**Minnesota Association for Developmental Education**

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**Position Statement 2016**

**Compiled by the membership and approved by the MNADE Executive Board**

**March 6, 2016**

**MNADE Board Position Statement on Developmental Education in Minnesota**

**Executive Summary**

* The Minnesota Association for Developmental Education (MNADE) is the professional organization which provides faculty development to state- and region-wide instructors of developmental reading, mathematics, and writing.
* It is a misnomer to call (developmental) “remedial” when the instruction in the college setting is not a repeat of the same instruction in high school. This is usually the case in reading.
  + High school students often do not have the opportunity to practice independent reading and learning from long texts.
* The audience for developmental education is complex.
  + Non-traditional students
    - Who have many adult responsibilities
    - Who are often first generation students, and economically disadvantaged
    - Who are disproportionally students of color
  + But also students who appear to be on track, but cannot make the leap to more independent reading and learning
* It is valuable to our state, our employment outlook, and our economy to educate these students.
  + Education is the “great equalizer.” In a state with a huge achievement gap between white students and students of color, this is needed.
  + Developmental education plays a large role in preparing students for shorter-term career and technical programs.
* Assessment for placement into college coursework needs overhaul, including the use of meaningful multiple measures. Accurate placement is an issue; correcting that is a high priority.
* MNADE supports faculty in using and developing best practices in teaching and learning.
  + Several innovative curricula are in place in the MnSCU system.
  + Campuses need the support of MnSCU and the legislature to continue to develop and assess these new efforts.
* Collaborations are currently being redesigned, improved
  + Between K12 and colleges
  + Between Adult Education and colleges
  + Between colleges (transfer of developmental coursework is proposed)
* Professional development (including collaborative meetings between systems) is essential to provide continued excellent programming.

**MNADE Position Statement on Developmental Education in Minnesota**

**Introduction**

The Minnesota Association for Developmental Education (MNADE) is a state chapter of the National Association for Developmental Education, and provides professional development to those who teach and support developmental students at two- and four-year colleges and universities in Minnesota, North Dakota and South Dakota. We are closely affiliated with the College Reading and Learning Association as well. This position statement has been developed with the input of the membership and under the direction of the Executive Committee, 2015. **The purpose of this statement is to help stakeholders better understand developmental education and its role in higher education in Minnesota**.

Developmental education has a long history of serving students, and almost as long a history of being criticized and looked on with disdain. There are many misconceptions about our work and many more about our students. Legislators, in particular, often remark that the state shouldn’t “have to pay for the same thing twice,” perpetuating a common myth that developmental students just didn’t work hard in high school. The reality is that in any group of students, some will not be well prepared. Students are as complex as any group of humans and each one has unique needs and circumstances.

**Developmental education exists to provide the necessary instruction and learning experiences to prepare students to do college level work.** Although there may be alternatives to the traditional curricular offerings of reading, writing, and math, **MNADE believes that the most qualified faculty and staff should be the primary teachers and facilitators of learning;** full time instructors, credentialed part time instructors, and well prepared and supported tutors, advisers, and program directors.

**Definition of Developmental Education**

The term “developmental” does not mean “remedial.” Remediation occurs when a student has been taught a skill, but did not learn it and needs reteaching. “Developmental” refers to teaching pre-college level skills to students who, for a variety of reasons, did not have the appropriate learning experiences in their prior education. For example, very few students in high school take a reading class. Even if their skills in reading are not at grade level, they will likely just take regular language arts or English classes with their classmates. They have no direct instruction in the skills they need to improve their reading. Additionally, most high school students—even those reading at grade level—do not get adequate practice in independent reading of long articles or chapters. More explanation of this is in the next section. Similarly, many developmental math students never take algebra at all. They may be in a “general” math class until they have fulfilled the math requirement of their school district or state. Therefore, taking Introductory Algebra may not be a review at all. (Also, mathematics students often take the minimum requirements in high school and then don’t practice what they learned. They may place into courses lower than we might expect, based on their transcripts, because they have forgotten the procedures and don’t prepare for the assessment test. We discuss assessment for placement in a later section.)

By nature, the term “developmental” is contextual. One could argue that there are developmental students at every level of education, including graduate programs. They are the students who are the least prepared for the demands of the curriculum and environment in which they are immersed.

**Developmental Education Serves a Specific Audience**

Students in developmental education are served at both two-year and four-year institutions in MnSCU. Although there are some differences between the two groups (i.e. students lean toward “traditional” in terms of age and social class at the four-year schools and “non-traditional at the two-year schools), there are still remarkable similarities. Developmental students are often first-generation college students. They are disproportionally disabled, especially in terms of learning. They are more likely to be economically disadvantaged. In fact, whereas six years ago, 10% of RCTC’s student population was poverty level, now 40% are poverty level. They are more likely to be students of color. At the two-year colleges, developmental students are often older, many have a GED instead of a high school diploma, and many attend school part time because of work and family obligations.

