DEVELOPMENTAL EDUCATION HISTORY: RECURRING TRENDS AND FUTURE OPPORTUNITIES

Dr. David Arendale

Postsecondary institutions throughout the nation's history have provided developmental education and learning assistance programs to meet the academic standards expected of admitted college students. "It can be asserted accurately that bridging the academic preparation gap has been a constant in the history of American higher education and that the controversy surrounding it is an American educational tradition" (Brier, 1984, p. 2). Before identifying several of the recurring trends in developmental education history, it is essential to review its origins in American colleges. While most in the higher education community are aware of its current status and scope, many are unaware of its early and pervasive place in the origins and formation of U.S. postsecondary education (Arendale, 2002a, 2002b, 2001).

Developmental Education History from the 1600s to the 1800s

Developmental education in America was created in response to implementation of admission requirements at postsecondary institutions. Nearly all students that sought admission to college were unable to be fully admitted due to deficiencies in foreign language requirements of Latin and Greek. This is not surprising considering the dismal status of public education until the 1800s. Precollege academic assistance for most students at Harvard and Yale commonly consisted of private tutors who prepared them for college entrance examinations in Greek and Latin (Cowie, 1936).

Once admitted to Harvard, many students continued to receive tutoring since most of the assigned readings and textbooks were written in Latin, and many college lectures were delivered in the same language by the professors. Even among the more wealthy white families, verbal and written competency in Latin was unusual. Therefore, it is not surprising that Harvard University was also the first postsecondary institution in America to require remedial studies for most of its first-year students (Boylan & White, 1987).

Economics intervened in implementation of academic admission policies during the late 1700s. As larger numbers of academically underprepared students were admitted to the less selective postsecondary institutions, it was recognized by many college administrators that a special department was necessary to accommodate and meet the academic needs of these students. For these

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institutions, the number of underprepared students sometimes outnumbered the "regular" college admits. For example, at the University of Wisconsin in 1865, only 41 of 331 admitted students were in "regular" college-level courses that counted toward graduation requirements (Shedd, 1932, pp. 136-137). This was expected since the quality of primary and secondary education was uneven, or missing, in many parts of the United States. Colleges were often forced to provide instruction in the basic skills of spelling, writing, geography, and mathematics since they were the only venue for such organized instruction (Brier, 1984). Instruction in these basic content areas for the underprepared students often lengthened the undergraduate bachelor's academic degree to six years or more (Casazza & Silverman, 1996).

The first modern developmental education program was established at the University of Wisconsin in 1849 (Curti & Carstensen, 1949). The Department of Preparatory Studies focused on instructing students in the basics of study skills. Remedial courses in reading, writing, and arithmetic were provided for students to enable them to succeed in college-level, graduation credit courses. This was the first systematic program to accommodate and ready underprepared students. The program was established since the number of tutors was not sufficient to meet the academic needs presented by the overwhelming number of students who would need help. Of the 331 students enrolled at the institution, 290 were enrolled in one or more remedial courses in the Preparatory Studies department (Brubacher & Rudy, 1976). This Wisconsin model of academic assistance and developmental education was adopted for use at other institutions across the U.S. (Brier, 1984). The department persisted until the 1880 when it was disbanded due to internal political battles between administrators and some faculty members.

The movement to establish academic preparatory departments in most postsecondary institutions accelerated quickly by the end of the nineteenth century. Canfield (1889) estimated that more than 80 percent of the nearly 400 postsecondary institutions in the U.S. had established some sort of college preparatory program by 1889. These academic preparation departments became important in bridging the gap between the academic preparation of many high school youth and college-level entrance expectations (Clemont, 1899). A review of college admission documents suggests that the further west the institution was geographically located, the lower the academic entrance requirements for the institution were. Thus, preparatory departments on the West coast were even more essential than those on the East coast. In 1894, more than 40 percent of the 238,000 first-year college students were enrolled in college preparatory courses

(Ignash, 1997).

The importance and degree of institutionalization of academic preparatory establishments were documented by a study that found that by 1895, nearly 40 percent of all college students were directly admitted from the institution's own college preparatory department (Rudolph, 1977, p. 158). It appears that many colleges had developed such academic preparatory schools to educate future college students for successful admission and persistence toward college graduation, enabling these institutions to survive economically through payment of tuition and fees by these formerly academically underprepared students. The poor quality or nonexistence of public high schools created a demand for some college-bound preparation programs.

