.3 in July. This reflects some of the interviews we had with faculty during these trainings, in which they indicated that this aspect of the curriculum was very different from their standard teaching models and brought them somewhat outside their comfort zone. At the same time, faculty seemed to agree unanimously that this aspect of the DBA is critical, and they seemed willing to embrace the concepts in order to deliver the curriculum as intended.

*Exhibit 3.2: Trainee Rating of Self-Disclosure*

	Average Score (5 point scale where 5 is the highest)	
	June Training	July Training
How would you rate your current understanding of using self-disclosure to be authentic with high-risk students?	4.5	4.8
How much did your experience this week affect your understanding of using self-disclosure to be authentic with high-risk students?	4.5	4.6
How would you rate your comfort level in using self-disclosure to be authentic with high-risk students?	4.3	4.3
How much did your experience this week affect your comfort level in using self-disclosure to be authentic with high-risk students?	4.3	4.2
Do you feel you have enough relevant personal stories to complete the exercises?	4.2	4.6
Do you feel your personal stories are the sort that will engage high-risk students?	3.9	4.3
Number of respondents (N)	15	13

*Enthusiasm for Continuing with the DBA*

The trainees' enthusiasm about the DBA curriculum and core concepts is evident in their ongoing plans to teach the DBA curriculum, to train in the model, and even to act as trainers in the future. All of the trainees said that they were looking forward to continuing the DBA at their school and that they planned to keep in contact with one another. Several faculty members who had not yet taught the Foundation Course but were trained over the summer reported that they had changed the way they were teaching their regular college classes, incorporating the educational approach of the DBA into their teaching. Each of the three replicating colleges had a plan for offering the DBA beyond the first semester, and administrators were committed in each place to ensure that the Foundation Course did not become a one-time offering.

During the September focus group, trainees discussed and decided on a training schedule for the second week of the Foundation Course, and all of the faculty were interested in participating. Faculty also expressed great interest in ways to keep the DBA student cohort together after the Foundation Course concludes. Although all of the replicating programs had established some form of a Bridge Semester to keep the student cohorts together, they had yet to implement the accelerated Bridge Semester that is core to the Watsonville DBA program. This is also a topic for future training.

At one replicating college, all of the Foundation Course students were enrolled in the same courses and the faculty teaching the courses (both DBA trained and not) were meeting once per week to discuss the students' progress. At another school some of the Foundation Course students were not enrolled in Bridge Semester courses, the Bridge Semester itself was not fully developed, and the faculty did not regularly meet. The faculty at this school expressed concern that the students might not be as successful because of this. However, all of the faculty were interested in further developing the Bridge Semester at their school and some requested Diego's assistance and suggestions for improvement. All of the schools expressed that they hoped to teach the Foundation Course and the Bridge Semester in the spring or in the subsequent fall.

## **The Foundation Course for Other Types of Students**

The Digital Bridge Academy has been operating since 2002 at Cabrillo College's Watsonville campus and has served mainly (95%) Latino young adults ages 18 to 25 (though the program has served adults up to age 55) who reside in the rural, agricultural areas of South Santa Cruz County. By design, the DBA was intended to service a variety of students. The program was specifically designed for cohorts of students with age, skill, and gender diversity. Furthermore, the curriculum was designed to work with any ethnicity, though it is not part of the design to have ethnic diversity within each cohort.

A key question for replication is whether the DBA curriculum is appropriate for students with background characteristics that are dissimilar from Watsonville DBA students. Furthermore, is it necessary that the students and faculty share the same ethnicity to succeed, and how will the program work in mixed-ethnicity settings? Also, can the DBA be as successful at an urban community college as it has at the rural Cabrillo Watsonville campus?

We cannot generalize our results due to our small sample size; however, we clearly found that the DBA Foundation Course was successful at the three colleges we observed. These included classes comprised of groups of students with a variety of ethnicities, genders, and ages and the replicating colleges included both urban and suburban areas. In addition, one class we observed this summer was comprised of a majority of students with learning disabilities.

### *Demographics and the DBA*

The students served at Cabrillo and the three replication colleges differ by race/ethnicity, gender, and age. As is shown in Exhibit 3.3, Cabrillo College's two largest racial groups are White (64%) and Latino (24%).<sup>10</sup> College of Alameda's two largest racial groups are Asian (34%) and African-American (24%). Las Positas College's student body is 60 percent White, 15% Asian/Filipino/Pacific Islander, and 13 percent Latino. Finally, Merritt College's two largest racial groups are African-American (35%) and White (21%). No two colleges share similar racial/ethnic profiles, which makes replication at these schools an interesting test of how the DBA program translates elsewhere. The age distributions at these colleges vary as well, with Merritt having the largest share of older students and Las Positas and Cabrillo having the largest share of very young

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<sup>10</sup> The Cabrillo demographics are for Cabrillo College overall, and are not specific to the Watsonville campus where the DBA program is located. The Watsonville campus likely has a much larger concentration of Latinos than the college as a whole.

college students (age 19 or younger). Cabrillo, Alameda and Las Positas have somewhat even distributions of male and female students, but at Merritt College 66% of the student population is female.