The descriptors in the above paragraph are true, but not inclusive of all developmental students. Many high school students who appear to be ready for college find out they are not ready by college placement test standards. Reading at “grade level” does not mean college ready. In reading, the high school experience is often limited to shorter reading assignments that can be completed in school, where there is adequate assistance and support. Many high schools do not have enough text books to send them home with students, so the students never practice reading lengthy chapters independently and completing assignments outside of school. College requires many hours of outside, independent reading, and a significant portion of the reading may not also be reinforced in the classroom; students must actually *learn* from their reading.

Although most college students experience obstacles during their years in school, **developmental students often face more serious issues that affect their learning, attendance, and progress.** Personal life circumstances are more complex for non-traditional students. They often are supporting children (who get sick or have non-school days); in fact, child care issues top the list of reasons for our students to be absent from classes. Economic challenges abound. One college in the metro area found that fully 10% of its students were homeless at one time or other while they were trying to go to college. Because so many students are first-generation college students, they have few role models in their families or social groups for “how to do college.” Finances also mean that these students may not have reliable transportation, computers, or even books, since PELL grants do not cover the entire costs of college. In fact, MnSCU policy allows students to register for classes before their financial aid is in place, which means that many cannot afford to buy their books until days, even weeks after classes begin, further putting them at risk. Health is another, perhaps surprising issue for developmental students. Poverty and health issues go hand in hand; our students and their children get sick more often and have longer recoveries than more affluent students.

**More campuses need to create a clear set of structures to help developmental students adjust to the system of college**. The culture of academia is new to developmental students. They are not familiar with the system, and the system isn’t very friendly to those who don’t know the rules. The skills the students have learned that help them survive in their homes and neighborhoods do not translate well to the college environment. There are navigational, classroom, and interpersonal norms that are unique to higher education. Procedures are multi-stepped and many-layered; college staff are not predisposed to teach the system, only to carry it out. Resources to assist students vary from campus to campus and are not always easy to find and seek out. Sometimes, due to finances, colleges change, remove, and combine resources, so that it is an ever changing system that keeps even the faculty and staff guessing at where to send a troubled student.

Developmental students can become overwhelmed very quickly, and they have less experience and practice in the skills of persistence in school on which to draw. Thus, they drop in and out of school, depending on what crisis is under control (or not) at the time.

**The Value of Developmental Education**

**The societal and economic need for education beyond high school, the appalling gap in achievement between white and students of color in Minnesota, and the persistent underclass that is transient, underemployed and undereducated are three good arguments for providing sound education to help these students become successful in college so that they can be successful in life.** It is no secret that education and social issues are intertwined. MnSCU needs to commit to doing whatever it takes to move students into “college ready” status so they can become educated and gainfully employed.

**Developmental courses and resources provide a more holistic approach to teaching and learning than most other college coursework.** We teach “college knowledge.” We explicitly show students how to enter the academic environment, get support and use resources, talk to their teachers and ask for help appropriately, and know what to expect in this new system. We help students get used to the rigors of college courses in a safer environment; we give them multiple opportunities to get feedback on their work, not just two or three tests per semester as many college courses do. We teach them the accountability of college; students learn to take responsibility for learning in partnership with their teachers. We help students learn to feel connected to this new institution by delivering classes in which students become part of a community of learners, some for the very first time in their lives. It is in developmental coursework where many students find the self-confidence they need to be successful.

It takes practice to become a college student. Developmental students have not had the preparatory conditions to practice while they were in high school; they need to practice it when they come to our colleges and universities in order to succeed.

Career and technical education, touted by President Obama and other leaders, is a viable pathway to well-paying careers. **Developmental education plays a prominent role in preparing students for these career programs.** CTE is full of students from all walks of life; in fact, a number of students already hold college degrees and are changing careers. But developmental students have an excellent opportunity to earn a fairly short-term certificate or degree in a CTE field if we can create good pathways for them to enter the programs. Many developmental departments work closely with their CTE programs to create First Year Seminars that are linked to programs, customize reading, writing, and math courses to be more appropriate for program needs, and offer more connections to advisers and career resources before students actually enter the programs. These important connections should be strengthened and made sustainable.

**Assessment for Placement**

**How students are placed into developmental coursework is a serious concern.** The *Getting Prepared* report has shown that students are frequently under placed using our current measures (Fergus 14). Multiple measures have been somewhat instituted, but MnSCU still mostly relies on one test, the Accuplacer.

