SPECIAL EDITION | Focus on Accreditation

The NADE Digest publishes articles of interest for developmental education professionals including administrators, faculty, learning assistance personnel, academic counselors, and tutors who are interested in the discussion of practical issues in post-secondary developmental education. The Digest is published electronically twice each academic year. Articles in the Digest are indexed in ERIC.

NADE Digest Submissions

Articles should relate to issues that inform and broaden our understanding and practice of teaching and learning in developmental education. The subject of the article may emphasize innovative approaches, best practices, how meaningful research affects teaching and learning, or techniques to enhance student performance. Review the "Call for Manuscripts" at www.thenade.org for more information.

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IN THIS ISSUE

MISSION

NADE seeks to improve the theory and practice of developmental education at all levels of the educational spectrum, the professional capabilities of developmental educators, and the design of programs to prepare developmental educators.

Preface

This first issue of the *NADE Digest* for 2018 is devoted to NADE Accreditation. It may be at this point that most members of NADE know about accreditation, so the goal of this issue is not so much to inform as to inspire, and perhaps to expand the context in which many of us think about the NADE accreditation process and its importance. First, we address a "global" perspective. In her article, "Accreditation: A Value-Added Proposition," Dr. Martha Casazza looks at how the accreditation process within higher education has historically been either transactional or value-added. She contends that NADE Accreditation has and still fills a unique place in higher education today.

The Accreditation Commission continues this discussion with the article "The Right Decision for the Current Time." They note that in a time when many programs are undergoing mandated reforms, it is especially important to evaluate the effectiveness of these changes, for both their short- and long-term implications.

Third, the focus moves on to the more practical—the process of what's involved in getting accredited. Jenny Ferguson and Naomi Ludman provide an overview of the accreditation process, focusing on the "how," but also continuing to look at the "why," the reason that program administrators can say "yes; this is why our institution, program, and students will benefit so profoundly from this process."

Fourth, we include the real "ground-level" view, the voices of those who have gone through some part of this process, using the NADE Guides in their work or completing the accreditation process with their program. Jane Neuburger shares how she used the *NADE Self-Evaluation Guides* to help build tutoring programs in two very different institutions. Stephanie Kratz shares the journey to advanced-level accreditation for the writing program at Heartland Community College. And finally, we share the voices of those who have not only been through the accreditation process themselves, but who have also been peer reviewers; that is, they have evaluated the applications of programs seeking accreditation. Dr. Geoff Bailey and Maria Bahr share from these "dual" perspectives.

Naomi Ludman, *Editor*

Linda Thompson, *Chair of the Commission*

National Association for Developmental Education

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Mission

The NADE Accreditation Commission exists to improve and enhance the success of students at all levels of academic preparation, as well as to facilitate the professional growth of developmental educators by setting standards of best practice, emphasizing the use of theory to inform practice, and promoting effective evaluation and quality research in developmental education and learning assistance programs.

Accreditation: A Value-Added Proposition

Martha Casazza

Let's begin our discussion by thinking about the process of accreditation in general and examining whether it is a transactional or value-added activity. At the same time, we need to consider if the assessment it represents is more closely related to a measure of accountability or a means of improvement.

In a transactional process, accreditation is simply a means to an end. An institution or program demonstrates that it meets the standards established by the appropriate industry. If it demonstrates through a self-study report and peer review that it meets the standards, it is awarded accreditation. At that point, the report and the data collected may be shelved until the next cycle when the process begins again. The entity has been found accountable to established standards, and its work continues often unchanged.

If accreditation is a value-added proposition, on the other hand, it goes beyond simple accountability. The institution analyzes the data to examine its current status and critically inform its future practice. While striving to meet industry standards, the organization also recognizes the potential of the process to impact its internal effectiveness. It fully embraces accreditation as a process integral to its growth.

These two lenses for thinking about accreditation closely mirror the two paradigms of assessment suggested by Peter Ewell (2009): the improvement paradigm and the accountability paradigm. The former is underscored by its emphasis on formative assessment that is internally focused with an ethos of engagement. The latter is summative and framed by its judgmental nature that is externally focused with an ethos of compliance.

As we review the overall systems of U.S accreditation and NADE accreditation, let's keep these two processes and paradigms in mind. Let's critically reflect on the accreditation processes this article describes and decide if one is emphasized more than the other and where they converge.

Overall U.S. Accreditation

Today, in the United States, for an institution of higher education and its students to receive federal monies, it must be accredited by a regional or national agency recognized by the federal government. The process of gaining institutional accreditation is built around a set of standards created by an accrediting agency. The criteria are first examined through an institutional self-study and then reviewed by a team of external peers created and trained by the accrediting agency. The outcomes of this external review include accreditation/re-accreditation for up to ten years, sanctions/warnings or denial/termination (Kelchen, 2017). Normally, the one outcome that demands a plan for improvement is when a sanction or warning is issued. This seems more punitive than value added.

Looking at this process through the lenses described above, our initial impression is that accreditation is based on standards designed to hold institutions accountable to an external agency for obtaining funding from the federal government. There is little incentive under most circumstances to use the data gathered to inform decision making. Unfortunately, this often spawns a transactional process that is more concerned with accountability than improvement.

Has it always been this way? Accreditation wasn't always linked to the federal government. In the late 1800s, there was a proliferation of educational institutions including normal schools, junior colleges, technical schools, and secondary schools. Postsecondary institutions needed a way to define what a college was and to determine standards for admission and completing a degree (Harcleroad, 1980). This led to the development by educators of regional associations to create and certify standards. The subsequent process of accreditation was voluntary and driven by educators. The outcome was the creation of a list of approved institutions. This list became very prestigious and sought after, and institutions began gathering descriptive data to ensure they were included. Thus, the process of accreditation, even before its ties to the federal government, began to be transactional and tied more to accountability than improvement.

