

# Using a comparison group to evaluate program impact: Summer Bridge participant outcomes

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### Summer Bridge

Summer Bridge (SB) is a summer transition program designed to assist incoming EOP first-year students in their transition from high school to college. Students take a five-week course, live on campus for the first three weeks and commute for the last two weeks, participate in faculty lectures, workshops, peer networking activities, an academic advising seminar that covers key topics for a successful transition (e.g., curriculum requirements, registration, BroncoDirect, financial aid, university policies, student success behaviors), tutoring, study time, residence life programming activities intended to build community, all while learning about Cal Poly Pomona. SB fulfills the university's mandatory orientation requirement. SB covers all topics included in orientation programs, and coordinates with Orientation Services so that participants can join a college advising session and experience Bronco Spirit Night.



### Purpose of Assessment

In past years, pre and post assessments were implemented to determine if students met predetermined learning outcomes. Every year, learning outcome results were highly positive. Students demonstrated learning everything that was intended for them to learn in the program. To expand our understanding of the impact of Summer Bridge, an assessment was designed to compare the acquired knowledge and sense of belonging/connectedness of SB participants with similar non-participants. The research questions were: Do SB participants learn more than similar non-participants? Do SB participants develop a stronger sense of belonging to the campus than similar non-participants? Comfort about living on campus was also measured.

### Methodology

Fall 2015 incoming EOP students (265 total) were sent a survey through CampusLabs (the Student Affairs assessment platform) in mid-August. The survey contained 24 learning outcome based items, 9 items that composed a *connectedness* scale, 1 item for closeness to the campus, 5 items related to living on campus, and other demographic and SB related questions. The focus of this assessment report is on the items that can be compared between SB participants and non-participants (learning outcomes, connectedness, closeness to campus, and living on campus items).

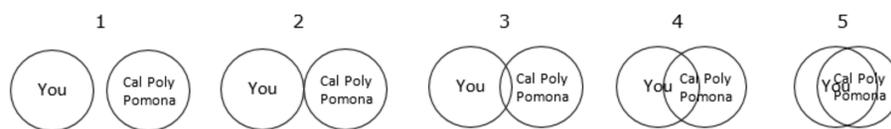
**Learning outcome items** covered a variety of areas. For example, "I can list three important advising tools that will help me plan my courses so that I can meet graduation requirements," "I can describe what plagiarism is," "I can interpret my Award Summary information on BroncoDirect," and "I know where to go at Cal Poly Pomona for assistance with writing assignments."

**Connectedness** items included, "I see myself as someone who can connect with

others in college," "I feel I will be able to connect with faculty in college," and "I see people as friendly and approachable in college." The connectedness scale was adapted from Lee, Draper, and Lee's (2001) social connectedness scale. A composite scale was built from the 9 items.

All learning outcomes and connectedness item responses were set with a Likert type 5-point scale where 1 = *Strongly Disagree*, and 5 = *Strongly Agree*.

The **closeness to the campus** was measured with one item adapted from Aaron, Aaron, and Smollan's (1992) inclusion of other in the self scale. Rather than measuring closeness with another individual, this scale was adjusted to measure closeness with the institution. Participants selected the pair of circles that best represented their connection to the campus from the following:



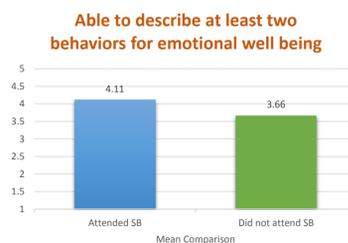
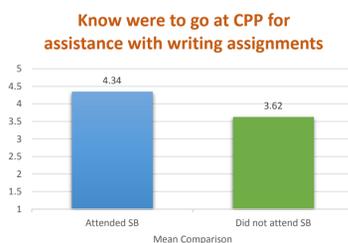
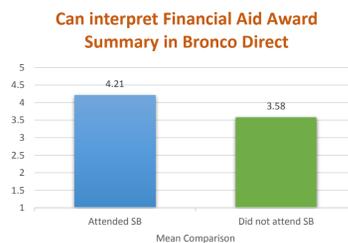
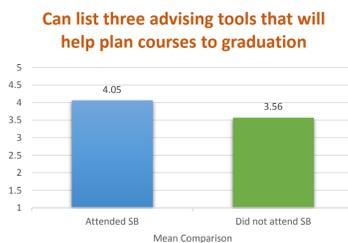
**Living on campus** items included "I feel comfortable about living in the residence hall," "I feel I can resolve conflicts in the residence hall if they come up," and "I feel confident about living away from home." The response scale was the same as the learning outcomes and connectedness scale. A composite scale was built from the 5 items.

