

NADE Accreditation: The Right Decision for the Current Time

NADE Accreditation Commission

NADE has long recognized that “Developmental Education is a comprehensive process that focuses on the intellectual, social, and emotional growth and development of all students. Developmental Education includes, but is not limited to, tutoring, personal/career counseling, academic advisement, and coursework” (NADE Fact Sheet, www.nade.net/). Sometimes at odds with this holistic vision is the more traditional view of Developmental Education as a sequence of stand-alone, semester-long remedial courses. It is this aspect of the field that is currently being challenged to reexamine its paradigms for instructional delivery and to explore different platforms. In the current climate of scrutiny, the NADE Accreditation process is more relevant and important than ever to the discussion of students’ success and completion of a meaningful credential. Clearly, the continuous, systematic self-assessment and evaluation inherent in the self-study and accreditation process—both formative and summative—is vital to the effectiveness of any academic support program (Boylan & Saxon, 2012; Boylan, 2002).

Changes to the traditional instructional model, whether in the form of paired courses, learning communities, embedded instruction, contextualized learning, or any of a number of other designs, have a direct impact on the student population served by developmental programs. The effectiveness of these changes, as well as the short- and long-term implications they hold for various student groups, must be continuously evaluated. Though many revisions to traditional educational delivery systems have been mandated at the state or system level and/or by external grants, individual institutions and developmental programs must exercise their responsibility to ensure the quality, effectiveness, integrity, and efficacy of the support services they offer to students. Evaluation for NADE Accreditation allows developmental programs to study the effect of these changes on the students they serve.

At a time when developmental education programs are being asked to radically change their program designs, the professionals working in these programs need to advocate for the students who will be most impacted by such policies. They also need to have confidence that they can successfully implement changes to enhance student success. As MDRC senior policy expert Thomas Brock suggested at the June 2012 National Center for Postsecondary Research conference, research alone is not enough. Policy makers need to make the case for change, generate the will to change, and either reallocate or find new resources to support the change (Brock, 2012).

In the current politically-charged climate, NADE Accreditation helps programs demonstrate not only to themselves and their administrations, but to their states and systems, the effects of changes made to their programs. The accreditation process, itself, demonstrates the results of changes, mandated or self-determined, to student success, and it provides the evidence needed to make data-driven decisions about programs. The process also explores the intended and unintended consequences of various types of interventions for different groups, cost and cost-effectiveness of strategies, and holistic implications for student success, including completion of meaningful credentials.

Developmental Education professionals should participate in developing a larger body of evidence about learning and teaching strategies. It is imperative that developmental professionals work together to apply the best practices that support students and programs. Programs that follow the NADE Accreditation process have an opportunity to demonstrate that they are following recognized best practices.

NADE Accreditation promotes standards for research and practice in Developmental Education. The accreditation process, as well, creates an avenue for innovations to emerge and become part of the fabric of Developmental Education. Accreditation requirements promote a culture of evidence and continuous improvement for the Developmental Education profession.

NADE Accreditation is flexible and responds to the wide spectrum of developmental education programs found in the profession. Accreditation provides opportunities to examine all aspects of programs that offer academic support to students—traditional and innovative coursework programs, course-based learning assistance for credit-level courses, and tutoring services (Clark-Thayer & Cole, Eds., 2009). It is ultimately intended to advance research in the field.

NADE Accreditation will continue to support Developmental Education professionals in their efforts to provide the best possible educational opportunities for their students in this changing and uncertain environment.

In summary, NADE Accreditation is highly relevant for any institution serious about making research-based changes and assessing their outcomes.

References

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- Clark-Thayer, S., & Cole, L.P., Eds. (2009). *NADE self-evaluation guides (2nd edition): Best practices in academic support programs*. Clearwater, FL: H&H Publishing.
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