The college student body demographics are likely to be reflected in the types of students that will enroll in the DBA; indeed, the three cohorts we observed at these colleges were somewhat representative of the demographic profile of the school overall. At both the July and August Merritt courses, the majority of the students were African-American (as were the two primary faculty there) with some Latino students. Like the demographic profile of the college overall, the Merritt courses included a broad range of ages, however there were almost even numbers of men and women. At College of Alameda, the courses were more diverse in ethnicity, with African American, Asian, Latino, and White students in the room. These students were mostly younger (in their late teens or early twenties), with a couple of female students who were in their late forties, and very few students in the age range in between. The primary faculty at College of Alameda were both Latina. At Las Positas College, the students were also young, ranging from ages 17 to 22, and most were white males with learning disabilities (some of them emancipated foster children), though the class also included African-Americans, Latinos, and Asians as well. The Foundation Course was primarily taught by faculty who were Latina and White.

*Exhibit 3.3: Characteristics of Students at Community Colleges, Spring 2005*

	Cabrillo College	College of Alameda	Las Positas College	Merritt College
<i>Race/Ethnicity</i>				
White Non-Latino	63.8%	16.9%	59.5%	20.5%
Latino	24.1%	11.8%	13.1%	14.1%
African-American	1.5%	23.5%	3.5%	34.9%
Asian/Filipino/Pacific Islander	4.9%	39.1%	14.5%	19.7%
Other or Unknown	5.7%	8.7%	9.5%	10.7%
<i>Age Group</i>				
19 or Less	22.7%	18.1%	24.7%	8.6%
20 to 24	27.8%	33.0%	30.3%	23.2%
25 to 29	11.7%	15.0%	10.1%	15.4%
30 to 34	7.3%	9.3%	6.4%	12.3%
35 or Older	30.5%	24.6%	28.5%	40.5%
<i>Gender</i>				
Female	55.5%	53.1%	55.6%	67.5%
Male	44.4%	44.9%	44.2%	30.5%
Unknown	0.1%	2.0%	0.2%	2.0%
<b>TOTAL STUDENTS</b>	<b>15,093</b>	<b>5,281</b>	<b>7,383</b>	<b>7,750</b>

Source: California Community Colleges Chancellor's Office  
[http://misweb.cccco.edu/mis/onlinestat/studdemo\\_coll\\_cube.cfm](http://misweb.cccco.edu/mis/onlinestat/studdemo_coll_cube.cfm)

*Does DBA Work In Other Environments?*

Because they were familiar with the student composition at their own schools, we asked the faculty in June whether they thought the training was relevant for the population their colleges serve. Exhibit 3.4 shows that the majority of trainees in both June and July felt that the training was relevant for the target populations at their colleges. Citing education that is not relevant to their life experiences as one of the reasons many students drop out, Diego asked the trainees at the focus group if they felt the DBA was relevant to their students. The group unanimously responded “yes.”

*Exhibit 3.4: Trainee Rating of Transferability of the DBA*

	Average Score (5 point scale where 5 is the highest)	
	June Training	July Training
How relevant did you find the training for the target population your college serves?	4.7	4.9
Number of respondents (N)	15	13

We asked the faculty to comment on this issue in several of our interviews as well. During the first week co-teaching the course with Diego, one of the faculty members said that, “College of Alameda is racially diverse and [the Foundation Course] works here.” Another trainee expressed similar thoughts: “The differences in the student populations are not significant barriers to being able to replicate the program. Urban students can easily relate to the curriculum. It travels well. Whatever their background, students will connect with the curriculum from their own standpoint/experiences.” One trainee remarked that it is the “students who drive the process,” implying that while teachers facilitate the curriculum, ultimately the students in the classroom—through their stories, participation, and educational struggles—that make the course something more than just another college course. One faculty member said, “I do not have a Harvard MBA [like Diego], but now I see that what he provides is the curriculum.” Mastering the curriculum includes both facilitating the exercises and successfully employing the DBA concepts, such as building learning communities and using self-disclosure for authentic communication with students. After the June training one trainee remarked, “This went from good to great. You could not convince me that this would not work in other parts of the country.”

Although there is agreement amongst the faculty and DBA Cabrillo staff that the Foundation Course was effective for the diverse groups of students taught at Merritt, Alameda and Las Positas, it may be that the curriculum needs to be modified slightly in order to relate better to the students. For instance, during the June training, faculty trainees brainstormed a set of movies that can be shown to classrooms with different ethnicities and the DBA staff analyzed the movies to make sure they had main characters that would be appropriate for the DBA exercises that rely on the movie. Faculty at the three replication colleges chose different films to present to students based on the primary ethnicity in the class, including *Mi Familia* and *Antwone Fisher*. At Las Positas there was some discussion of having a film with a White lead character, with one suggestion being the film *Good Will Hunting*.

In the August course at Merritt, faculty had made an effort to find speakers with whom the students would be able to identify. Because the teachers there were two African-American women, and the class had a majority of young men, they brought in speakers who were prominent African-American men, the president of the college and a history professor. They shared their educational histories with the students.