It was not linked to federal funding until after the GI Bill when veterans were offered tuition support from the government. That eventually led to the Veterans Readjustment Assistance Act in 1952, when the government tasked accrediting agencies with ensuring that institutions met minimum quality standards (Conway, 1979). The government became interested in the work of the various accrediting agencies and in 1979 expanded the purposes of accreditation with its list of nine criteria for agency recognition. One of the criteria was "creating goals for self-improvement of weaker programs and stimulating a

general raising of standards among educational institutions" (1979, p.1). In a very general way, this may have led to a focus on a value-added approach to accreditation. It also led, however, to the challenging merger of a process of self-regulation with one of federal oversight (Legon, 2017). Some would argue that this has led to a model that is more driven by accountability than value-added.

Until the 1980s, the following general standards were used to evaluate an institution's quality: mission, governance, financial health, and academic resources. As we can see, these are essentially inputs to the institution and not directly related to outputs that result from teaching or learning: Academic resources were measured by data that described such things as the number of books in the library, number of faculty and facilities. An institution could best meet the standards by adding volumes to the library or increasing the number of faculty. Indeed, these elements were assumed to be linked to learning and thus could be considered part of a process of improvement rather than simply accountability, but there was little mention of the student-centered mission of higher education or outcomes. The criteria still seemed to be leaning toward overall accountability and a summative measure of quality. The measurement tools were quantitative rather than a combination of quantitative and qualitative which underscore the overall accountability focus (Ewell, 2009).

The accreditation process was not yet looking at teaching and learning as quality measures for the institution, nor was it asking institutions to analyze the data it collected to inform decision making that could improve its effectiveness. It was not critically examining the core purpose of higher education: To educate its students and to provide evidence of their learning outcomes, a value-added concept.

It was not until thirty years later that the government required student learning outcomes to be added to the process. Despite this new requirement to address learning outcomes, a report in 2015 showed that colleges were more likely to lose accreditation for financial reasons than academic reasons. This report was followed by an article that reported 11 regionally-accredited four-year colleges had graduation rates below ten percent (Kelchen, 2017). Clearly, no one was really paying attention to learning outcomes as a significant marker for accreditation purposes. This was somewhat adjusted in 2016 when regional accreditors set new standards for graduation rates (Kreighbaum, 2016). The new standards, however, were not clearly outlined and pretty much left up to the accrediting agency (Ewell, 2010).

More recently, regional accrediting agencies like the Higher Learning Commission (HLC) have focused more on teaching and learning with student outcomes playing an important role. Its five criteria for accreditation now include: Mission, Integrity, Teaching and Learning: Quality, Resources and Support, Teaching and Learning: Evaluation and Improvement, and Resources, Planning and Institutional Effectiveness. It is significant to note that teaching and learning have become two integral components of the HLC accreditation process (Higher Learning Commission, 2014).

With teaching and learning now comprising two of the five criteria for accreditation, the focus necessarily includes student learning outcomes and has greater potential for becoming a value-added process. Through these two criteria, HLC is asking its institutions to demonstrate specific qualities such as

- The exercise of intellectual inquiry and the acquisition, application, and integration of broad learning and skills are integral to its educational programs,
- Provides support for student learning and effective teaching
- Evaluates the success of its graduates,
- Uses information on student retention, persistence and completion of programs to make improvements as warranted by the data, and
- Processes and methodologies for collecting and analyzing information on student retention, persistence and completion of programs reflect good practice.

(An added note in the HLC policy here states that institutions are accountable for the validity of their measures.)

This represents a shift in focus to one of assessment and analysis which can drive accreditation toward more of an improvement model. Institutions accredited by the HLC are being asked to not only report data on student learning but HOW they use that data to improve their programming. What does this mean for the accountability approach? Ewell asserts that there will always be a tension between the two approaches but that one should not preclude the other. He urges all accreditors to separate compliance from deep engagement activities and for institutions to utilize the data they collect to identify deficiencies while at the same time producing summary benchmarks that meet compliance criteria.

NADE Program Accreditation

How does NADE program accreditation fit into the overall concept of accreditation and its various paradigms? How does it add value along with accountability to an institution's accreditation process? From the beginning, the NADE process has been one of self-regulation that encouraged teams of educators to deeply engage with the data from their programs. The primary goal was never compliance with standards for the sake of external accountability. Instead the goal is to facilitate a value-added process where "unique strengths and weaknesses" are uncovered through a reflective, evidence-based process. The Accreditation Commission encourages applicants to approach the process with a goal to "improve your program rather than protect it" (NADE Accreditation, 2017)).

As we saw in the earlier descriptions of institutional accreditation, too often data are gathered simply for accountability purposes. They are frequently summative in nature and do not reflect a continuous process of assessment. This does not align easily with an improvement model. In NADE's *Required Parts of Application* document (2013), it asserts that programs under review, "…are effectively engaged in the process of continuous and systematic assessment and evaluation" (p. 1). This approach fits well with Ewell's principles for easing the tension between accountability and continuous improvement.

Let's examine NADE's approach through the framework of his "Principles of Response" (2009, p. 14). He constructed these to provide guidance for those seeking to balance external accountability and evidence-based continuous improvement.

