

& 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.