Perhaps the clearest indication of the trainees’ confidence in the success of the course for various types of students was expressed during the September focus group after they had taught without the Cabrillo DBA staff present. Faculty described themselves as “very prepared to teach the curriculum;” they said that the week “went well;” and faculty from each college said with certainty that the students’ “fires had been lit.”

Still, some classroom diversity is a necessary condition for success. The DBA was designed specifically for students ages 18 to 25. During our observations it seemed clear that the classrooms with at least a few older students (in their later 20s or 30s) were more focused and had fewer behavior problems. The one class that was mostly comprised of students in their late teens had a harder time bonding (also for reasons other than age) and remaining focused. Although this class was also successful in the end, it seemed that the “fire was lit” more quickly and behavior problems were less frequent in classrooms that also included some older students.

Gender diversity amongst the students also seemed to produce more focus and participation in the classrooms. Diversity in race/ethnicity did not seem to be an important factor. The program worked with all groups of ethnicities involved and there was no noticeable difference between the more racially homogenous classrooms and the more diverse ones. Although the evaluators did not access student records, DBA staff reported that they created cohorts that included academic skill level diversity as well. The benefit to having students with a variety of academic skill levels is that those with different skill levels think and analyze the exercises differently, which enhances everyone's learning experience.

All of these factors may be important considerations when assembling cohorts for future sessions of the Foundation Course. Based on our observations, we recommend that age diversity, especially, should be given a high priority.

### **Beyond the DBA Curriculum Training: Other Factors that Need to be in Place<sup>11</sup>**

Although trainees' confidence levels in teaching the course were high, they expressed concern about their abilities to fulfill some of the non-teaching requirements of having a DBA program at their school. Among the most challenging aspects of replication were student recruitment, scheduling issues related to their other teaching responsibilities, and other administrative issues, such as the timing of the Foundation Course and planning for classes beyond it.

#### *Student Recruitment for the DBA*

The DBA can only be successful if high-risk students know about the program and enroll in it. Because these students are often not already engaged at the community college, extensive recruitment activities may be required in order to ensure high enough enrollment to warrant offering the DBA curriculum on campus.

Across the three replication sites, recruitment occurred in various ways. It worked best where there was a recruiter who was not part of the faculty team, whose job it was to locate high-risk young people who would be good candidates for the program. At this college, the recruiter (who was paid by a program other than DBA) used her existing networks to connect with high-risk students to identify and recruit students in two specific fields of study—automotive and business management. This strategy of recruiting students into one or two fields was intentional on the part of the recruiter, with the thought that the students would be more likely to continue their studies together if they were in the same major. Although this may not be necessary, it was a positive experience for the automotive students, for instance, when the automotive instructor (who had also gone through the DBA training) came to meet them he engaged them in a well-received exercise.

Recruitment at the other two colleges proceeded without a separate recruiter, and this posed some challenges. At the September focus group, an administrator at one of these colleges, who oversees the DBA trainee who taught the class, admitted that she turned her head when this trainee spent 90% of her summer recruiting for DBA and therefore was not able to give the same attention to her

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<sup>11</sup> We plan to issue a report on policies that need to be in place for DBA replication, which will touch on some of these issues as well.

other tasks. At the third college, recruitment for the July course was more successful than that for the August course, which included fewer students.

The biggest problem with recruitment at all the colleges is that it took longer than anticipated. In future years, this could be partially resolved as former students refer their friends and relatives to the course (a key recruitment strategy in Watsonville). Still, some important suggestions came out of the focus group for improving this aspect of replication:

- Recruiters should attend the DBA training (or a modified version of it) so that they can adequately represent the program to prospective students;
- Staff need a longer time frame than a few weeks for recruitment.
- Using former DBA students as recruiters may be an effective way to recruit new ones.
- Recruitment required modifications to the normal enrollment procedures, which caused problems at one or more of the colleges. An administrator who is committed to the program is essential.

Although DBA trainees did not specifically mention this, it is our observation that recruitment was a much smaller issue when a separate recruiter is on board. Particularly if replicating colleges plan to scale up their programs or offer it to more than one cohort per year, it seems that having a staff person whose responsible for is recruitment is essential.

#### *Staff Commitment and Responsibilities*

Teaching the Foundation Course is intense and exhausting. When immersed in it, faculty found it to be all consuming. During the September focus group, faculty who had taught the course in August expressed to us that they felt “overwhelmed” and “emotionally drained” afterwards. Even a week later, some were still recovering from having taught the course. The faculty noted that even though they all taught in teams, this level of exhaustion came from being responsible for all aspects of teaching, including all the setup, keeping connected with students, end of day planning, scheduling, recruitment, and all other administrative responsibilities. As one trainee explained, “The Cabrillo DBA has a real office and staff to manage all the paperwork and outreach—here it is just us, and it ends up being a lot of work on top of our regular full time jobs.” As the other colleges gain and maintain a network of DBA students, they also may have more support. The Watsonville DBA staff includes a number of former students who obtain internships and develop professional expertise in the DBA to support its continued implementation. This is an important way to continue to support students while having them support the program as well.