Academic preparatory establishments created an indirect economic benefit to the institution through enrollment of a new subpopulation of students. There have been several periods in American higher education when campus administrators enrolled higher numbers of academically underprepared students who normally would not have been admitted to the institution. However, the institution modified admission standards to enroll this group of students to receive their tuition and other fees. Illustrating the precarious nature of institutional financial stability, in the one hundred years before the Civil War nearly 700 institutions were closed due to inadequate budgets (Wyatt, 1992). This created an environment in which the business and academic interests of the institution were in conflict with one another. While it was in the financial interest of the institutions to admit a more diverse student body who were able to pay the tuition and fees, the prevailing campus culture might be in opposition to providing the level of academic support services needed for their long-term academic success and eventual graduation of the students from college.

It appears that the first time that colleges aggressively pursued the academically underprepared students for recruitment was during the American Civil War. Economic and social changes in American society in both the North and South created by the Civil War had a significant impact upon the expansion of developmental education to many colleges and universities. Many male students failed to seek admission or left college during the Civil War to join their respective armies. Many colleges in both the North and South sought to replace them and their student tuition payments by expanding their institutions' academic preparatory departments by recruiting underage students who could not yet serve as soldiers (Rudy, 1996).

The need for academic preparatory departments was so great due to the academically underprepared nature of many students that 84 percent of the land

grant institutions provided some form of remedial education by 1889 (Craig, 1997). With the sudden emergence of these new land grant institutions with more open admission policies, competition became fierce to attract students who could help pay the institutional operation costs and faculty salaries. Since public high schools were not widespread across America, many new public and private colleges admitted students with only elementary school education (Ross, 1942, pp. 113-115).

While the number of postsecondary institutions was rapidly increasing in the early 1900s, so were the methods for segregating students due to their scores on standardized college entrance examinations. The College Entrance Examination Board (CEEB) was founded in 1890. An important tool for sorting potential college students was created by the CEEB, called the College Entrance Examination, which permitted colleges to use standardized test scores as criteria for entrance decisions to postsecondary institutions. Another goal of the CEEB was to standardize entrance criteria for postsecondary institutions nationwide as well as set exit criteria for high school students. It was hoped that secondary school administrators would use the examination as a diagnostic tool to increase the rigor of the high school curriculum and provide justification to college administrators to raise academic standards at the postsecondary institutions. These changes, therefore, might lead to the reduced need to provide remedial classes at the collegiate level (Boylan, 1988).

By 1874, Harvard established the first American college freshman remedial English course in response to faculty complaints that too many students lacked competency in formal writing activities. As described earlier, the introduction of remedial courses into the formerly fixed curriculum was made possible due to the introduction of elective courses. Without that flexibility, remedial courses would have only been available as a precollegiate option. However, academic conditions had not improved significantly at Harvard, Yale, Princeton, and Columbia by 1907. Still half the students failed to earn the minimum composite entrance exam score that was measured by the College Entrance Examination. It appeared that faculty expectation levels at these highly selective institutions rose more quickly than the academic preparation levels of these students from primarily affluent and privileged backgrounds. In response to this gulf between expectations by the faculty and the performance level of the incoming students, Harvard began to offer a remedial reading course (Brubacher & Rudy, 1976, p. 244; Levine, 1996). Yale, Princeton, and Columbia also added developmental courses to their curriculum for similar reasons (Wyatt, 1992).

One stated goal of the CEEB was to eliminate the need for college

preparatory programs since high schools were now expected to produce more academically prepared students. This goal, however, was unrealized. Much like today, many more students sought postsecondary education than those who enrolled in a college preparatory program during secondary school. Of those who enrolled in such a program of study, not all successfully mastered the academic course material though they might have received a high school diploma. Tutorial programs were supplemented with remedial classes during the first year of college to prepare students for the college-level curriculum (Wyatt, 1992).