1. Respond visibly to domains of legitimate external concern.

In recent years, developmental education with its multiple components (coursework, tutoring, and course-based learning assistance) has come under attack from multiple sources. With state and federal support for postsecondary education decreasing, institutions are looking for ways to cut costs. Often the first place to cut includes student support systems such as academic assistance. At a time when increasing revenues is important, institutions look at the short term and may decide to cut developmental coursework or decrease funds for tutors. This, of course, does not consider the potential loss of tuition when students who need assistance drop out. Some state systems have phased out what they call remedial education from their four-year institutions or legislated significant reductions. Twenty-two states have reduced or eliminated developmental coursework from their public colleges and universities (Parker, 2007). In Florida and Colorado, for instance, students in public colleges can now avoid developmental classes and enroll directly in college-level courses regardless of their placement test results. Connecticut restricts separate developmental coursework to one semester per student (Lu, 2013).

While funding is decreasing, the need for academic assistance programs continues to increase. More diverse students are coming to college; often they are older and need to brush up on skills learned earlier. This population is expected to increase (NCES Fast Facts, 2011). They may also be coming from a range of secondary schools with varying amounts of academic preparation. Boylan and Goudas (2012) describe students placed into remediation as "disproportionately characterized by known risk factors such as being minority, low income, first generation and underprepared" (para.10).

Clearly there is a realistic need for developmental education programs to collect, analyze and disseminate the data that show how effective their academic support systems are. These data will not only help their institution demonstrate the overall value they add to a student's education, but they also make a significant case for additional resources through an important measure of accountability. The data gathered has the potential to make the institution appear proactive to the needs of its students and to assume a "collective responsibility" for their success. (Ewell, p. 15) This is a legitimate external concern that needs to be addressed.

2. Show action on the results of assessment.

Ewell contends that institutions often do not know how to implement evidence-based continuous improvement. He suggests that this is a result of the historical precedent of utilizing assessment data for compliance purposes. His suggestion for providing opportunities for the "thoughtful, collective reflection about evidence" (Ewell, p.16) is exactly what the NADE model accomplishes.

NADE states in the overview of essential actions that, "...the Accreditation process and the thoughtful analysis it is intended to stimulate are not linear in action" (p.5). Indeed, it emphasizes the significance of the active engagement of the self-study team and encourages the inclusion of as many stakeholders as possible. It goes on to assert: "Potential insights into areas of strength as well as areas needing improvement are enhanced by the differing perspectives offered by a diverse self-study team" (p. 6)

In addition to the creation of a strategic, actively engaged team, the NADE process requires evidence of the data being used to inform a cycle of continuous and systematic assessment. The 8th step of the process for developmental coursework accreditation states, "Using the baseline data analysis, coupled with the prioritized list of areas needing improvement, formulate the action plans intended to improve services to students and/or impact student success" (p.7).

NADE ensures that its process is a model for the value-added approach to accreditation. It not only requires a thoughtful analysis of data, but the self-study team must create an action plan that clearly spells out how the data will inform its next steps. This study will not be put on a shelf; rather, it will proactively guide the program to continuously improve. This is a model not only for a specific institution but for U.S. accreditation in general.

3. Emphasize assessment at the major transition points in a college career.

There is a significant data component to the NADE process that requires a minimum of four academic years of consecutive data that includes at least two years of baseline data plus two years of comparative data (p.14). Since developmental education programs typically occur at the beginning of a student's educational experience, descriptive data are initially collected to provide an overall picture of the incoming cohort and whether its students follow advice related to learning assistance and their subsequent performance. It is also important to note that not only is successful completion of the developmental component assessed, but additional measures are built in throughout their path to college completion. For instance, grades and/or completion rates in subsequent college-level courses are tracked as well as retention rates through the second year. The process for advanced accreditation also suggests the inclusion of comparative data that looks at the institution's overall student success data versus that of the students placed into a developmental program.

The multi-year baseline and comparative data provided through the NADE accreditation process have the potential to be valuable resources to the institution in general when it examines its overall admissions, persistence and retention rates. These are, indeed, major transition points where data can inform practice.

4. Embed assessment in the regular curriculum.

Too often assessment is an afterthought, and measurement tools are only employed at the conclusion of a program to evaluate the end results. The data that result from such an approach cannot accurately assess where the program succeeded and where it might need to be improved. Successful programs build in evaluation from the beginning by analyzing formative measures along the way to determine if the goals and objectives are being met.

To apply for NADE accreditation, a team must provide two years of baseline data collected before implementing an action plan for improvement. Following the action plan, the team collects data for another two years documenting the effectiveness of the plan. These data necessarily reflect more than simple end points. They examine patterns and multiple points of evaluation and align with the overall goals and objectives of the program. The fundamental question that guides the data templates for developmental coursework accreditation is, "To what extent is the developmental coursework program component using continuous and systematic assessment and evaluation to improve the services it provides" (p. 13). The expectation is that assessment is an integral part of an effective program and embedded throughout.

NADE's accreditation process clearly fits into a value-added approach that encourages program improvement through formative assessment and thoughtful analysis of data. Its evidence-based model ensures that programs and their outcomes will be critically examined and continuously evaluated. NADE recognized the significance of this model from the start and is well positioned to be an integral component of any institution's overall accreditation process.

As the graphic below demonstrates, the NADE accreditation process adds a significant component to at least two of the HLC components, teaching and learning, that we examined earlier. Its robust collection of data related to student outcomes has the potential to strengthen any institution's self-study process.

In addition to the significant value it adds to the teaching and learning components through its formative data, the NADE process also supports the accountability needs of an institution's accreditation with its summative data. At the very least, it has the potential to amplify the mission or integrity components of the overall accreditation process. The formative and summative data analyzed by the NADE self-study team both underscore the institution's commitment to meet the needs of its students.

In summary it is evident that although there is a tension between a value-added approach to accreditation and one that is simply undertaken to demonstrate accountability, there can be a healthy overlap. They are not and should not be exclusive processes. In the field of developmental education, we approach accreditation the same way we approach our students: We are interested in continuous improvement and formative development. We are also willing to be held accountable for our students' success and completion of their goals. That is what drives us to collect and critically analyze data that will continuously inform our decision making.

