

**2009 ACCT FACULTY MEMBER AWARD NOMINATION**  
**DIEGO JAMES NAVARRO, CABRILLO COLLEGE**

**In what ways has the educator demonstrated excellence in teaching?**

Digital Bridge Academy (DBA) Director, Diego Navarro has combined his corporate experience with his commitment to social change to solve the problem of young adults who are under-prepared for college and the workforce. His use of an industrial design model applied to higher education, based on determining needs and systematically finding the most effective ways to meet them, is unique. This is a uniquely designed educational program, and his skill in this area is one reason why Diego is such an asset. He has created an unusual, highly effective program to bring under-prepared young people into the community college system and give them a chance to turn their lives around. Diego's excellence in teaching is three fold; from developing an innovative and successful program, to working directly with students to "light the fire within," and offering faculty training in DBA concepts.

The DBA targets young adults, predominantly from the Latino community in Santa Cruz County. Often, these students have not had a successful academic experience in the past and are unprepared for college study. Many participants in the program are from high risk backgrounds, including referrals from the probation department, drug and alcohol programs, adult education and foster care. Some have had gang related backgrounds; many are from migrant farm-worker families. The DBA prepares them for technical, knowledge-based careers that demand responsibility and leadership.

Students who have had difficulty with the transition to adulthood respond well to this program, which is based on the concept of "lighting the fire within." Diego's approach is to meet these students' multiple needs by addressing the whole person and the negative educational experiences and personal traumas that they have to overcome. In addition to academic and technical skills, they learn self-awareness and the personal and behavioral skills that they need for success. They learn to become leaders in their own communities. Diego calls this a curriculum-based persistence model. Students learn the complex of new skills they need in the classroom, and they get support from each other as a cohort. It has certainly proven effective, as seen in the DBA's over 80% retention rate.

Disaffected and cynical youth are in need of transformative education, and respond positively when they find it. One student, a high-school drop out, whose older brother had been in our second cohort, came to a DBA orientation meeting reluctantly, only to satisfy his family. He began with a negative attitude but saw something of value and stayed. He is now an honor roll student and serves as a mentor to new students.

The DBA is the kind of new idea that we need in order to address the profound educational issues that we face in California. The issue of disenfranchised and under-prepared young adults will only increase as the high school exit exam is fully implemented. Many students need an alternative, and the DBA offers them one that builds excellence.

Diego leads our efforts to expand the DBA model both at Cabrillo College and at other colleges. Diego has developed a seven-day Faculty Experiential Learning Institute (FELI) to efficiently train DBA faculty as well as non-DBA faculty. Woven into the institute are faculty-specific discussions about teaching and learning and reconceptualization of their community colleges from a deeper understanding of the industrial education model. The FELI is required of DBA instructors and has proved effective with community college faculty interested in employing DBA insights and principles in their regular classroom activities. To date Diego had helped to train over 150 faculty members from 20 community colleges.

**What has this educator initiated and helped to develop in the area of innovative programs used in two-year postsecondary institutions?**

Diego has taken a very non-traditional approach to educating under-prepared students. Many of the techniques he uses are adapted from corporate executive training programs. Others are from mental health and other models, and some are complete innovations. The synergy among them is surprisingly effective. His success with under-prepared students has been remarkable. The DBA ultimately has the potential to become a widespread model for a new kind of education.

Diego has instituted a number of innovations that make a significant contribution to educational methodology, and he has been able to test and document their effects in great detail. Some of these important innovations include:

- Industrial research and process design techniques—based on careful needs analysis, pilot testing and scaling—were used to develop the DBA, something unique in the area of educational reform.
- The DBA is a curriculum based persistence model, rather than an out-of-class support model, which is much more common.
- The DBA uses a sustainable business model based on student hours in the classroom, making it much easier for others to adopt.
- The transformational curriculum of “lighting the fire within” motivates students to learn in new ways and brings about a profound change in students.
- The immersion-style, project-based curriculum teaches teamwork and builds student cohorts that provide much of the support students need from within the classroom.
- Teaching low-performing students corporate management skills early on, which include self-management, planning and teamwork, empowers them to change their lives.

- The DBA was designed to be easily adapted to other colleges and populations on a large scale and operated sustainably.

Several of these ideas are new to the field of education, and any one of them could serve as the basis for a new program. Diego challenges the status quo in community college education in a positive way.

**How has this educator served on technical or special committees that affect the college program in the community, state, or nation?**

Diego has been a presenter and keynote speaker for a variety panels and conferences around the nation focused on at-risk youth attending college. His piece on Digital Bridges to Community Colleges was published in the Community College Journal in 2005. He has also been a speaker at the following conferences:

- The DBA Model: Preparing and Bridging Underprepared Students to Technician Careers, Funding Opportunity Conference for NSF Graduate Teaching Fellows in K-12 Education (GK-12) and Advanced Technological Education (ATE), A conference of The National Science Foundation's Nevada EPSCoR Program, University of Nevada at Las Vegas with Video Conferencing to The Desert Research Institute (DRI) in Reno, Las Vegas, NV, April 2007.
- The DBA Curriculum-Based Persistence Model: Preparing and Bridging Underprepared Students to Community College, Strengthening California's Community Colleges: Seeking Sustainability & Change, A Symposium of The William and Flora Hewlett Foundation, Menlo Park, CA, November 2006.
- The DBA Curriculum-Based Persistence Model: Creating Communities of Learners, Pre-Conference Workshop on Recruitment and Retention of Students in Technical Programs, National Science Foundation ATE Principal Investigator Conference, Washington, DC, October 2006.
- Development with a Soul: Sowing the Seeds For a Digital Peace Corp, Digital Bridge Symposium, Oakland, CA, April 2002.
- Workforce Demonstration Project: Digital Bridge Academy, Civic Entrepreneur Summit, Oakland, CA, January 2002.