The primary faculty member at the Watsonville DBA is the DBA Director, whose teaching responsibilities lie only within the DBA program itself. The scheduling of the Foundation Course in relation to the rest of the semester is a critical issue for replication colleges, because most faculty at these colleges have other teaching responsibilities that overlap with the course. At Las Positas, one faculty member had several other teaching responsibilities and had to leave the Foundation Course in order to attend to these. She was extremely torn, not wanting to miss any part of the experience, but knowing that she had to fulfill her other responsibilities. By the end of the week she proclaimed that she would never again do this, and would find a way to have the Foundation Course be taught prior to the regular semester so that her time was not so divided.



This is an issue that faculty and administrators at each replicating college need to clearly understand so that teaching the DBA does not become onerous and staff are adequately compensated for their investment into the program. During August 2006, the burden of teaching in the DBA was lightened by having faculty co-teach the course. Each of the three replicating colleges had two or more instructors for the Foundation Course who worked together to prepare and teach the course. This allowed faculty to build support and distribute instruction and other tasks amongst teams at each campus. For the implementation period, faculty expressed very positive feedback about the team teaching model and felt that this provided a necessary level of instructional support. Although this is a good short-term strategy to help new instructors learn the curriculum and pacing without having to do everything themselves, it is not intended to be a long-term plan. In the September focus group, faculty trainees stated that they were willing to teach the Foundation Course alone or with teaching assistants (former DBA students) in order to allow more students to participate. Faculty felt they could scale the course to 45-90 students if DBA staff trained them to do it.

### *Administrative Buy-In*

Most aspects of replication rely on an administrative champion to help faculty work within the college regulations to implement a non-standard program. Fortunately, all of the colleges in which the DBA was replicated this summer had such a champion, and this seemed a minimum requirement for starting the replication process.

In the September focus group, several of the administrators said that they were able to avoid some of the normal college procedures for implementing a new program because they were personally committed to the DBA program and because it was the first year—but they said that in the future such rule-bending might not be possible. Overall the intake, recruitment and institutionalization processes that are required for implementation of the DBA program at each college need to be further addressed. In some cases this could involve addressing logistics, such as how to schedule the two week Foundation Course within the college semester, other issues might be funding for the teacher trainings and for faculty who chose to take on the DBA as an additional commitment. Fortunately, at Merritt, Alameda and Las Positas Colleges there was considerable faculty buy-in for the DBA program which should help to mediate some of the remaining program implementation issues.

The evaluators received a consistent message from campus administrators that replicating the curriculum was of incredible value to their campus on many levels. At College of Alameda, the College President is considering having all campus administrators take the learning styles test which is part of the Foundation Course curriculum as a campus-wide professional development activity. A dean at this same college envisions that faculty would participate in the training from across the campus, not just those specifically working in the DBA. This would provide students with a campus-wide culture that affirms the core values of the DBA in their educational experience. A faculty member commented that she saw the applicability for a variety of student populations in many sectors of the campus, including student government, “The Foundation Course can serve high-achievers as well as at-risk students in helping them to become effective leaders.” Continuing to involve administrators in DBA trainings will be important to nurturing this level of buy-in.

## Chapter 4: Preparing the Next Generation of DBA Faculty



In this chapter, we provide details from the formative evaluation intended to help improve future training and offer feedback about trainees' (1) experiences with the Foundation Course training, (2) responses to the DBA curriculum, and (3) views on forming a DBA faculty community of practice.

### Faculty Experiences in the Foundation Course (Week 1) Training

Training for the first week of the Foundation Course took place over two weeks: one in June during which all faculty resided at the Quaker Center in Ben Lomond and experienced the Foundation Course as taught by Diego, and one in July during which faculty observed and co-taught the course with Diego at either College of Alameda or Merritt College. During this latter week, faculty had the opportunity to both observe Diego and their peers teaching the Foundation Course as well as teach certain exercises themselves. In this section we focus specifically on faculty preparation for this teaching, the effectiveness of the training in helping faculty teach the course, and suggestions for improvement.

#### *Preparation for Teaching the Foundation Course*

As shown in Exhibit 4.1 below, faculty felt very well prepared to teach the first week of the Foundation Course after having attended the June and July trainings.<sup>12</sup> Faculty responded to the questions in Exhibit 4.1 using a five-point scale with 1 being the lowest level of comfort or understanding of the concept and 5 being the highest. We report average scores in the table. In general, responses indicate that faculty feel they understand the curriculum and that it was well presented in the training. For example, when asked to what extent the training they attended helped them to understand the DBA curriculum, faculty in June reported an average score of 4.8, indicating very high marks for the relevance of the training. When asked this question in July, all respondents reported the highest score of 5.