Recurring Themes in Developmental Education History

A review of the history of developmental education in American higher education (Arendale, 2002a, 2002b, 2001) suggested that the following themes persisted. Understanding these can help predict the future trends and guide actions by individual educators, developmental education departments or learning assistance centers, and the professional associations that represent the field and practice.

1. Institutions often admit students from diverse socioeconomic and cultural backgrounds but do not effectively deal with that reality. Most institutions do not place sufficient resources in place to effectively deal with the oppressive and academically deprived backgrounds of the students but, instead, target more academic resources for upper division and graduate students (Arendale, 2002b, 2001).

2. The college dropout rate has remained at 50 percent without significant change for the past 100 years (Tinto, 1993).

3. Educational leaders and faculty members complain about the academic preparation level of prospective students. Academic expectancy rises more quickly than the academic preparation level of students. The creation of admission standards guarantees that some students will be excluded and some will be admitted provisionally and need developmental education (Arendale, 2002b, 2001).

4. While developmental education permeates the history of higher education in the U.S, it is nearly universally ignored by education historians. The common pattern of these institutional histories is to focus on the college presidents, relationships with the board of trustees and officials at the local and state level, budget matters, and construction of the campus buildings (Arendale, 2002a).

5. While the name for developmental education may change over time, the need persists. Some institutions deal with the need by renaming courses. Other institutions simply renumber their courses to a higher level to make them more politically acceptable to campus or state officials (Arendale, 2002b, 2001).

6. Developmental education students are recruited for economic gain by institutions during times of low student enrollment (e.g., American Civil War, Post World War II Baby Boom) (Arendale, 2002b, 2001).

7. Rising high school exit standards do not eliminate the need for developmental education. Several reasons explain this: (1) expectation levels by the college faculty have risen more quickly than the preparation level of the high school graduates; (2) the number of students who delay entrance into college have forgotten much of what they learned in high school; (3) more students enter college from high school than those who enrolled in college preparation course in high school; and (4) too many of those students who enrolled in college preparation courses while in high school did not deeply master the course material and accompanying academic and critical thinking skills (Arendale, 2002b, 2001).

8. Academic enrichment activities, based upon best practices of developmental education, have been offered at elite, private schools for hundreds of years (e.g. Harvard University). These institutions have used other vocabulary to describe their activities and have a campus value system and culture to support and nurture this orientation (Arendale, 2002b, 2001).

History is Prologue for the Future: Practical Steps to Take

The historical record is clear that developmental education and learning assistance programs have been integral and widespread in American higher education since its inception. Since the expectation levels continue to rise both regarding admissions preparation and graduation competence, the need for developmental education and learning assistance programs at all levels of postsecondary education will persist. However, the form of such services may change to meet the political and practical needs of the institution and the student.

There are practical action steps that need to be taken by the field (Gardner, 2000). History suggests that the previously identified recurring trends will continue to impact and influence this field in particular and postsecondary education in general. If professionals in this field fail to heed them and take proactive steps, they may lose their ability to meet student needs and survive the changing political environment in higher education. The following action steps

require change by individuals, the departments or centers they direct at the institution, and the professional associations that represent the individual educators.

Action Steps by Individual Educators

Individual educators must grow more personally and professionally. Many of these recommendations potentially pose some discomfort and additional energy by professionals who commonly perceive themselves as overworked and underpaid. However, these are steps needed to meet the pressing and vital national need presented by today's and tomorrow's college students and future leaders of our country.

1. Increase knowledge and skill with both research and evaluation. This may include engaging in formal coursework, working with colleagues who have more skills in this area, and joining professional associations such as the American Educational Research Association, American Evaluation Association, and the Association for Institutional Research.

2. Learn more about learning. It is critical to acknowledge that there are multiple theories of learning (e.g., cognitive, sociocultural) and to understand how to employ them in diverse learning situations with students (Higbee, Arendale, & Lundell, 2005). Read widely in the professional literature on trends in learning.

3. Actively participate in political action initiatives. Be informed about political issues that impact education, especially those concerned with access for diverse student populations and academic support services. Influence policy makers through telephone calls and personal letters.

4. Obtain advanced credentials and academic degrees. Attend institutes such as the Winter Institute, Kellogg Institute, and the Technology in Developmental Education Workshop. Obtain terminal degrees. This will increase personal knowledge, credibility, and influence with others.