We are confident that our model will remain primarily focused on a value-added approach while also holding us accountable to rigorous standards and serve as a model to other accreditation models that have not yet reached that point.

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Dr. Casazza has published numerous articles and co-authored two books with Dr. Sharon Silverman: Learning Assistance and Developmental Education: A Guide for Effective Practice *(1996), which is listed as "essential professional reading" on the CLADEA website, and* Learning and Development *(1999). She also co-authored* Access, Opportunity and Success: Keeping the Promise of Higher Education *(2006). Her most recent publications are* Dreaming Forward: Latino Voices Enhance the Mosaic *(2015) and* Student Voices: We Believe in You *(2017).*

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 website at https://thenade.org/Mission-Vision-and-Goals). Sometimes at odds with this holistic vision is the narrower and more traditional view of Developmental Education as a sequence of stand-alone, semester-long remedial courses. This aspect of the field has been challenged, and now new paradigms and platforms for instructional delivery are being mandated.

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 meaningful credentials. 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 state or system levels and/or by external grants, individual institutions and developmental/ transitional programs must exercise their responsibility to ensure the quality, effectiveness, integrity, and efficacy of the support services they offer to students. The assessment and evaluation required for NADE Accreditation allow developmental programs to study the effect of these changes on the students they serve.

At a time when developmental and transitional 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/transitional education and learning assistance professionals should participate in developing a larger body of evidence about learning and teaching strategies. It is imperative that professionals in the field work together to apply the best practices that support students and programs. Programs that follow the NADE Accreditation process utilizing the *NADE Self-Evaluation Guides* have an opportunity to demonstrate that they are following recognized best practices.

NADE Accreditation promotes standards for research and practice in Developmental/ Transitional Education. The accreditation process additionally creates an avenue for innovations to emerge and become part of the fabric of Developmental Education and :Learning Assistance. NADE Accreditation requirements promote a *culture of evidence and continuous improvement* for the Developmental/Transitional programs dedicated to student success in colleges and universities.

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/Transitional 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 in student support programs.

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An Overview of NADE Accreditation

Jennifer Ferguson and Naomi Ludman

As noted in the introduction to this issue of the *Digest*, the articles here present many "voices" or perspectives on the accreditation process. This article is intended to provide an overview of the steps involved and, at the same time, to share the "voice" of the commission on the value of accreditation. Those who have gone through the accreditation process have, perhaps, the most eloquent "voices" as to the value of accreditation. However, those of us who serve on the Commission speak with the collective "voice" of the many programs who have shared their experiences. Therefore, this article provides both a broad overview of the accreditation process and gives what we have come to call our "elevator speech," our "collective why."

In short, accreditation is a process by which programs demonstrate their academic quality; that is, they demonstrate that they are making decisions for programmatic changes based on

- a sound theoretical foundation,
- clearly stated mission, goals, and objectives,
- a comprehensive self-study and thoughtful use of best practices, and
- consistent, systematic data collection and analysis (both baseline and comparative).

Additional benefits of this project include gaining knowledge about professional standards in the field(s) of the program, including assessment and evaluation models, awareness of national standards and student outcomes, student learning outcomes, and student success measures in general. Once involvement has begun, the program often finds itself contributing to the research of the field and becoming a voice of authority on its own campus and beyond—even nationally.

One way to get a quick overview of the accreditation process is to look at the "Application Checklist" which can be found on the accreditation website www.nadeaccreditation.net. In looking at this, it might appear that the accreditation process is very linear: 1) complete the application narrative, 2) complete the self-study, 3) collect and analyze two years of base-line data, 4) create and implement an action plan, 5) collect and analyze two years of comparative data, 6) collect and analyze data required on the minimum data templates (both baseline and comparative), and, 7) put it all together and turn in the application.

However, in reality, the process is rarely that straight forward. Applicants may decide to start with the self-study and then work on tasks such as mission, goals and theory simultaneously. Sometimes applicants already have data that can fit the requirements of the baseline data for the application so that data becomes the starting point. Wherever applicants start, the process is likely to be quite recursive, but it is helpful to keep the "straight line" laid out in order to see where all the pieces need to fit in the end.

The application packet consists of several sections: a narrative component containing a brief description and his-

tory of the institution and the program component seeking accreditation. NADE currently accredits Tutoring Programs, Course-based Learning Assistance Programs (e.g., Supplemental Instruction, Structured Learning Assistance), and Developmental/Transitional Coursework Programs. A program must have been in existence for four years in order to seek accreditation.

The narrative section must explain how the program fits organizationally within the hierarchy of the institution, the program component's mission and goals, and include a discussion of its theoretical foundations. In addition to this component-specific information, the applicant must supply the institutional mission as well as the mission and goals of the department or unit under which the component is institutionally housed. Finally, documentation of the component's content must be provided. Developmental/transitional coursework components must include course syllabi and related supporting material as content documentation.

Following this narrative section is a summary of the self-study, one of the major components of the accreditation process. Many program administrators have noted that even though they did not complete the entire accreditation process, the self-study itself was extremely beneficial on its own. The purpose of the self-study is to help programs evaluate their own practices against best practices in the field using the *NADE Self-Study Evaluation Guides*. The Guides are divided into multiple sections that will lead a program through a comprehensive examination of components such as mission and goals, course content and delivery, financial support, faculty and staff development, ethics, student support, institutional support, and evaluation systems, each with its own set of criteria for staff and faculty to consider and evaluate. For example, in "Developmental Coursework, Part IV: Content and Delivery of Courses and Goals," one criterion statement reads:

> "student learning objectives, materials, activities, and assessment tools for each course are appropriate for the target student population(s) and are carefully sequenced so that students progress along a skill continuum."

