

The Bounce Back Retention Program: At a Glance

Bounce Back is a semester-long class that meets weekly. While there may be some variation based on institutional need, we have developed the program to last fifteen weeks. Classes are designed to run for an hour at minimum. This structure allows for ongoing support throughout the semester. With this frequency, engagement and connectedness are able to develop – conditions which research has shown to improve retention. At SDSU, students receive one academic credit for attending, but this is not a necessity. Registration in the Bounce Back Program is voluntary. However, there have been requests to mandate Bounce Back. We have met this request for athletes at SDSU and based on data from Spring 2007, results were impressive. All athlete participants returned to good academic standing.

Bounce Back classes are experiential. The curriculum is unique in that it addresses two aspects of academic success: academic skills and resiliency traits. Each module has been developed to bolster hope, increase confidence, and strengthen commitment to obtaining a college degree. Even when the topic is academic, students are encouraged to self-reflect and engage with the material in a new way.

We continually ask students to reflect on obstacles and challenge them to persist. We reinforce the concept that knowledge is power. As they more fully know and understand themselves, they become more goal-directed.

Classes are run by a mental health professional and peer coach.

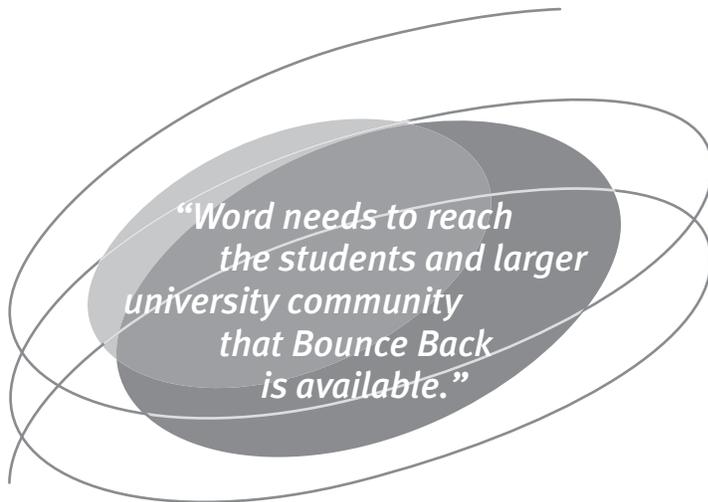
Facilitation by both a therapist and a student gives a well-rounded perspective to the group.

We encourage the mental health professional to be both a therapist and an instructor. As therapists, we know psychological theory. We know how to elicit and manage strong feelings. We are skilled at establishing rapport and know how to make meaningful connections in groups. These factors are critical in establishing the necessary environment for personal reflection on academic performance and goals. In our roles as instructors, we are able to be more self-disclosing. Most of us have had to overcome disappointment and failure. Stigma and hierarchical differences are reduced when students have additional proof that prior challenges are not predictors of future success. At the same time, it is also important to remember that Bounce Back is not traditional therapy. With this instructor/therapist role, it is necessary to be mindful of boundaries. Remember, it is more appropriate to refer students with emotional issues to the counseling center rather than become their Bounce Back therapist.

The peer coach adds credibility to any topic introduced in class. He or she is “one of them,” and the institutional and generational connection is invaluable. We have also discovered an unexpected secondary gain for the peers. The peer coach usually finds their participation in the program helpful to their own personal and professional development. Through this experience, they learn first-hand that “giving is getting.”

Classes are kept small. We have found ten students per class to be the optimal number of participants. However, if budget restraints require larger classes, we believe the class can be effective for up to fifteen students. Keeping a cap on the size allows for classroom cohesiveness and open discussion.

Know your material but don't be limited by it. This is one of the most important aspects to keep in mind. We have tried to provide an excess of information for each Bounce Back module so the purpose and goal of



each class can be approached in various ways. Likewise, you are equipped with enough information so you will never be at a “loss for words.” It is important for you to familiarize yourself with the information prior to class in order to present the ideas in an informal, non-lecture format. If you are reading off a script, the students will not listen. We have designed Bounce Back with enough flexibility to change the order of sessions so you can respond to student or institutional need. Be creative! Many of the modules contain ideas that have probably been incorporated into your therapeutic work. Please, feel free to innovate. Also, we encourage you to divert from the planned format if the interest and needs of the class move in a different direction. As long as the direction supports the overall goal of enhancing academic skills and strengthening resiliency, you are on the right track.

Some preparation is involved. Prior to starting Bounce Back at your institution, you will need administrative support. Word needs to reach the students and larger university community that Bounce Back is available. You’ll want to find eager instructors and peer coaches. We have had success recruiting coaches by contacting Bounce Back graduates, peer programs, honors students, and the Dean of Students Office. Manuals and incentives will need to be ordered. We have created the Student Workbook which conveys the essence of Bounce Back to enrollees and provides participants with an organized collection of worksheets to be used throughout the semester. Additionally, a workbook encourages students to give serious reflection to the topics covered. Your institution may choose to pay for the cost of the Student Workbooks but we have found that students are usually able to cover the cost which is small compared to materials in their other classes. Other preparation includes ordering incentives.

Incentives are important. At the end of each class, students are given a tangible reminder of the week's topic. The incentive serves to remind students of the core principles addressed in each module. A secondary gain incurred by the use of incentives has been the student response. Many students appreciate having some “thing” being offered to them. Many students, who have been deprived materialistically, feel cared for with these reinforcements. We have provided suggested incentives for each module but strongly encourage you to explore other possibilities that might be more relevant to your student population. Websites such as iPrint.com can encourage creativity.

Time to collaborate with your colleagues can be extremely helpful. Given that there are many reasons students are on academic probation, consultation groups are held with facilitators and peer coaches to brainstorm approaches. We have found some issues to be predictable. For example, getting all students to participate in discussions, managing indifference, and handling absences are some such issues. Yet, each semester unexpected issues arise. For example, we've had to deal with child-abuse reporting, issues in regards to working with mandated participants, and referrals for students who clearly have needs beyond what Bounce Back can provide. Collaborating in consultation groups results in creative problem-solving and helps facilitators feel less alone when they are struggling.

Research is beneficial. We have found it very helpful to have statistical data to support the efficacy of Bounce Back. School officials, financial supporters, and even students take interest in the data. We recommend collecting pre- and post-data. At SDSU, pre-assessments are required prior to registration. Post-tests are administered near the end of the semester which provide comparative results. Although not required, we incorporate these results during week ten, “My Makeover: Before and After Shots.” While there may be a variety of characteristics your institution would like to measure, we have focused on time-management skills, emotion regulation abilities, and automatic thoughts. Perhaps most relevant to the administration is data on G.P.A. and retention rates. Therefore, we strongly recommend that you track the academic success of your participants. Further information about SDSU's Bounce Back data can be found at www.sdsu.edu/cps. As you conduct research on Bounce Back at your institution, we would appreciate learning about your results. You can e-mail us at Bouncebk@mail.sdsu.edu.