5. As Covey (1989, pp. 236-260) states in *Seven Habits of Highly Effective People*, seek first to understand, then to be understood. Study the literature read by upper level administrators. This includes the institutional annual reports, accrediting agency reports, strategic planning documents, and broad-based publications such as the *Chronicle of Higher Education*. Use the vocabulary and values expressed in these documents in conversation with others. It is critical to better understand their meaning and value before we can effectively communicate them. Carefully consider the language used to describe

the programs and services. The words used to describe this field have changed significantly over time (Arendale, 2005). Use more progressive language to both more accurately describe and to avoid negative stereotypes triggered by older and outdated language.

Action Steps by Departments or Centers

After educators improve their knowledge and skills, then they can be more effective in providing leadership in the classroom, department, or learning center where they work. Some action steps to take regarding these areas include the following:

1. Mainstream the best practices of developmental education into the heart of the institution (Arendale, 2004b). Instead of continuing its earlier tradition of existing at the peripheral outskirts of the academy, developmental education must become more mainstream. Many stand-alone study skill classes have become linked courses, paired with a first-year general education course such as English Composition, History I, or Introduction to Sociology. The instructors of the paired courses intentionally integrate the course material between the two courses so that the students immediately practice use of study strategies with academic content material. Another version of this integration is practiced by the General College of the University of Minnesota where first-year general education courses are infused with the study strategy instruction (Higbee, Lundell, & Arendale, 2005). Other variations of the integration of study strategies mastery development are postsecondary peer cooperative learning programs such as the Emerging Scholars Program, Peer-led Team Learning, Structured Learning Assistance, and Supplemental Instruction (Arendale, 2004a).

2. Expand the campus learning center into a full service learning and teaching center. Instead of focusing exclusively on developmental students, these centers have changed to a value-added mission that expands service for all students, not just those at the institution's margins who have traditionally received additional help – the developmental and the gifted students. In addition, some of these expanded centers also provide faculty development services as well. Some of the common practices of these expanded centers include using academic support programs to provide requested feedback to course professors, publishing teaching effectiveness newsletters, conducting learning effectiveness workshops, providing teaching mentors, and consulting on instructional delivery innovation (Stratton, 1998).

3. Conduct rigorous research studies to evaluate the effectiveness of

programs. Use the results to make the programs better. Submit reports to upline administrators. Highlight how the program or activity helps to fulfill the institution's and administrator's priorities, values, and goals. Use their vocabulary to more effectively communicate with them through these publications.

4. Tie the learning center or developmental education department to key campus priorities such as enrollment management or learning mastery for all students. Volunteer to serve on such committees and task forces. Help them understand how they need your expertise.

Action Steps by Professional Associations

Finally, there are key activities that the professional associations that represent the field can use to help both the students and the professionals who serve in the area of developmental education.

1. Provide accessible continuing education for faculty and staff who work in this area. Most faculty members who teach developmental education courses are either part-time adjuncts or full-time faculty members who only teach one section of developmental education courses. Most of them will never attend learning assistance or developmental education conferences. Therefore, web-based delivery of streaming video workshops and other means will be necessary to reach these instructors.

2. Train association members to become involved in political action initiatives to influence policy makers and funding decisions. Issue position papers and resolutions on key issues. Position the association as not only an advocacy voice for its individual members, but as a leader in the field and resource for policymakers and stakeholders.

3. Disseminate best practices in the field. Identify these practices from around the world, validate them through careful evaluation, and then disseminate the information.

4. Widely disseminate the historic role of access, learning assistance, and developmental education in the history of American higher education to fellow educators, educational administrators, and policy makers at the local, state, and national level. These facets of postsecondary education are not the recent phenomena, but rather a critical component since the very beginning.

5. Create a new national association which all existing groups can affiliate and merge with to capitalize on the national expertise, skill, leadership, and resources. The new association needs to carefully consider where the future lies. This may require many to reconceptualize and recognize that their expertise is with learning for all students.