Asking faculty and staff to first of all define what this statement means, then explain how it applies to them, and finally to identify how they would rate themselves on a Likert scale can help to generate a useful discussion. It might reveal what is perceived to be strong, what needs improvement, and it might reveal some differences of opinion about aspects of the coursework or delivery that had not been thought of before.

After the self-study is the data section. Or, as noted earlier, the data work may progress at the same time as the self-study. The data component of the application packet is intended to demonstrate that the applicant has implemented a systematic cycle of data collection and analysis. More importantly, applicants must show that they are using data analysis to make informed decisions that will lead to program changes and increased student success. Therefore, this section asks applicants to identify at least two component goals along with the data which can appropriately measure each goal. Data Analysis Documents (DADs) are provided so that applicants can record each goal on a DAD, followed by the baseline data and then a discussion and analysis of that data. Once applicants have identified a plan that they believe will lead to increased student success, two years of comparative data must be collected, and that data will also be recorded and discussed on a DAD. This process is done for however many goals the program may choose to include in the application. There must be at least two!

Each application packet also contains a set of "Minimum Data Templates (MDTs)," which are types of data which must be included in every application packet. Some applicants find that the MDT data will measure the program goals they have selected. Therefore, they do not have to include those separately in an "MDT" section. It is important, however, for applicants to read through the MDTs. If any of these required data pieces have not been included elsewhere in the packet, they will need to be done separately in the MDT section.

Once this process is complete, applicants will be able to present a story that describes their program—its history and place within the institution, its theoretical perspectives and vision for working with students, its systematic data collection and evaluation cycle—all of which lead to data-based decision making and action plans based on industry best practices.

NADE Accreditation serves as a vehicle to validate the quality of what you do. NADE Accreditation promotes the value of your program with internal and external stakeholders. NADE Accreditation gives you a voice to speak with authority about student success and program design.

Jenny Ferguson is the director of the developmental writing and reading program at Cazenovia College in Cazenovia, New York, where she has also co-directed the college's writing program. She has been active in both learning assistance and developmental education professional organizations, and is the co-author of the chapter on developmental coursework in the second edition of the NADE Self-Evaluation Guides. *A long-time member of NADE and the Accreditation Commission, she is the commission's professional development coordinator.*

Naomi Ludman is the former director of developmental studies at Southwestern Michigan College in Dowagiac, Michigan. She was active in both the Michigan Developmental Education Consortium and NADE for many years and served on the Accreditation Commission for four years.

Benefits of Using the *NADE Self-Evaluation Guides* for Program Development, Improvement, and Evaluation

Jane Neuburger

In its original inception, the NADE certification effort—now the NADE accreditation process—was and is based on the processes used by regional accrediting agencies. It remains an exceptionally strong way to prepare for regional accreditation, and use of the *NADE Self-Evaluation Guides* for an internal self-study is one of the fundamental steps for NADE accreditation. More on the actual accreditation process may be found in this *Digest* and at www.nadeaccreditation.net.

However, any program director may choose to use the *Guides* with or without application for accreditation. Why would this be a good idea? Simply put, the *NADE Self-Evaluation Guides* are a compendium of best practices in four areas: Tutoring Services, Course-based Learning Assistance, the Teaching & Learning Process, and Developmental Coursework, also recently known as transitional, co-requisite, accelerated, or bridge programs, all of which are preparatory-to-college post-secondary coursework. Each of these *Guides*—chapters, if you will—has over 100 listed best practices, some deemed essential and others recommended, gleaned by a canvass of those in the field and from workshops across the nation to ensure the continuing validity of salient points.

Each *Guide*, used singly or together, provides a blueprint for developing a program, a reminder of essential items in revamping a program, and/or items to consider for annual or long-term planning. Used for departmental discussions, it provides a non-threatening method to include pertinent stakeholders in assessing programs, evaluating strengths, and mapping out areas in need of improvement. In today's push to improve student outcomes, we look to numbers and percentages. The *NADE Guides* provides a detailed framework of *how* to improve those numbers and percentages: what instructional practices might be promoting success, what policies might be hindering progress, what intra- and inter-office communications might assist in increasing student success and outcomes, or what kinds of administrative support could be most cost-effective? Actively comparing program and institutional practices to the *Guides'* compendium of best practices helps to direct discussion on program practices and policy. Investing in and using the Guides can be one of the best things a pro-

gram's faculty and staff can do to improve success rates, ensure student learning, and maintain program quality.

As Martha Maxwell, pioneer in our field, said in the forward of the 1995 version of the *Guides*, "This book represents a significant step toward increasing the professionalization of Developmental Education and Learning Assistance Programs. . . . Self-study comprises the initial step of almost all academic accreditation efforts . . . . Readers should find the guides helpful in many ways: for planning, developing, maintaining, evaluating and improving their programs." (p. iii).

There is an enormous benefit to having external validation of one's program. While full validation is embedded in the NADE accreditation process, the process begins with simply using the *Guides* for self-study. Even in its inception, people using the *Guides* reported back to NADE that "certification. . . encouraged their programs to be included as key players in decision-making processes that affect their program, a process they were otherwise excluded from in the past." (Materniak, G. (2000, 28 April). LRNASST. Retrieved from https://lists.ufl.edu/archives/lrnasst-l.html).