Faculty were slightly more hesitant about their own comfort level in implementing the DBA curriculum, averaging a 3.9 response score after both the June and July trainings.<sup>13</sup> However, they strongly indicated that the training made them feel more comfortable, with average scores of 4.5 and 4.9 after the June and July trainings. Other responses to the questions shown in Exhibit 4.1, and our interviews and observations, point to this lower rating of comfort in implementing the DBA reflecting more nervousness than under-preparation. During the July trainings, faculty expressed to us that they were overwhelmed; that the curriculum was extensive and that they felt they would need a lot of preparation to be successful in teaching the course without the Cabrillo staff present. In the September focus group, faculty admitted that their concerns turned out to be true, but they

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<sup>12</sup> See Appendix 1 for more detailed tables for responses to these and other questions in the questionnaires.

<sup>13</sup> For this question, only one respondent reported a 5, indicating he or she felt extremely comfortable. Two respondents reported a comfort level of 3, indicating only a moderate level of comfort.

articulated that teaching something for the first time is always more work than teaching it subsequently.

*Exhibit 4.1: Trainee Rating of June and July Overall Training Experiences*

	Average Score (5 point scale where 5 is the highest)	
	June Training	July Training
How would you rate your current understanding of the DBA curriculum?	4.1	4.3
How much did your experience this week affect your understanding of the DBA curriculum?	4.8	5.0
How would you rate your comfort level in implementing the DBA curriculum at your college?	3.9	3.9
How much did your experience this week affect your comfort level in implementing the DBA curriculum at your college?	4.5	4.9
How much do you feel you have learned by observing and interacting with students in the pilot this week?	n/a	5.0
Do you feel that what you learned by observing and interacting with students in the pilot this week will be valuable to you in teaching the Foundation Course?	n/a	5.0
Number of respondents (N)	15	13

After experiencing the July training, faculty were unanimous in giving the highest ratings to questions that asked how much they learned by observing and interacting with students in the pilot Foundation Course and the value of this observation and interaction. They were, in fact, very impressed by the extent to which the Foundation Course “lit the fire within” student participants. One trainee in the July training observed that, “[DBA] makes students responsible for their own learning and allows them to step out of their comfort zones.” At the end of both the Merritt College and College of Alameda July trainings, trainees unanimously agreed that the course had succeeded in its goals of preparing them to teach the Foundation Course at their colleges.

Faculty trainees became even more committed to the DBA curriculum after teaching the first week of the Foundation Course in August. After having time to reflect on their training experiences, faculty again unanimously reported in the September focus group that the training prepared them very well for teaching the first week of the curriculum. Faculty who taught the class received positive feedback from students, and felt a close connection and commitment to their students by the end of the week.

Overall, faculty felt that the DBA training was a transformational experience for them professionally and personally. As is shown in Exhibit 4.2, when asked about the extent of transformation they experienced in both these realms, the majority of trainees reported high levels of transformation, with averages of 4.8 and 4.5 out of 5 after the July training. These ratings are higher than those reported for June (4.2 and 4.1 respectively), as early as the June training participants were beginning to feel the transformational value of the training. One June trainee stated, “Now being into this and practicing, I know how valuable [the DBA] is. I value the gift of being placed here because whatever happens, it will be valuable in my life.” Another faculty member remarked during the August teaching of the Foundation Course, “Challenging myself with [the DBA] and meeting the challenge

was a great experience.” Faculty who taught the August course felt empowered by their experience and even some of those who did not teach it yet reported using the techniques they learned in their other courses.

*Exhibit 4.2: Trainee Rating of Transformational Experience of Training*

	Average Score (5 point scale where 5 is the highest)	
	June Training	July Training
Was this a transformational experience for you professionally?	4.2	4.8
Was this a transformational experience for you personally?	4.1	4.5
Number of respondents (N)	15	12

Trainees who participated in this summer’s training schedule were necessarily committed to the program, as the schedule was intense and required long hours as well as time away from home. They made this commitment because they hoped to achieve success with the underserved students at their respective colleges.

*Effectiveness of the Training Model and Suggestions for Improvement*

The training model is experiential with the premise that faculty must first undergo the Foundation Course as a student in order to learn how to teach it to others. Trainees are taken through a “modified medical model” in which they experience the curriculum, watch it, practice it, and then ultimately teach it. The two five-day trainings reflect this experiential focus, the first phase included the residential training and the second phase included observing Diego teach the course with opportunities for the faculty trainees to co-teach various exercises. In August, many of the trainees went on to teach the first week of the Foundation Course at their own colleges.

Faculty reflected on the June and July trainings in the September focus group and agreed that the experiential aspect of the training was essential, and that the three-part learning process (for those who taught the August Foundation Course) was “amazing.” All 15 participants in the June training reported at the end of the training that experiencing the class from the perspective of a student was extremely valuable to them. They reported that staying in residence allowed them to remain centered and focused on the DBA curriculum and it facilitated the creation of the bond they now share—a key component of the community of practice they hope to build (discussed more fully later in this chapter). At the end of the June training, Diego asked the group if they felt they could have taught the foundation course without experiencing it themselves and the group responded that the experiential aspect was essential for them, with one faculty member describing it as “mandatory.” Those who are visual learners said that they would not have had sufficient information if they only had access to written materials. One trainee captured it well by stating, “Without the experience, I could do it like a robot, without heart, but heart and soul is where the change is.”

