

Valuing the Accreditation Process

Maria Bahr

The value of the NADE accreditation process is far-reaching. Not only do students and programs benefit from the process, but also the entire institution. Through data collection of student performance, analysis, and resulting action plans, faculty and administrators can work cohesively towards improving both the effectiveness of the program and student success. In addition, the program accreditation process reinforces institutional assessment by implementing data-driven decisions, a process supported by institutional accrediting agencies.

The bonuses first begin with the team-building task of completing the campus-wide NADE Self-Evaluation Guides, which draws together co-workers from every facet of the institution. A collegial atmosphere emerges as these coworkers, including faculty, staff, and administration, examine current practices and services in an effort to improve those services. The self-evaluation process not only identifies and improves student services, but also improves employee relations as employees from a cross-section of campus take on a new appreciation of each other's roles. What then began as an evaluative process becomes a team-building process that facilitates strategy-building activities for improved student services.

Following completion of the self-evaluation guides, the program collects two years of baseline data on students' performance, resulting in not only a cross-sectional view of campus services and student demographics, but also specific assessment data, both providing invaluable tools for an informed action plan. After analysis of baseline data and documentation of key areas for improvement identified from the self-evaluation guides, the team is armed with a new understanding that fuels a data driven action plan. Making program changes requires risk-taking behavior, a behavior that many practitioners are reluctant to engage in because of the fear of failure. However, the results of campus-wide evaluation and analysis of student data foster a more confident climate geared towards continuous quality improvement. In addition, after the action plan is implemented and comparative data collected and analyzed, practitioners continue formative assessments to facilitate continued program improvements and better student outcomes.

Beyond that, the NADE accreditation process also facilitates and buttresses institutional assessment. Since accrediting agencies, such as the Higher Learning Commission, require institutions to engage in a system of insti-

tutional evaluation and improvement, the NADE accreditation process becomes a microcosm of that process that may be replicated across campus. As a result, a developmental program can model sound assessment processes for the entire institution.

From a NADE reviewer's perspective, the careful collaboration of practitioners with campus-wide staff and administrators becomes evident with the result of a thoughtfully crafted action plan specific to student demographics and institutional climate. Practitioners who successfully collaborate with co-workers show a deeper understanding of their institution's strengths and weaknesses and use that valuable information to build a process of improvement that is achievable and beneficial to students and to the program.

Undergirding the entire accreditation process is an achievable timeline. Team members must carefully plot achievement markers along the continuum. This reduces stress and encourages the depth of reflection necessary for such a far-reaching process. For example, during the collection of baseline data, practitioners can spend a semester or a year completing the self-evaluation guides by meeting with a cross-section of campus employees and documenting the results of the meeting. Consequently, the team will be able to orchestrate the completion of the guides as well as collect and analyze baseline data. As a team, they will then have the core components necessary for thoughtful analysis and informed decision making, resulting in an achievable action plan. Once practitioners implement the action plan, collect and analyze comparative data, and complete a summative assessment of the plan, that will fuel the next cycle of continuous improvement.

Maria Bahr teaches developmental and college-level English at Fort Scott Community College in Fort Scott, Kansas. She serves on the assessment committee and is currently focused on implementing ALP into the developmental composition sequence.