### Results

Two hundred and forty (240; 91%) students responded to the survey, but only 213 (80%) completed the survey through the end (some questions did not apply to all students).

- 96 participated in SB
- 117 did not (113 of them participated in an Orientation Program)

**Learning Outcomes (LOs):** SB participants felt they knew, understood, could list or could describe more information related to learning outcomes than non-participants. T-test analyses showed that SB participant's means were significantly higher than non-participants on all learning outcomes except on three. Below are examples of items with statistical significance of  $p \leq .001$ :

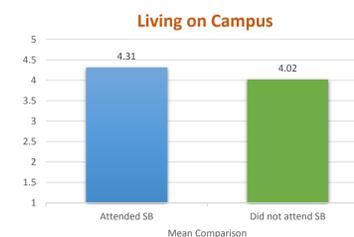
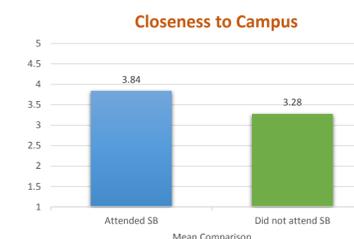
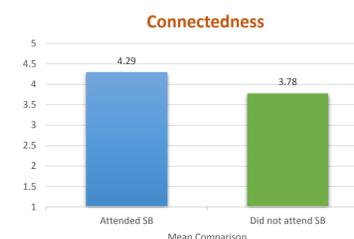


The three LOs where SB participants and non-participants did not differ significantly were: "I can describe what plagiarism is," "I know the consequences for not following university policies," and "I know what it means to be accountable for my own education." These LOs are broad in nature, and students should have a good sense of them through prior experience as students in general.

**Connectedness:** A statistically significant t-test analysis ( $t = 5.79$ ,  $df = 211$ ,  $p < .001$ ) indicated that SB participants had higher means ( $M = 4.29$ ) in the connectedness scale than non-participants ( $M = 3.78$ ), therefore, SB participants had a better outlook about their connection with people at Cal Poly Pomona.

**Closeness to campus:** A statistically significant t-test analysis ( $t = 4.77$ ,  $df = 210.05$ ,  $p < .001$ ) indicated that SB participants also had a higher mean ( $M = 3.84$ ) than non-participants ( $M = 3.28$ ) on the closeness to campus scale, meaning that they included Cal Poly Pomona in their sense of self to a greater extent.

**Living on campus:** Ninety-seven students indicated they were going to live on campus in Fall 2015, 38 of them were SB participants and 59 were not. A statistically significant t-test analysis ( $t = 2.33$ ,  $df = 88.31$ ,  $p < .05$ ) indicated that SB participants felt better overall ( $M = 4.31$ ) about being able to manage living on campus than non-participants ( $M = 4.02$ ).



### Conclusion & Implications

In general, this assessment showed that, when compared to similar students who did not participate in Summer Bridge, SB participants had more confidence than non-participants in their knowledge and ability to describe and list information related to being a successful student at Cal Poly Pomona in 21 of 24 pre-identified LOs. SB participants also had stronger feelings of connectedness and closeness to campus. When looking only at students who were going to live on campus during their first year, SB participants felt more confident in their ability to manage study demands, conflicts, making friends, and being away from home, than non-participants. Almost all students who did not participate in SB had attended an Orientation program, therefore, the impact of SB can be said to go above and beyond what students gain through orientation.

This assessment shows the value of using a comparison group to evaluate the impact of a program. When possible, program evaluations should include such groups for a greater understanding of program impact. For this SB in particular, survey items will be reviewed to assess if modifications would yield improvements.