For instance, what policies and practices might need to be examined in your institution, to be sure that "The [developmental program] works with academic departments to assure that the content, scope, and learning outcomes of the [developmental] curriculum are aligned with subsequent courses in the college curriculum" (*Guides*, p. 45) or that "Varied modes of access to tutoring are available to meet diverse needs of students (*Guides*, p. 91)? Consider for a moment, how just these two criterion statements—out of many—might impact student success outcomes, and you can understand how using the *Guides* for reflection can provide you with the "things to address" that will impact those success rates.

I've had personal experience in using the *Guides* in two separate colleges—one, a two-year college growing into a four-year college, and the other, a research institution. Although I did focus on the section of the *Guides* most pertinent to a given program, I did use parts of all four of the *Guides* to plot annual goals and subsequent reports on

those goals; in considering changes in my own teaching; in directing and teaching developmental reading; in advising; and in directing learning assistance services. I used the criterion statements in discussions with my upper administrators. I used them in discussions with faculty and academic departments when setting up targeted tutoring services. In fact, as chair of program accreditation across campus, I found the *Guides* indispensable for *any* program, not only academic support (if one takes out the words "developmental," the *Guides* are applicable to any program).

In the two-year school, I inherited a set of wonderful para-professional tutors who had been hired for their content expertise. Together, we first explored the recommended topics for CRLA tutor training to compile materials—books and journals—for individualized professional development. We then investigated selected sections in the *Guides for Tutoring Services* to determine where improvements were most needed; I then had a unified and cohesive set of requests—backed by a national set of best practices—to bring to division administrators. Definitely, some of the criterion statements led us to consider items we'd not thought of before: Were all the paraprofessional tutors able to access campus personnel training on the campus shut-down emergency plan? Was compensation for the part-time tutors commensurate with other para-professional positions on campus? Did we have a "code" to use if we felt threatened or in trouble when working with an individual student? Other criterion statements were focused on the quality of the services and professional development support for continuous improvement. I used the expert voices provided in the *Guides* to collect and distribute readings paralleling the topics described in CRLA Tutor Training; to improve the distribution of human resource and safety materials on a variety of topics; and to ensure that salaries were commensurate with other, similar para-professional positions at the college. I used the areas in the *Guides* to find out staff members' thoughts on how things operated, both in the tutoring enter and in the college. What a great and non-threatening vehicle to provide a voice in how things might be improved!

As the college changed from a two-year to a four-year school, the tutoring center began to add peer tutors to what had been a strictly para-professional tutoring staff, and we considered adding services for specific, difficult courses. As I created program goals for each coming year, the *Guides* provided the direction and the words to use. I could not have found a more helpful set of guidelines, and I have no doubt at all that the improvements we made led to better tutoring and better tutoring results. We saw increased demand for services, higher faculty satisfaction, and most importantly, increased percentages of students who reported that "tutoring helped my learning" and "tutoring helped increase my grade."

In the second instance, the research university, I used the *Guides* to develop an existing learning support program into one that more than tripled contacts and paved the way to begin assessing outcomes for tutoring received in specific courses. As in many large schools, tutoring services were spread across campus; each school/college had its own learning support programs and very strong advising programs, as did the athletic department. For students, it was difficult to determine which service to use, and the professional staff and advisors had a steep learning curve to know what services were available where, when, and for whom. And, those services changed each term. The first order of business, then, was to establish connections across campus and bring all the various voices together to simply know what each department offered. I used some of the dean's funds to host several simple luncheons and used selected portions of the *Guides* to facilitate discussions of what each of us were doing, where we might collaborate, and what common issues we faced. In NADE Accreditation, we say that accreditation provides a voice to validate and demonstrate the value of what you and your program do for students and for your institution. In this instance, I found that the *Guides* contributed to providing me a voice on campus, and others could see how using the *Guides* would validate their programs' efforts to provide valuable service to students and the university. (Later, the accreditation processes helped me establish assessment practices as well.)

As a result of these (and other) meetings, the group came to consensus on using only writing-center approved consultants for assistance in writing, assigning common training for tutors (to be handled in my center), collaborating on hiring standards and peer wages and increases. The honors program instituted tutoring as part of their students' potential service projects; and my center and the athletic center collaborated on the hiring and salary bands for professional tutors. The near-by medical university used my center's expertise to start a program for tutoring first-year medical students and training their honors students for appropriate assistance. The grant programs—TRIO and state grant programs—looked to my center for tutor selections, training, and providing the bulk of services. While I certainly had gained quite a bit of professional knowledge by the time I was hired for this position, I have no doubt that the *Guides* contributed to establishing that "outside expert voice" that helped me maximize opportunities to improve learning assistance across campus and consolidate services where possible.

And of course, early work with the *Guides* led me to join and then chair the ethics and standards committee

of our own NADE state chapter of NYCLSA (New York College Learning Skills Association). That led to sending suggestions to the NADE committee on the *Guides*, which led to joining the NADE Certification Board, which led to my continuing involvement with the NADE Accreditation Commission. Let me simply add comments from a recent NADE Accreditation Institute, where the Commission provides a full-day training on the application process for NADE accreditation. Only part of that is about using the *Guides*, but here are samples of what people say:

- The self-study will help me see what we can work on to improve our program.

- I learned that self-study is absolutely crucial to the program's development!

- I need to look at my data to see where improvements is needed. Then, I will write goals on improving outcomes. But I will use the Guides to create Action Plans to get us there!

So yes, the *NADE Self-Evaluation Guides* have been central to my professional life, on many levels. I hope they can be in yours, too.

Jane Neuburger is recently retired as the director of the Syracuse University Tutoring & Study Center in Syracuse, New York. She has been active in both the New York College Learning Skills Association as well as NADE, and is a long-time member of the Accreditation Commission. She is a past president of NADE and a CLADEA Fellow.