**How has this educator provided leadership in helping to solve challenges for two-year postsecondary education?**

As our economy and student populations have grown and changed, the community colleges have been challenged to meet the needs of diverse and under-prepared students. The community college system is most often the sole entry point to educational and career advancement for disadvantaged and minority students. Recognizing that their programs are the path out of poverty for the state's most at-risk students, community colleges have implemented a variety of programs and projects have been developed to address remediation, including a statewide Basic Skills Initiative (BSI) that encompasses several programs designed to support new remediation models. Despite the community colleges' increasing investment in basic skills, completion rates remain low for disadvantaged students.

The Digital Bridge Academy is a promising alternative to traditional community college remediation models focused on basic skill acquisition. Diego's theory of action is that when vulnerable, under-prepared students first enter college they need an educational environment grounded in a positive view of their capabilities, not a deficit model focused on remediation. The DBA's holistic approach addresses the behavioral, cultural, and affective issues that cause so many students to fail while also engaging them in college-level, integrated curriculum. Often under-prepared students who enroll in college have low academic skills but have had to overcome challenges that require intelligence, creativity, and deep knowledge of their communities. Through guided team learning, our students engage in primary research linked to their life experience while developing computer, communication, presentation, and leadership skills. The DBA educates students to recognize and adopt personal and professional behaviors that underlie success in college and in the workplace. DBA works to build leaders who can help to recruit and mentor the future cohorts of DBA students.

Community College Research Center at Columbia University and the Cabrillo College Institutional Research Office have provided us with the results of a longitudinal study comparing DBA student outcomes for 208 students from the first nine DBA cohorts with outcomes for over 12,000 similar Cabrillo students not participating in the program. The results for both accelerated and non-accelerated cohorts upheld the efficacy of the DBA model. Accelerated cohorts were 16 percent more likely to enroll in the semester after the DBA than the control group, while non-accelerated cohorts were 8 percent more likely. Non-accelerated students earned, on average, 9 more college credits and were 25 percent more likely to enroll full-time, while accelerated students earned, on average, 21 more college credits and were 33 percent more likely to enroll full-time. Neither group saw differences in GPA the semester following DBA from the comparison group, although the CCRC-Cabrillo team noted that it is likely that DBA students are more disadvantaged than the comparison group. DBA intentionally recruited very high risk students. 60% of students had a parent who was a migrant worker, 25% had gone to an alternative or continuation high school, 20% had a history of substance abuse, and 21% had not graduated from high school. In this case, lack of differences in average GPA may be evidence that DBA participation raised students' GPAs above the levels that would have been achieved.

Diego's role has been one of exemplary and inspiring leadership here at Cabrillo College. He came to Cabrillo with the idea of starting a research-based program to serve under-prepared minority students. As the founder and director of the DBA, he has forged a broad range of partnerships within the community and pulled together a dedicated group of faculty here on campus. He has also been able to attract a group of highly skilled professional consultants to help set up various aspects of the DBA and to prepare it for wide dissemination.

**How has this educator been active in developing, organizing, or supporting state and national two-year postsecondary associations?**

Diego has been a keynote speaker for the basic skills initiative. He has presented his research and experience with the Digital Bridge Academy at the following conferences that are state and nationally focused:

- Understanding the Needs of High Risk Students, University of Chicago Chapin Hall and MacArthur Research Network on Transitions to Adulthood conference, Chicago, IL, November 2004.
- Preparing Under Prepared Youth for College and High Paying Careers, American Association of Community College's Workforce Development Institute, Phoenix, AR, January 2005.
- Preparing Youth At-Risk for College and High Paying Careers, Adolescent Issues Summit, State of Colorado Office of the Child's Representative, Denver, CO, May 2005.
- Preparing High Risk Youth for College and High Paying Careers, California Workforce Association's Fourth Annual Youth Conference, Anaheim, CA, January 2005.
- Bridging the Gap to High-Wage and High-Demand Careers for High-Risk Young Adults, California Workforce Association Conference on New Models for Industry-Driven Workforce Partnerships for Career Pathways, San Diego, CA, April 2002.

**What awards or honors has the educator received in recognition of leadership in the college or community?**

The following are the awards and recognition Diego Navarro has received for his innovative work on the DBA.

- 2005 Model Program Award from the Women Employed with Chicago Jobs Council & UIC Great Cities Institute
- 2007 Example Program Award from the Research & Planning Group for California Community Colleges with the Center for Student Success
- 2007 John W. Rice Diversity and Equity Award
- 2007;Excelencia! in Education Honorable Mention
- 2007 Practice with Promise Awards from the Campaign for College Opportunity,
- 2008 Pacific Regional Equity Award from the Association of Community College Trustees
- 2008 Exemplary Program Award from the U.S. Department of Education
- 2009 John Irvine Leadership Award Finalist