

Arendale, D. Changing trends for administrative location of developmental educators within an institution: A pilot study of NADE members

Significant changes are occurring in higher education regarding restructuring of postsecondary institutions. Institutions are adopting business models. This is prompting these institutions, especially public four-year colleges and universities to reevaluate their mission and often narrowing their focus and concentrating resources with its strongest and more highly valued programs (Bastedo & Gumpert, 2003)..These dramatic changes occur simultaneously with heightened scrutiny of developmental education programs (Jehangir, 2002).

As a former national executive board member of the National Association for Developmental Education (NADE), I have monitored the shifts in membership of the professional association. Current trends indicate that previously the membership was equally divided between two- and four-year institutions. Now it is heavily shifted towards membership of educators from two-year colleges. I was curious to investigate whether there had been a shift of where these NADE members were located on campus. Previous national research from the Exxon Study of Developmental Education indicated that student achievement outcomes from developmental education programs were higher if the programs were centrally administered and located within the campus (Boylan, 2002).

My purpose with this very limited pilot study was to identify the most frequent departmental names of the campus located where individual NADE members received their mail from NADE. In spring of 2005 I received permission from NADE to evaluate the membership roster of the national association regarding the mailing address of members. To guard confidentiality, I only requested access to the following data elements of the membership record: institution name, department name, city, and state. Approximately 2,700 records were analyzed. Approximately one-fourth of the records were discarded since it appeared that they were addressed to the person's home address. My next step was to consolidate departmental names to a common one if they were very similar to one another. For example, I consolidated developmental education studies, developmental college, and developmental education program into one category name of developmental education.

Following this rough analysis of the data during this pilot study, the following are the top ten departmental names. They are arranged from most frequent to least frequent: developmental education, mathematics (regular department), English (regular department), developmental subject unit (math, reading, and writing), humanities (regular department), academic support, learning center, learning assistance, student success center, and student support.

With this limited pilot study, conclusions about the data are carefully restrained. However, a couple of interesting observations can be made. Not surprisingly, the most common name of the departmental unit for NADE members is developmental education. The surprise was observing that the regular academic departments of mathematics, English, and humanities occur with such a high frequency. Boylan (2002) indicated that some shifting away from centralized developmental education units may

be occurring. This preliminary study seems to confirm that among the top ten departmental names that NADE members receive their mail, only two have the words developmental education explicitly listed in their titles. It appears that centralized developmental education administrative units are becoming rare.

As a pilot study, it suggests that further investigation is warranted. Some possible directions could be a more careful analysis of the original data set. Similar studies could be conducted with other professional associations in the field (e.g., College Reading and Learning Association, National College Learning Center Association). Follow-up interviews with a stratified sample of members could probe for the historic choices made concerning departmental names and whether changes have occurred in the intervening years.

References

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