One huge difference between students who attend four-year colleges and universities and those who attend two-year colleges is the amount of preparation they do before they take their college placement exam. Most high schoolers who are taking the ACT do some practice; they may go through a study set—especially in math and science—and they usually take practice tests before they take the actual ACT. Also, many students take the ACT more than once—and they study again in between test taking. Two year students, on the other hand, arrive for orientation/testing often without ever realizing they are going to take a test. This happens even though many colleges prominently put testing information and suggestions for reviewing on their website and materials. Lack of preparation negatively affects their test results. Some two-year schools schedule orientation and testing in one day. Students are tired and overwhelmed by the time they take the test, another reason they do not do well on the test. Retaking the Accuplacer is certainly encouraged—strongly at some colleges—but, if students just come back the next day and retake it without any review of math or practice testing, the score isn’t going to change much. **Better, systematic, college-directed preparation is necessary to get more accurate results.**

Other measures, such as high school transcripts/GPA, self-report study inventories (such as the Lassi), demographic questions, non-cognitive questions are all suggestions that could be organized and implemented. **Longer orientations** that give students more time to learn about the college expectations, to practice for a retake of the Accuplacer, and that give them more time with advisers all can contribute to a better start in the classes that are at the right level.

**Best Practices**

**The MNADE organization strongly supports the use of known best practices in teaching and learning.** There are many colleges employing innovative curricular offerings, tutoring and other academic supports, and campus efforts to create mentors and community building. There has been a concerted effort to examine the standards that professional organizations have created (such as the National Council of Teachers of Mathematics and the American Mathematical Association of Two-Year Colleges well known process standards and standards for intellectual development). There are discussions on some campuses of a more competency based approach to developmental education that would be less constrained by the semester system. There are obstacles, however, in designing curricular changes, such as the technical and time-consuming difficulty of handling registrations for paired courses. These obstacles sometimes stand in the way of an otherwise excellent pedagogical innovation that has been well researched. Funding is also an issue for support services, such as mentoring or tutoring programs. The lack of role models mentioned earlier in this report makes it essential to find students who can step in to assist their classmates, but good training and structures cost money.

A set of changes to developmental education that was brought forth as a bill in the Minnesota Senate in February 2015 suggested that curricular approaches be minimized and “supplementary instruction” be used instead. **MNADE strongly opposes any plan to reduce student-teacher contact by eliminating quality curriculum by qualified instructors. Also, since student needs are complex, we know that a “one size fits all” approach will not serve students**.

Four developmental outcomes committees (reading, mathematics, writing, and English as a Second Language) in MnSCU met several times in 2013-2015 to address issues in course outcomes, transferability of courses, and collaborations with K12 systems (Coleman, et al; Kess, et al.; McFall, et al; Houdek, et al). **Transferability recommendations from these committees include creating a team of people representing all two-year colleges to develop a “Developmental Transfer Curriculum” based on the model of the Minnesota Transfer Curriculum** that exists now. Students do transfer before they are finished with all of their developmental coursework, and at present they are required to retake the Accuplacer to “prove” their readiness for college courses. This is not a good use for that exam, and students routinely end up taking developmental courses over again, thus stretching their time in college even more. We believe this should be a high priority project for MnSCU.

**Collaborations**

**Building a better pathway from high school to college is critical.** Many colleges already collaborate with their feeder school districts. College in the schools (or concurrent enrollment) programs are growing (Anoka Ramsey, Inver Hills CC, Central Lakes CT). Bridge programs (summer and academic term) are in place at some schools (Rochester CT, St. Cloud State U, Anoka Ramsey CC, Minneapolis CT, St. Paul College). These are models that could be replicated. Intentional alignments of curriculum in reading, writing and mathematics may make a smoother transition for students. **The “one size fits all” approach will not work for collaborations any more than it would for curriculum in the colleges. Communities differ, and thus collaborating will need to be customized carefully to succeed.**

The Adult Education services also feed our colleges, especially the two-year schools. Better connections with the GED programs, as well as their college preparation courses is much needed. There are bigger gaps for these students as they enter college, and they succeed at a lower rate than other developmental students (Cressman 5).

**To achieve solid collaborations, more professional development is crucial**. It needs to bring together the faculty from all participating institutions in a meaningful way—and regularly—so that ongoing improvements can be addressed.

Colleges and universities also collaborate with their communities: the businesses who hire their graduates, their alumni, the neighborhoods nearby, the social services with whom students interface. These are important connections and they benefit students. Higher education does not work in a vacuum. Better opportunities to work together will help our students get jobs, get housing, get help, and be successful.

**Conclusion**

The MNADE organization strongly urges all stakeholders in higher education to work together from the inception to the delivery of any new models of delivering developmental education to Minnesota students. MnSCU’s system director Pakou Yang, the developmental outcomes committees, representation from all types of campuses, and the MNADE membership and leadership should be key leaders in any reforms, new initiatives or policies, transfer agreements, and curricular innovations. Legislative representatives and senators, especially in the two Higher Education Committees, should be actively seeking ways to interface with their Minnesota education partners. Together, we can support our students and produce successful and productive graduates.

**Works Cited**

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