

Bounce Back Retention Program: At a Glance

Bounce Back Retention Program Bounce Back was specifically developed for students on academic probation. It is a fifteen-week curriculum formatted into weekly modules, each of fifty-minute duration. Sections are kept small in order to encourage discussion, facilitate engagement, and develop a supportive learning community. The experiential format of Bounce Back fosters critical thinking and strengthens the learning potential of participants. Additionally, modules encourage student interaction with other campus resources, allowing students to become more informed and more fully involved in campus life. It is recommended that class instructors have mental health backgrounds to facilitate discussion and manage the emotions that arise from personal disclosure. Likewise, it is recommended that select undergraduate students assist each section as peer coaches.

The topics covered in Bounce Back include persistence, study skills, time management, procrastination, stress management and self-understanding. Class instructors use a positive psychology and resilience-based approach to student learning. Students are helped to recognize and strengthen their skill sets. Likewise, students are helped to overcome barriers that interfere with academic success.

Research studies comparing Bounce Back students with non-participating students on academic probation concluded that students who participated in Bounce Back were more likely to remove their academic probation status, avoid disqualification and increase their overall grade point average.

Registration in the Bounce Back Program is voluntary but has become a mandate for first year students.

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. They are “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.

Classes are kept small. We have found 15-20 students per class to be the optimal number of participants. Students have been able to create community and feel connected to each other.

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 needs. 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.-

Time to collaborate with your colleagues can be 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 regard 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. During its inception at SDSU, pre-assessments were required prior to registration. Post-tests were administered near the end of the semester which provide comparative results. Although not required, we incorporate these results during the final week 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@sdsu.edu.