Conclusion

American higher education is undergoing massive restructuring. It is ill-advised and professionally dangerous to not take proactive steps to deal with the quickly changing environment. This article identified some of the recurring trends impacting the field of developmental education and provided some recommendations for immediate action. Some of these recommendations require reinvention of the field and of those who work within it. Astin (1998) stated that higher education is a battleground between two often opposing values: the traditional one of identifying smartness and the emerging one of developing smartness. The historic value focused on identifying the smartest students and admitting them to college. The new value is more inclusive. It focuses on admitting a wide and diverse student body. It is the responsibility of the institution to be a talent developer of all the students, regardless of their level of academic preparation.

The challenge for learning assistance and developmental educators is to reinvent themselves as part of the new wave of talent developers on their campus. When policy makers begin to see the role for them as a mainstream effort to develop the talent of all students, then postsecondary education will take another major step in achieving two of the noble goals of American higher education: higher levels of academic success with broader access for more students.

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Developmental Education History from the 1600s to the 1800s

Developmental education in America was created in response to implementation of admission requirements at postsecondary institutions. Nearly all students that sought admission to college were unable to be fully admitted due to deficiencies in foreign language requirements of Latin and Greek. This is not surprising considering the dismal status of public education until the 1800s. Precollege academic assistance for most students at Harvard and Yale commonly consisted of private tutors who prepared them for college entrance examinations in Greek and Latin (Cowie, 1936).

Once admitted to Harvard, many students continued to receive tutoring since most of the assigned readings and textbooks were written in Latin, and many college lectures were delivered in the same language by the professors. Even among the more wealthy white families, verbal and written competency in Latin was unusual. Therefore, it is not surprising that Harvard University was also the first postsecondary institution in America to require remedial studies for most of its first-year students (Boylan & White, 1987).

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The movement to establish academic preparatory departments in most postsecondary institutions accelerated quickly by the end of the nineteenth century. Canfield (1889) estimated that more than 80 percent of the nearly 400 postsecondary institutions in the U.S. had established some sort of college preparatory program by 1889. These academic preparation departments became important in bridging the gap between the academic preparation of many high school youth and college-level entrance expectations (Clemont, 1899). A review of college admission documents suggests that the further west the institution was geographically located, the lower the academic entrance requirements for the institution were. Thus, preparatory departments on the West coast were even more essential than those on the East coast. In 1894, more than 40 percent of the 238,000 first-year college students were enrolled in college preparatory courses

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While the number of postsecondary institutions was rapidly increasing in the early 1900s, so were the methods for segregating students due to their scores on standardized college entrance examinations. The College Entrance Examination Board (CEEB) was founded in 1890. An important tool for sorting potential college students was created by the CEEB, called the College Entrance Examination, which permitted colleges to use standardized test scores as criteria for entrance decisions to postsecondary institutions. Another goal of the CEEB was to standardize entrance criteria for postsecondary institutions nationwide as well as set exit criteria for high school students. It was hoped that secondary school administrators would use the examination as a diagnostic tool to increase the rigor of the high school curriculum and provide justification to college administrators to raise academic standards at the postsecondary institutions. These changes, therefore, might lead to the reduced need to provide remedial classes at the collegiate level (Boylan, 1988).

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3. Actively participate in political action initiatives. Be informed about political issues that impact education, especially those concerned with access for diverse student populations and academic support services. Influence policy makers through telephone calls and personal letters.

4. Obtain advanced credentials and academic degrees. Attend institutes such as the Winter Institute, Kellogg Institute, and the Technology in Developmental Education Workshop. Obtain terminal degrees. This will increase personal knowledge, credibility, and influence with others.

5. As Covey (1989, pp. 236-260) states in *Seven Habits of Highly Effective People*, seek first to understand, then to be understood. Study the literature read by upper level administrators. This includes the institutional annual reports, accrediting agency reports, strategic planning documents, and broad-based publications such as the *Chronicle of Higher Education*. Use the vocabulary and values expressed in these documents in conversation with others. It is critical to better understand their meaning and value before we can effectively communicate them. Carefully consider the language used to describe

the programs and services. The words used to describe this field have changed significantly over time (Arendale, 2005). Use more progressive language to both more accurately describe and to avoid negative stereotypes triggered by older and outdated language.