The Journey Toward NADE Accreditation: Investments Reap Benefits

Stephanie Kratz

Fall 2016 saw the completion of a multi-year process for my program as we completed our application for NADE accreditation. Happily, our application was approved, and as of February 2018, the developmental English program at Heartland Community College will be accredited. I won't lie: this rosy picture looks nicer from this side of all the work it entailed. The accreditation application was rigorous to be sure. But the benefits for the faculty, the college, and our students have been remarkable.

The multi-year process began in 2009 when English faculty reviewed data from the National Community College Benchmark Project. The data showed low success rates and poor persistence from developmental into college-level courses. As a member of the Developmental English Redesign Team, I studied various models of developmental English programs across the country. Research led us to a model of accelerated developmental education called the Accelerated Learning Program (ALP) which was first developed at the Community College of Baltimore County. Several characteristics of the ALP model impressed us, and the redesign group decided to adopt an accelerated program at HCC.

Substantial institutional resources were afforded to us. We participated in a course redesign academy and attended the Conference on Acceleration in Developmental Education. The college invested in better institutional data reporting, in large part because of our requests for

accurate data for the accreditation process. I created a new course, trained faculty, launched the small (four-section) pilot, facilitated course adjustments, and eventually moved to program-wide implementation of ALP.

To describe my program's journey in NADE terms, the ALP implementation became our primary Action Project. Documentation of the baseline and comparative data, while tedious for an English teacher like me who thinks in words instead of numbers, was revealing and informative. Take falling withdrawal rates, for instance. Since the implementation of ALP, the number of students who withdraw from our developmental English classes has been cut in half. Furthermore, the ALP students actually have a lower drop-out rate than the regular college-level students with whom they sit in a co-requisite course. Similarly, we have also seen a significant improvement in success: nearly a 10% increase.

Not all of the data showed such dramatic improvements. For instance, developmental students are less likely to pass the college-level course than regular college-level students. However, we are confident that our trends from pre- to post-action project are moving in the right direction. All new programs will hit some bumps in the road, and we will continue to self-assess and revise as needed. Part of continuing NADE accreditation, for instance, encourages monitoring the data over time, allowing for small data sets

to grow and lessening the effects of semesters that were exceptions to the rule.

For me, one of the most useful aspects of completing the accreditation was my close contact and regular communication with Lisa Putnam-Cole, a member of the NADE Board and a HCC colleague. Lisa guided me through the maze of data mining. If asked to offer any suggestions to NADE about how to improve the accreditation process (hey, wait, I think that's what I'm doing here!), I would recommend a close NADE mentor for all applicants. Having previously completed the accreditation process herself, Lisa was able to commiserate with my struggles and offer suggestions about the lessons she learned throughout the process.

The journey to NADE accreditation was long and challenging. Honestly, my program weighed whether to complete the process even after the self-study was completed. The administration and faculty knew that it would be an investment in resources and personnel, and we had learned so much about ourselves already that we questioned whether to continue. Having completed accreditation, of course, it is easier to sing its praises. But I honestly believe that the knowledge we have gained is worth the work. I furthered my professional goals throughout the journey; the college values the accreditation; and—most importantly—students benefit from our increased dedication to their learning and success.

Stephanie Kratz is professor of English in the Department of Liberal Arts and Social Sciences at Heartland Community College in Normal, Illinois, where she teaches developmental and college-level composition as well as literature. Having helped guide her program to successful accreditation, she now has more time for those other important things in her life—science fiction and fantasy, her dog, and the Chicago Cubs.

The Value of Accreditation for Learning Centers and Their Programs
Geoffrey Bailey

Creating a culture of assessment is an essential practice and mindset for postsecondary institutions as well as the units and departments embedded within our respective campuses. Although it may sound daunting at first glance, simply put, assessment is "a set of processes designed to improve, demonstrate, and inquire about student learning" (Mentowski, 1998). Arguably, there is tremendous value to having a "systematic collection, review, and use of information about educational programs" so that we better understand student learning and can effectively scale such learning and practices (Marchese, 1987). Moreover, assessing the learning process goes beyond measuring learning outcomes and incorporates future-thinking (Salisbury, 2013).

Although most learning centers and their respective programs have increasingly engaged in data collection and assessment efforts, not all have fully explored the value of benchmarking and accreditation. For over twenty years, learning center pioneers have promulgated the benefits of evaluation, which dovetail well with the value of benchmarking and accreditation. Christ, Sheets, and Smith (2000) spotlighted such values in an interview with David Gerkin, which included justification for a program's resources, people, and its very existence. Additionally, evaluation provides a lens through which one can determine what works well, what needs improvement, and what can enhance decision-making (Christ, Sheets, & Smith, 2000).

Similarly, benchmarking fosters opportunities to reflect on what is working well, what areas would benefit from improvements or changes, and drives more deliberate strategic thinking and performance (Martin Epper, 1999). This is critical given that our most important stakeholders, our students, will reap the proverbial benefits of better services and instructional support. Additionally, undertaking these efforts in the context of accreditation helps ensure that we are implementing best practices backed by research and professional practices in our field. To that end, the NADE Accreditation Commission:

> ...exists to improve and enhance the success of students at all levels of academic preparation, as well as to facilitate the professional growth of developmental educators by setting standards of best practice, emphasizing the use of theory to inform practice, and promoting effective evaluation and quality research in developmental education and learning assistance programs. (NADE Accreditation, 2016).