Although in retrospect they agreed the training was conducted effectively, some trainees reported that at the time they experienced it, they felt somewhat frustrated. For example, not knowing the agenda, or not understanding what it meant, made the experience difficult for some, yet this same uncertainty made at least one other person feel, “curious and engaged.” There was a noted tension between wanting to intellectualize the process and wanting to experience it without intellectualizing. Although the goal was to offer the latter experience, some trainees found this difficult. The DBA

trainers were also aware of this issue. They wanted the trainees to experience each exercise, but also had difficulty resisting the desire to explain the theory behind it. This issue should ultimately be resolved in order to avoid confusion for future trainees.

In addition to these findings our August interviews and the September focus group generated a list of recommendations to improve the training experience on a variety of levels:

- Trainees noted that the very long days of the June training combined with shared room assignments left very little time for self-reflection and personal space. They recommended including more individual free time as well as more shared free time to engage in non-DBA related bonding activities (like a group hike).
- The trainees felt they were asked to do too many written reflections and that these reflections were not as useful to them as the DBA staff had intended. Trainees did not use these written reflections to help them teach the Foundation Course.
- In general, trainees felt there was too much gathering of written information and that the questions did not reflect what they wanted to write about. They suggested that a better format might be to ask which three exercises stood out or what worked and what could be changed. As the training is more firmly established, it may be that these types of evaluative forms are no longer needed as frequently.
- Trainees felt that the list of supplies given to them was too confusing. They requested that the list include an explanation of the purpose of each item so that they could make substitutions if necessary.
- Trainees requested a written bibliography of the additional readings that were suggested during the training.

## **Feedback on DBA Exercises and Curriculum**

Faculty expressed tremendous commitment to the DBA curriculum. However, three important issues surfaced during the training that must be addressed by DBA staff before the training continues. First, trainees expressed dissatisfaction with the words used to describe two of the learning styles: concluders and analyzers.<sup>14</sup> For instance, the concluder word group includes a majority of words that have negative connotations, such as: impatient, insistent, authoritative, commanding, and dominant. The analyzer word group also includes several words with possible negative connotations, such as: exacting, low-risk, proper and careful. In contrast, the words used to describe interactors and synthesizers are all positive, and include among them: generous, understanding, imaginative, dynamic, positive, and fun. This discrepancy in the words used to describe the four learning styles led some in the training to be uncomfortable with their “A” or “C” learning style, and this discomfort was also present for students who were labeled “A” or “C”. In the August teaching of the Foundation Course at one college, students were reluctant to be part of the “C” group during one of the learning styles exercises.

In order for trainees and students to gain as much as possible from the learning styles curriculum, we believe it is critical that the four styles be presented using similarly positive, negative, or neutral words. To the extent that negative words are used, they should be presented to an equal degree in

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<sup>14</sup> For more information on the learning styles curriculum, see Spherical Dynamics Inc., <http://www.sphericaldynamics.com>.

each of the four learning styles. This issue was felt so strongly that one trainee designed an alternate list of words. Other members of the September focus group expressed a great deal of interest in obtaining that list.

A second important issue, which surfaced during the August teaching of the Foundation Course, is the extent to which the curriculum can be modified to suit unanticipated challenges or the characteristics of participating students. For instance, faculty had questions about substituting student life stories for activities or other presentations,<sup>15</sup> substituting (or eliminating) movies from the curriculum,<sup>16</sup> and teaching certain exercises that are more lecture style than participatory, which tended to lack student enthusiasm. Faculty at all three colleges struggled with these issues, and felt that a guide to the DBA essential components would be useful for them so that they knew which of the exercises could be modified and which were critical to the DBA curriculum and should not be altered. The DBA Director is already working on this guide, which will be ready for next summer's training.

The third issue raised by faculty in the August training is about discipline in the classroom. Although there is a behavior system embedded in the DBA curriculum, faculty felt unsure about how to handle discipline problems in the Foundation Course. They wanted to establish order in the class so that the cohorts could bond. But, at the same time they did not want to be overly strict because they felt this would inhibit their ability to bond with the students themselves. The problem was most apparent during the two courses that were comprised of mainly younger students. For these students in particular, faculty reported that the life stories were a way to engage students and have them respond to each other in positive ways.

*Exhibit 4.3: Trainee Comfort with DBA Behavior System (July only)*

	July Training
How would you rate your current understanding of the DBA Behavior System?	4.5
How much did your experience this week affect your understanding of the DBA Behavior System?	4.9
How would you rate your comfort level in implementing the DBA Behavior System at your college?	4.3
How much did your experience this week affect your comfort level in implementing the DBA Behavior System at your college?	4.8
Number of respondents (N)	13

Exhibit 4.3 shows trainees' self-reported comfort with the DBA behavior system as reported after the July training (and before any of the faculty taught the class without Diego's assistance). The self-reports indicate a very high level understanding of the behavior system, with the lowest ratings reported in the category of trainees' own comfort level in implementing the system. This meshes well with reported experiences teaching the Foundation Course in August.