Action Steps by Departments or Centers

After educators improve their knowledge and skills, then they can be more effective in providing leadership in the classroom, department, or learning center where they work. Some action steps to take regarding these areas include the following:

1. Mainstream the best practices of developmental education into the heart of the institution (Arendale, 2004b). Instead of continuing its earlier tradition of existing at the peripheral outskirts of the academy, developmental education must become more mainstream. Many stand-alone study skill classes have become linked courses, paired with a first-year general education course such as English Composition, History I, or Introduction to Sociology. The instructors of the paired courses intentionally integrate the course material between the two courses so that the students immediately practice use of study strategies with academic content material. Another version of this integration is practiced by the General College of the University of Minnesota where first-year general education courses are infused with the study strategy instruction (Higbee, Lundell, & Arendale, 2005). Other variations of the integration of study strategies mastery development are postsecondary peer cooperative learning programs such as the Emerging Scholars Program, Peer-led Team Learning, Structured Learning Assistance, and Supplemental Instruction (Arendale, 2004a).

2. Expand the campus learning center into a full service learning and teaching center. Instead of focusing exclusively on developmental students, these centers have changed to a value-added mission that expands service for all students, not just those at the institution's margins who have traditionally received additional help – the developmental and the gifted students. In addition, some of these expanded centers also provide faculty development services as well. Some of the common practices of these expanded centers include using academic support programs to provide requested feedback to course professors, publishing teaching effectiveness newsletters, conducting learning effectiveness workshops, providing teaching mentors, and consulting on instructional delivery innovation (Stratton, 1998).

3. Conduct rigorous research studies to evaluate the effectiveness of

programs. Use the results to make the programs better. Submit reports to upline administrators. Highlight how the program or activity helps to fulfill the institution's and administrator's priorities, values, and goals. Use their vocabulary to more effectively communicate with them through these publications.

4. Tie the learning center or developmental education department to key campus priorities such as enrollment management or learning mastery for all students. Volunteer to serve on such committees and task forces. Help them understand how they need your expertise.

Action Steps by Professional Associations

Finally, there are key activities that the professional associations that represent the field can use to help both the students and the professionals who serve in the area of developmental education.

1. Provide accessible continuing education for faculty and staff who work in this area. Most faculty members who teach developmental education courses are either part-time adjuncts or full-time faculty members who only teach one section of developmental education courses. Most of them will never attend learning assistance or developmental education conferences. Therefore, web-based delivery of streaming video workshops and other means will be necessary to reach these instructors.

2. Train association members to become involved in political action initiatives to influence policy makers and funding decisions. Issue position papers and resolutions on key issues. Position the association as not only an advocacy voice for its individual members, but as a leader in the field and resource for policymakers and stakeholders.

3. Disseminate best practices in the field. Identify these practices from around the world, validate them through careful evaluation, and then disseminate the information.

4. Widely disseminate the historic role of access, learning assistance, and developmental education in the history of American higher education to fellow educators, educational administrators, and policy makers at the local, state, and national level. These facets of postsecondary education are not the recent phenomena, but rather a critical component since the very beginning.

5. Create a new national association which all existing groups can affiliate and merge with to capitalize on the national expertise, skill, leadership, and resources. The new association needs to carefully consider where the future lies. This may require many to reconceptualize and recognize that their expertise is with learning for all students.

Conclusion

American higher education is undergoing massive restructuring. It is ill-advised and professionally dangerous to not take proactive steps to deal with the quickly changing environment. This article identified some of the recurring trends impacting the field of developmental education and provided some recommendations for immediate action. Some of these recommendations require reinvention of the field and of those who work within it. Astin (1998) stated that higher education is a battleground between two often opposing values: the traditional one of identifying smartness and the emerging one of developing smartness. The historic value focused on identifying the smartest students and admitting them to college. The new value is more inclusive. It focuses on admitting a wide and diverse student body. It is the responsibility of the institution to be a talent developer of all the students, regardless of their level of academic preparation.

The challenge for learning assistance and developmental educators is to reinvent themselves as part of the new wave of talent developers on their campus. When policy makers begin to see the role for them as a mainstream effort to develop the talent of all students, then postsecondary education will take another major step in achieving two of the noble goals of American higher education: higher levels of academic success with broader access for more students.

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