

Program Evaluation for the National Association of Developmental Education ~ Executive Summary ~ May 2012

This study, conducted by the Department of Developmental Education during 2003-2012 for certification by the National Association of Developmental Education (NADE), evaluates the strengths and needs of the developmental education program at the University of Alaska Fairbanks. To begin the study, the study team looked at changes of UAF's developmental education program over time, an external evaluation completed in 2002 by Hunter R. Boylan, David Caverly and Irene Doo, and a departmental self-study completed in 2007, and identified feasible initiatives to help meet the needs of students in developmental education at UAF.

The certification study focused on the effects of mandatory placement, a recommendation which had been on the agenda of faculty and administrators for more than a decade. The study analyzes data from three baseline studies (done in 2006, 2007 and 2009) and a baseline-comparative study (completed in 2012) looking at the effects of mandatory placement on placement, enrollment and grade distributions in developmental courses, courses and sections offered, grades and success in target courses, and retention to 24 credits during fiscal years 2008-2008 and 2009-2011.

Our goal was to increase student access to quality developmental instruction—including course completion—and to enable their competencies for success in college courses. Mandatory placement was implemented as a means of attaining this goal. The Department of Developmental Education, Developmental Studies Committee and other appropriate personnel met to determine student assessment and placement procedures to be used.

Mandatory placement wording was changed in the UAF course catalog in Fall 2007. BANNER registration blocking was implemented for Math in Spring 2008 and for English in Fall 2009. Much work was done in the department and with other faculty and administrators to support students as mandatory placement took effect: Math Fast-Track courses and Preparatory Writing III were established, reading courses were linked to core courses, guidelines for DEV placement and standards for DEV classes were refined, and prerequisites for 100-level core courses were established.

While the percentage of students placing into DEVE or DEVM courses stayed the same after mandatory placement, the number who enrolled rose 36%. In 2011, fifty-five percent of undergraduate students in their first semester at UAF placed into DEVE or DEVM classes. Sixty-six percent of the students seeking an Associates of Art, Associates of Science or Bachelor's Intended degree placed into DEVE or DEVM courses; 56% of those seeking an Associate of Applied Science, Certificate, or Occupational Endorsement Certificate, 48% of those seeking a Bachelors degree, and 53% of those who were Non-Degree-Seeking. Forty percent of students who place into DEVE or DEVM are still not enrolling in the appropriate class. Mandatory placement increased this percentage (from 36% before mandatory placement) only by 4%.

The success rate in DEV courses rose from 55% to 61%. No factors other than mandatory placement were identified which might have largely contributed to this change. Five percent more students than before, though not passing, are completing their courses.

Our analysis reinforced the point that good advising is essential to student success. On campuses where advising had been good beforehand, mandatory placement didn't affect student

success as much as it did where advising had been poor. Additionally, where advising was still poor, mandatory placement was heavily undermined.

Target core classes where mandatory placement had been focused and/or prerequisites had been placed or raised (CHEM 100x, HIST 100x, ANTH 100x, MATH 103, ENGL 111x) showed large gains (of 6.2% to 10.8%) in success rates. Lag time or lack of interest in establishing prerequisites on the part of some departments seems to have been responsible for decreases in success rates in other target core courses. We see from our data that if students come to their DEV classes, engage in class, and do their homework, they are significantly more likely to get an A or B in their target, college-level Math or English courses.

Retention to 24 credits for students who placed into DEV courses went down from 53% to 43%. But retention also went down university-wide. Throughout 2006-2011, retention to 24 credits for students who placed into DEV courses and enrolled in them within one year was quite a bit higher than it was for students who placed into them and did not enroll, and in 2009-2011 those enrolled retained at 43% and those who did not enroll retained at 29%.

We are very concerned about the forty percent of students who place into DEVE or DEVM classes and are not enrolling in a DEV course within one year of that placement. Our data doesn't show the number who went on to non-DEV/non-college-level courses with embedded developmental-level curriculum and were thereby successful in meeting their educational goals. We have requested data from the office of Planning, Analysis & Institutional Research so as to better track these students. We also need to study the demographics of our entering student population. In concert with many other faculty and administrators at the university, we accomplished a lot during the time when mandatory placement was initiated; however, both advising and mandatory placement need improvement if more than 60% of students with developmental placement are going to find their way to the appropriate educational support.

Two recommendations of our visiting evaluation team in 2002 seem pertinent here: students in developmental education benefit from (1) specialized advising done by a centralized developmental program fitted to their specific needs, and also from (2) centralized, coordinated learning assistance programs such as the Learning Commons being considered by the library today. There is also a need for more faculty in our program to be able to do research in our field as part of our workloads, like other departments do. Developmental Education faculty will continue to strengthen our coordination with each other, systematically evaluate our program and share our findings with faculty and administration, make recommendations for university-wide initiatives, and request funding for the programs we know will aid our students in their path. Most importantly, we will remember that the time we spend with our students in the classroom makes a big difference in their lives, not only because our specialized understanding of their needs makes us able to assist them with academic progress but also because, as time and time again they have told us, it means a lot for them to know how much we care about them.

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