

Need for Systematic, Ongoing Evaluation in Developmental Education

National Association for Developmental Education (NADE) Resolution

(Approved March 2000 by NADE Executive Board; Updated and Approved December 4, 2010)

Resolution

Whereas, there is an increasing demand from legislators and educational institutions for data-driven program accountability;

Whereas, research indicates that the most successful programs conduct regular and systematic evaluation of their courses and services;

Whereas, in order to adequately assess the effectiveness of a program, there must be systematic, ongoing formative and summative processes of program evaluation;

Whereas, ongoing evaluation of data provides validation of the current program or impetus for program improvement;

Whereas, professional standards have been developed that promote awareness of best practices which contribute to quality programs;

Whereas, ongoing assessment and evaluation lead to improving program services and the quality of student learning;

Whereas, a systematic, ongoing process of program evaluation requires time as well as fiscal and human resources;

Therefore, be it resolved that the National Association for Developmental Education advocates that institutions provide the necessary support and resources for their developmental education programs to regularly engage in a process of evaluation that includes analyzing data and conducting self evaluation using recognized professional standards.

Background

There has been an increasing concern in higher education that academic standards have been lowered, so students are entering colleges and universities less prepared than in past years. In 2007 ACT reported that nearly 75% of those taking the core curriculum in high school were not prepared for college-level work in at least one subject. Additionally, 19% of the students “need substantial help in all four subject areas to be prepared for college-level work” (p. 2). As the number of underprepared students continues to grow, stakeholders are concerned that the public is paying for education twice, once in high school and again at the postsecondary level. Therefore, some states are responding to the gap in education levels by taking measures to eliminate what they describe as "remedial" education within higher education institutions. However, limiting or eliminating developmental education programs in higher education would have a detrimental effect. Therefore, it is necessary that developmental education programs be given appropriate resources to adopt and carry out systematic and ongoing evaluation in order to specify those areas where programs are succeeding and where changes are needing to occur.

Researchers, Schwartz & Jenkins (2007) advocate that more important than incorporating individual best-practices is “adopting a continuous improvement process that involves regularly monitoring the progress of students, trying different approaches to help students overcome identified barriers to success, evaluating the success of such interventions, and making further adjustments based on these results” (p. 25). However, this kind of holistic program evaluation takes significant resources to conduct because of the time and resources involved. Additionally, researchers Casazza & Silverman (1996) pointed out that “staff are overextended... and program evaluation projects get pushed aside . . . Under such circumstances, a director may be hard pressed to justify individual activities of a program or the existence of the program itself when called to do so”(p. 90). Without ongoing systematic evaluation, institutions may not be able to defend the effectiveness of developmental education programs, despite nation-wide statistics showing how crucial it is for these programs to exist. For that reason, researchers Boylan, Bonham & Bliss (1994) argued that “without systematic evaluation, it is impossible to tell if a program actually does what it is supposed to do: The lack of systematic evaluation activity is, therefore, a weakness among a vast majority of developmental programs” (p. 3).

Additionally, while the number of two-year institutions using ongoing evaluation in their developmental programs has risen from 14% in 1992 to 62% over a decade later (Gerlaugh, Thompson, Boylan & Davis, 2007, p. 2), there still remains a need for consistency and institution-to-institution data sharing. Researchers, Boylan & Bonham (2010) specifically stated the need for individual institutions to share their data with other institutions in an “effort to work toward an industry standard” (par. 4). However, if more institutions supported ongoing systematic developmental education program evaluation according to proposed industry standards, and shared the data collected from that evaluation, then educators, administrators, and other stakeholders of developmental education would be able to better address the underprepared college population.

Thus, institutions need to support developmental education programs in this endeavor by providing appropriate resources, including adequate staffing, funding, and institution-wide support. The Criteria for Program Evaluation from the National Center of Developmental Education (2010) provides a list of quantitative and qualitative data that should be collected in an ongoing and systematic fashion (available at: <http://www.ncde.appstate.edu/resources/evaluation/>).

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