As a professional who has been through the accreditation process in one learning center, as well as having served on the accreditation review team since 2010, I want to offer a couple of reflections for professionals who are

unsure about the benefits of this process. First and fore-most, this process is a terrific way to conduct a self-eval-uation based on established benchmarks for our field. The opportunity to be strategic in identifying key areas for growth, as well as celebrate aspects of our centers that are excelling, is critical in helping prioritize where to focus our energies and attention. Second, we all know that data is critical in telling our story. However, if you're unsure what types of data are considered pivotal based on both research and practitioner experience, then the accredita-tion process can help shed light on essential analyses that include both descriptive data as well as more robust analy-ses. For example, measuring how student usage of services impacts student learning outcomes, grades, retention, and graduation rates is considered a best practice. Third, and this is probably the most essential reason, the process forces us to critically reflect on our efforts, the impact we are having, and what changes need to be made.

The difference between doing business as usual versus utilizing this process is that it leverages *your* interpreta-tion of your own data and the results achieved in order to craft *informed* decisions about where to make changes. This critical reflection is an essential component of any learning center's success, and it is built into the accredita-tion process. Moreover, the accreditation review team: 1) serves as a guide to help you through the process; 2) ap-propriately challenges how the results are conveyed in or-der to help you best tell your story; and 3) recognizes and celebrates your learning center on an international level once you've completed the process. Similar to the accred-itation process for an entire institution, it establishes that your program has been through an intentional and robust review of your practices, data collection, interpretation, and analyses. And, the process drives decision-making predicated on best practices and key metrics for learning centers and their programs rather than on an arbitrary set of standards. Moreover, in a time of increased fiscal uncer-tainty and political pressures, the accreditation process can help strengthen opportunities for appropriate funding and staffing to help scale your program's impact on student success. The only question you need to ask yourself is "when am I ready to start?!" To learn more, please check out https://nadeaccreditation.net/.

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Dr. Geoff Bailey is the executive director of REACH (Resources for Academic Achievement) at the University of Louisville. He has served as an accreditation reviewer for NADE since 2011 and has been active in both the Associ-ation for the Tutoring Profession (ATP) and the National College Learning Center Association. Additionally, Geoff serves as an adjunct faculty member for the College of Education at the University of Louisville where he teaches graduate level coursework for both the college student personnel and higher education administration programs.

The initial goal of the application was to gain certification while sharing aspects of our pro-grams which we found useful for our develop-mental mathematics students. On the way to this certification, some discoveries were made. First, because as we are constantly changing, any statistical report will be out of date before it is written. However, how we use those data to pro-mote change is a prevailing, positive aspect of this mathematics program. Secondly, the process of reviewing the data revealed some weaknesses in the program. Ameliorating these deficiencies has become the focus of some of this year's initiatives. Finally, analysis of the data led to the discovery of four measures which, taken together, may be a powerful way to measure the effectiveness of any developmental mathematics program.

—Anna Harwin,
mathematics instructor,
reflecting on the accreditation process

Valuing the Accreditation Process

Maria Bahr

The value of the NADE accreditation process is far-reaching. Not only do students and programs benefit from the process, but also the entire institution. Through data collection of student performance, analysis, and resulting action plans, faculty and administrators can work cohesively towards improving both the effectiveness of the program and student success. In addition, the program accreditation process reinforces institutional assessment by implementing data-driven decisions, a process supported by institutional accrediting agencies.

The bonuses first begin with the team-building task of completing the campus-wide NADE Self-Evaluation Guides, which draws together co-workers from every facet of the institution. A collegial atmosphere emerges as these coworkers, including faculty, staff, and administration, examine current practices and services in an effort to improve those services. The self-evaluation process not only identifies and improves student services, but also improves employee relations as employees from a cross-section of campus take on a new appreciation of each other's roles. What then began as an evaluative process becomes a team-building process that facilitates strategy-building activities for improved student services.

Following completion of the self-evaluation guides, the program collects two years of baseline data on students' performance, resulting in not only a cross-sectional view of campus services and student demographics, but also specific assessment data, both providing invaluable tools for an informed action plan. After analysis of baseline data and documentation of key areas for improvement identified from the self-evaluation guides, the team is armed with a new understanding that fuels a data driven action plan. Making program changes requires risk-taking behavior, a behavior that many practitioners are reluctant to engage in because of the fear of failure. However, the results of campus-wide evaluation and analysis of student data foster a more confident climate geared towards continuous quality improvement. In addition, after the action plan is implemented and comparative data collected and analyzed, practitioners continue formative assessments to facilitate continued program improvements and better student outcomes.

Beyond that, the NADE accreditation process also facilitates and buttresses institutional assessment. Since accrediting agencies, such as the Higher Learning Commission, require institutions to engage in a system of insti-tutional evaluation and improvement, the NADE accreditation process becomes a microcosm of that process that may be replicated across campus. As a result, a developmental program can model sound assessment processes for the entire institution.

From a NADE reviewer's perspective, the careful collaboration of practitioners with campus-wide staff and administrators becomes evident with the result of a thoughtfully crafted action plan specific to student demographics and institutional climate. Practitioners who successfully collaborate with co-workers show a deeper understanding of their institution's strengths and weaknesses and use that valuable information to build a process of improvement that is achievable and beneficial to students and to the program.

Undergirding the entire accreditation process is an achievable timeline. Team members must carefully plot achievement markers along the continuum. This reduces stress and encourages the depth of reflection necessary for such a far-reaching process. For example, during the collection of baseline data, practitioners can spend a semester or a year completing the self-evaluation guides by meeting with a cross-section of campus employees and documenting the results of the meeting. Consequently, the team will be able to orchestrate the completion of the guides as well as collect and analyze baseline data. As a team, they will then have the core components necessary for thoughtful analysis and informed decision making, resulting in an achievable action plan. Once practitioners implement the action plan, collect and analyze comparative data, and complete a summative assessment of the plan, that will fuel the next cycle of continuous improvement.

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