<sup>15</sup> In one college, the faculty felt strongly that the second day outside speaker should be a student life story instead, and they made this substitution.

<sup>16</sup> In one college, faculty substituted a movie with a student life story because they felt the students were not bonding as quickly as they had expected. Having the student tell a life story on the third day helped the faculty achieve this goal. This student had not been available to tell the story on the second day, and an administrator at the college spoke instead.

Trainees rated each of the DBA Foundation Course exercises after experiencing them in June and July, and tabulations of their responses for each exercise are provided in Appendix 1. In Exhibit 4.4, we summarize scores of all the exercises. Note that trainees were asked to report on fewer exercises in June than in July, and the tabulations have been adjusted to reflect this.

*Exhibit 4.4: Trainee Rating of Individual Exercises*

Question: How comfortable are you in teaching [this exercise]?

<i>Percent responding in each category</i>	June Training	July Training
1 (Not at all comfortable)	0.0%	0.2%
2	2.7%	0.2%
3	12.4%	9.1%
4	32.9%	36.6%
5 (Extremely comfortable)	51.9%	53.8%
Average response across exercises	4.2	4.4
Number of respondents (N)	15	13

There are two findings to note from Exhibit 4.4. First, by and large faculty feel comfortable with the exercises after both the June and July trainings. In June, 52 percent of trainees felt extremely comfortable with the exercises and an additional 33 percent felt comfortable at a slightly lower level (level 4 vs. 5). In July responses are even higher, with 37 percent feeling comfortable with the exercises at level 4, and 54 percent feeling extremely comfortable. These very high ratings are indicative of a successful training experience overall. These results also suggest that this group of faculty, who applied to participate in the training program, came into it with a desire for learning about and utilizing the types of exercises that the DBA includes.

The following two are the only exercises that rated on average lower than 4.0 in terms of trainee comfort with facilitation:

- #91215/01260 Art Project (3.7 in June, 4.0 in July)
- #01450 Energy Intensities/Energy Patterns (3.9 in June, 3.9 in July)

During the August teaching of the Foundation Course, faculty also reported some discomfort with the success/satisfaction cycle exercise. Several faculty reported feeling bored during this aspect of their own training, and struggled to make it more interesting for their students. We observed two faculty members shorten this presentation in order to keep students engaged. In addition, the PowerPoint materials for this presentation were confusing to faculty. They appeared out of order and included what may have been extraneous slides. Because faculty did not feel invested in this exercise after their own experiences with it, it would be useful to redesign the exercise to make it more interesting and easier to use.

A final comment provided by faculty at the September focus group is that they felt restless and stiff after sitting in the Foundation Course experiential training for eight hours at a time. Their students were similarly anxious to move around more. They agreed that more physical movement during the exercises is needed to keep students focused and engaged, particularly at the end of the day.

## Creating a DBA Faculty Community of Practice

When asked in the September focus group who of the trainees would be interested in participating in a ‘community of practice’ in order to share insights, suggestions and lessons about teaching the course and instituting the program at their colleges, all trainees indicated they would be eager to be involved. This sentiment is reinforced by ratings of the community of practice idea in four questions asked of trainees during the June and July training sessions. For each of the questions, respondents reported an average of 4.8 or 4.9 (as is shown in Exhibit 4.5), indicating a very high level of potential engagement in a community of practice.

*Exhibit 4.5: Trainee Rating of the Building of the Community of Practice*

	Average Score (5 point scale where 5 is the highest)	
	June Training	July Training
How do you feel about the level at which you and your fellow trainees have established a bond as a community of practice around the Digital Bridge Academy?	4.9	n/a
How much are you looking forward to participating in the DBA community of practice?	4.8	n/a
How do you feel about the level at which you and your fellow trainees have established a bond as a community of practice around the Digital Bridge Academy?	n/a	4.8
How would you rate your own level of engagement in the DBA community of practice?	n/a	4.8
Number of respondents (N)	15	13

Ideas generated in the focus group about how people could gain from participation in a community of practice ranged from the practical—share Whip-around topics and lessons learned from teaching—to loftier goals—to continue to develop relationships across disciplines and maintain the bond they have formed. Some trainees volunteered that they could contribute to the community of practice by helping to rewrite or update some of the materials that they felt were confusing. One offered to help think about ways to be inclusive of other ethnicities through an emphasis on social movements among people of color. In short, trainees agree that a community of practice to support DBA activities is a worthwhile endeavor. They hope to both contribute to and gain from such collaboration.

In sum, the training was successful in preparing the faculty members to teach the course. For the most part the faculty enjoyed the training and learned a great deal about both what it is like to experience the Foundation Course and how the course is best taught. They seemed to know the curriculum well and were even able to alter it in order to better meet the needs of different groups of students. The feedback the faculty members and the students provided will help make the next training even more successful.



## Chapter 5: Conclusions and Recommendations



“This course is pretty extraordinary in what it has to offer in five days.”

