

to grow and lessening the effects of semesters that were exceptions to the rule.

For me, one of the most useful aspects of completing the accreditation was my close contact and regular communication with Lisa Putnam-Cole, a member of the NADE Board and a HCC colleague. Lisa guided me through the maze of data mining. If asked to offer any suggestions to NADE about how to improve the accreditation process (hey, wait, I think that's what I'm doing here!), I would recommend a close NADE mentor for all applicants. Having previously completed the accreditation process herself, Lisa was able to commiserate with my struggles and offer suggestions about the lessons she learned throughout the process.

The journey to NADE accreditation was long and challenging. Honestly, my program weighed whether to complete the process even after the self-study was completed. The administration and faculty knew that it would

be an investment in resources and personnel, and we had learned so much about ourselves already that we questioned whether to continue. Having completed accreditation, of course, it is easier to sing its praises. But I honestly believe that the knowledge we have gained is worth the work. I furthered my professional goals throughout the journey; the college values the accreditation; and—most importantly—students benefit from our increased dedication to their learning and success.

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The Value of Accreditation for Learning Centers and Their Programs

Geoffrey Bailey

Creating a culture of assessment is an essential practice and mindset for postsecondary institutions as well as the units and departments embedded within our respective campuses. Although it may sound daunting at first glance, simply put, assessment is “a set of processes designed to improve, demonstrate, and inquire about student learning” (Mentowski, 1998). Arguably, there is tremendous value to having a “systematic collection, review, and use of information about educational programs” so that we better understand student learning and can effectively scale such learning and practices (Marchese, 1987). Moreover, assessing the learning process goes beyond measuring learning outcomes and incorporates future-thinking (Salisbury, 2013).

Although most learning centers and their respective programs have increasingly engaged in data collection and assessment efforts, not all have fully explored the value of benchmarking and accreditation. For over twenty years, learning center pioneers have promulgated the benefits of evaluation, which dovetail well with the value of benchmarking and accreditation. Christ, Sheets, and Smith (2000) spotlighted such values in an interview with David Gerkin, which included justification for a program's resources, people, and its very existence. Additionally, evaluation provides a lens through which one can determine what works well, what needs improvement, and what

can enhance decision-making (Christ, Sheets, & Smith, 2000).

Similarly, benchmarking fosters opportunities to reflect on what is working well, what areas would benefit from improvements or changes, and drives more deliberate strategic thinking and performance (Martin Epper, 1999). This is critical given that our most important stakeholders, our students, will reap the proverbial benefits of better services and instructional support. Additionally, undertaking these efforts in the context of accreditation helps ensure that we are implementing best practices backed by research and professional practices in our field. To that end, the NADE Accreditation Commission:

...exists to improve and enhance the success of students at all levels of academic preparation, as well as to facilitate the professional growth of developmental educators by setting standards of best practice, emphasizing the use of theory to inform practice, and promoting effective evaluation and quality research in developmental education and learning assistance programs. (NADE Accreditation, 2016).

As a professional who has been through the accreditation process in one learning center, as well as having served on the accreditation review team since 2010, I want to offer a couple of reflections for professionals who are

unsure about the benefits of this process. First and foremost, this process is a terrific way to conduct a self-evaluation based on established benchmarks for our field. The opportunity to be strategic in identifying key areas for growth, as well as celebrate aspects of our centers that are excelling, is critical in helping prioritize where to focus our energies and attention. Second, we all know that data is critical in telling our story. However, if you're unsure what types of data are considered pivotal based on both research and practitioner experience, then the accreditation process can help shed light on essential analyses that include both descriptive data as well as more robust analyses. For example, measuring how student usage of services impacts student learning outcomes, grades, retention, and graduation rates is considered a best practice. Third, and this is probably the most essential reason, the process forces us to critically reflect on our efforts, the impact we are having, and what changes need to be made.

The difference between doing business as usual versus utilizing this process is that it leverages *your* interpretation of your own data and the results achieved in order to craft *informed* decisions about where to make changes. This critical reflection is an essential component of any learning center's success, and it is built into the accreditation process. Moreover, the accreditation review team: 1) serves as a guide to help you through the process; 2) appropriately challenges how the results are conveyed in order to help you best tell your story; and 3) recognizes and celebrates your learning center on an international level once you've completed the process. Similar to the accreditation process for an entire institution, it establishes that your program has been through an intentional and robust review of your practices, data collection, interpretation, and analyses. And, the process drives decision-making predicated on best practices and key metrics for learning centers and their programs rather than on an arbitrary set of standards. Moreover, in a time of increased fiscal uncertainty and political pressures, the accreditation process can help strengthen opportunities for appropriate funding and staffing to help scale your program's impact on student success. The only question you need to ask yourself is "when am I ready to start?!" To learn more, please check out <https://nadeaccreditation.net/>.

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The initial goal of the application was to gain certification while sharing aspects of our programs which we found useful for our developmental mathematics students. On the way to this certification, some discoveries were made. First, because as we are constantly changing, any statistical report will be out of date before it is written. However, how we use those data to promote change is a prevailing, positive aspect of this mathematics program. Secondly, the process of reviewing the data revealed some weaknesses in the program. Ameliorating these deficiencies has become the focus of some of this year's initiatives. Finally, analysis of the data led to the discovery of four measures which, taken together, may be a powerful way to measure the effectiveness of any developmental mathematics program.

—Anna Harwin,
mathematics instructor,
reflecting on the accreditation process