*Student in Las Positas August class*

“Everyone has different learning styles, but when you put us all together we can achieve something higher than ourselves.”

*Student in Merritt July class*

“I am excited to come back tomorrow.”

*Student in Las Positas August class*

The students' comments during the DBA powerfully express the value of the program in ways that evaluator observations, questionnaires and focus groups alone cannot reveal. While the focus of this evaluation is on the training of the faculty and the replication of the program at other colleges, the ultimate test of success is the impact the program makes on the students who participate in it. On this count it is certain that the students were both moved and motivated; or in other words, their “fires had been lit.” They seemed to learn things about themselves and one another that could serve them well throughout their college careers. As one said, “We all have a lot of problems, but if you can get out of the cycle we become the best people around.” Participating in the Foundation Course was a positive and transformative experience not only for the students but for the faculty as well. The positive comments expressed by the students and faculty are consistent with our findings.

To summarize our responses to the key research questions:

1. This pilot training experience has demonstrated that faculty other than the DBA Founder and Director can successfully teach the Foundation Course. The faculty trainees are confident in their ability to teach the first week of the Foundation Course and want to participate in future DBA trainings.
2. The DBA Foundation Course was successful and relevant for students of many ethnicities, genders and ages in both urban and suburban regions.
3. There are various non-teaching issues that are critical to replication, most notably recruitment, fitting the DBA into faculties' other responsibilities, and administrative buy-in. These issues must be addressed for replication to succeed.
4. By preparing and supporting the faculty and administrators throughout the training the DBA staff created conditions for successful replication of the program. The faculty who were trained to teach the Foundation Course found it to be a transformational experience both professionally and personally.
5. The model of the training—experiencing, watching, and then teaching the Foundation Course—was not only effective, but preferred by the trainees.
6. All faculty trainees are interested in participating in a ‘community of practice.’

As these results indicate, the Watsonville DBA staff was able to successfully “pass the torch” to the new faculty they trained, empowering them to utilize the curriculum and their own stories to make a difference in the lives of the students in the course. Despite the success of this first training, some important lessons have been learned which could improve future phases of the program replication. We discuss these below.

First, the program requires a substantial amount of up-front investment for what is initially an uncertain outcome. One administrator explained, “It took a leap of faith to have so much time devoted to one program.” This level of trust and support for the program is necessary among replicating colleges. However, there are aspects of the start-up activities that could be made easier. In particular, we learned through this pilot training that it is less taxing to have a recruiter who is not part of the DBA faculty recruit students to participate in the program. In addition, taking a longer time to recruit eases the anxiety about filling the class. We recommend that in the future, when recruiting new colleges to participate, the DBA staff should make more information available to the colleges about how they successfully conduct recruitment and outreach, such as information about the Cabrillo internship program in which former students are paid to recruit new DBA students.

A second recommendation is about who should be recruited as DBA faculty. Our study identified two criteria that seem critical for success: (1) a strong commitment to the curriculum and (2) relevant personal stories and comfort with introspection in order to be authentic with students. Faculty could be recruited and interviewed personally by DBA staff or recommended by a colleague in a college that is already hosting the DBA. If replication becomes widespread, it might be necessary to ask faculty to pass a screening questionnaire in order to assess their commitment and interest.

A third finding about the success of the pilot has to do with age diversity amongst the students. In cohorts with greater age diversity, there seemed to be fewer behavioral problems and greater engagement with the curriculum early in the week. Faculty who taught more homogenous-aged groups, which were all younger groups, agreed that this made the Foundation Course first week challenging. We recommend that efforts be made to create cohorts of students with various ages. This may require specifically targeting older students as they were underrepresented in several of the classrooms.

Finally, faculty trainees offered important insights into some program and training specifics:

- The experiential training should include more non-scheduled time for participants, more discussion of useful discipline strategies and less time filling out written reflection forms.
- New names and descriptions should be written, based on feedback from students and faculty, for the “Concluder” and “Analyzer” learning styles.
- Greater clarity is needed on what parts of the curriculum can be modified or deleted. One faculty member suggested highlighting in the curriculum kit the exercises that should not be altered.

We feel these recommendations can be easily and realistically incorporated into future phases of the replication of the DBA program at each of these schools.

Community colleges have considerable responsibilities and thousands of students to serve. Faculty and administrators are focused on helping their students succeed as evidenced by one administrator

who said, “We want to make a big impact with a lot of students.” Based on the findings of this study of the pilot replication process, we believe the DBA program has the potential to make an important impact in the lives of the faculty it trains and the students it serves.

The increase in lifetime earnings for college graduates and for those with some college experience continues to grow. For this reason the DBA program has the potential to positively impact the financial future of each of its students. But in providing them the tools to fulfill their college dreams, the DBA program can offer students something less tangible but no less significant. As one outside speaker explained to a Foundation Course class:

“When you graduate you will wake up the next morning and you will look in the mirror and you will have something different that no one can take away from you—and for the rest of your life people will treat you with a greater degree of respect.”