Departmental Activities, Research Findings, and the National Trend Towards Acceleration

The following pages document some of the recent work we have been doing in the Department of Developmental Education, including a list of research findings that highlight some of our successes during 2006-2011. As you can see from the research findings below, we have seen much improvement in relevant student success rates. I have pulled this information from the NADE certification report to highlight information you might find helpful in talking with other faculty and administrators in the upcoming months. Page numbers are provided to aid you in going to the report if you want to look at this information in context.

Departmental Activities

Two assessments—the 2002 external study and the 2007 self-study—found many strengths in the developmental education program at UAF. Even before we became a department, we had well-trained faculty with common goals and objectives, providing varied instructional methods based on learning theory, assessing students regularly and giving them feedback, providing support services to both rural and urban students, and using formative evaluation strategies to refine and improve courses and services. We have a centralized program with clearly defined mission, goals and objectives, and we even have institutional support a little higher than is found at most research universities (p. 33).

As a result of these two assessments, the Developmental Education Department, Developmental Studies Committee and other appropriate personnel met to determine student assessment and placement as they relate to UAF admission standards. Mandatory placement verbiage was changed in the catalog in Fall 2007. BANNER registration blocking was implemented for Math in Spring 2008 and for English in Fall 2009. (Mandatory placement in Reading has not yet been implemented.) (p. 53).

Other work done in the department to support students as mandatory placement took effect were as follows. Our Math Fast-Track program was instituted in 2007-2008 in response to University of Alaska President Gamble's initiative to help students move through the system more quickly to get degrees. Fast Track courses provide review to help students move on in their math sequence. CRLA training for DEVM tutors was implemented during this time. Marjorie Illingworth compiled a list of courses for students with developmental placements, to assist them in moving forward while under mandatory placement. All areas worked on guidelines for placing students into higher classes. The Curriculum Committee reviewed curriculum and course outcomes for our courses that were offered through the Center for Distance Education. Due to very low completion rates, we pulled all those classes while completing an evaluation of them. We developed standards for UAF Developmental Education courses, including an emphasis on more rapid turnaround of instructors' comments on students' submissions, clearer completion timelines for individual assignments, and a higher use of synchronous delivery modes. DEVM evaluated its computer-mediated instruction. And several DEVS courses were linked as 1-credit reading or study skills courses to specific core courses in sciences, math or humanities, social sciences (p. 67).

Continuous and systematic evaluation has been ongoing in the institutional, programmatic and instructional areas related to our program. Our Student Learning Outcomes & Assessment Plan (2007), Final Report on Developmental Education Activities (2007), and Program Review (2011) are included in that report as Appendices P - R. Departmental evaluation happens via department meetings and department committee meetings on an ongoing basis. Our departmental committees include DEVE & DEVS Curriculum, DEVM Curriculum, Integration & Outreach, NADE Certification, and Program Review. We work on the Learning Commons and other university-wide initiatives via our representation

on the Student Academic Development & Achievement Committee of the Faculty Senate. We dovetail with other Senate committees' work too, including the Faculty Development & Assessment and Curricular Affairs, among others. We can use these relationships to carry out new initiatives that have grown out of this study (p. 68).

Research Findings

The following data comes from our departmental study that looked at FY2006-2008 baseline data ("pre mandatory placement") and FY2009-2011 comparative data ("post mandatory placement"). Unless otherwise specified, these are the before and after groups for our comparison study.

Placement

Before mandatory placement, 53% of incoming students (n=1,638) placed into DEVE or DEVM courses. Afterwards, 54% of incoming students (n=2,239) placed into DEVE or DEVM courses. While the percentage stayed about the same, the number of students who placed into DEVE or DEVM courses rose 36%. This is a substantial increase in students placing into DEVE or DEVM courses. Fifty-four percent of undergraduate students in their first semester at UAF place into either DEVM or DEVE courses (p. 55).

Enrollment

The percent of students who place at the developmental English or Math level who *enroll* in any developmental course within one year averaged 57% in FY 2006-2008 and 61% in FY 2009-2011. This means that 40% of the students who place into DEV courses are still not enrolling, or 2 out of every 5 students who place into developmental courses (p. 57).

Success in DEV Courses

Before mandatory placement, for all DEV courses, 55% of students were successful, 22% not successful, and 23% not complete. After mandatory placement, for all DEV courses, 61% of students were successful, 17% not successful, and 22% not complete. UAF developmental course success went from 55% to 61%. These numbers are not as high as we would like, but they do show a 6% rise in our success rate in DEV courses, and a drop in the percentage of students who are unsuccessful or noncompleting (p. 59).

For DEVM courses, the success rate rose from 49% to 58%. For DEVE courses, it dropped from 72% to 67%. For DEVS courses, it dropped slightly, from 69% to 67% (p. 60).

In DEVM courses, successful completion rose from 49% to 58%. The number of students who were not successful dropped from 27% to 20%, and the number who did not complete dropped from 25% to 22% p. 60).

The success rates went down some in DEVE, from 72% to 67%, but this coincided with a relevant change due to mandatory placement: some students who used to self-place into DEVE 070 earlier are now being placed in ENGL 111x, leaving us with a higher percentage of higher-risk students to work with in DEVE 070 (p. 61).

Success in Target Courses

Historically, we have had difficulty showing how successful our students are because administrators define success for our students by baccalaureate standards that don't reflect our students' needs. A very important consideration is the fact that most data collected in developmental education to date doesn't

show how many students didn't go on to take a college-level course but were otherwise quite successful in meeting their education goals through courses that met the degree requirements for occupational endorsements, certificates and associate degrees. Such students may have been directed by advisors into courses with embedded developmental Math and English curriculum, where they may have succeeded. We put in a request to the office for Planning, Analysis & Institutional Research (PAIR) to see which non-DEV classes students placing into DEV classes are going to for completion of these educational objectives, and how they are doing in those classes.

We have requested to see data for students who were placed in developmental education and took ABUS 155, ECE 117, HUMS 117, HLTH 116, PRT 155, or TTCH 131 in place of DEVM classes and DEVS 104, DEVS 105, ABUS 170, or CTT 104 in place of DEVE classes. We have also requested to see data for students who, having completed their developmental coursework, went on to the following target courses instead of the college-level courses traditionally identified as target courses: from DEVE, ABUS 170, ABUS 271, COMM 131, COMM 141, DEVS 104, DEVS 105 and CTT 104; and from DEVM, ABUS 155, ECE 117, HLTH 116, HUMS 117, PRT 155, TTCH 131, CS 101, AFPM 145 and CTT 106. We hope to see this data in the next few months.

More students completed (but were not successful) in the target course after mandatory placement than before (20→25%). Fewer students are not completing (19→16%) (p. 62). On the Fairbanks-CTC campus, the successful rate showed a big change, from 52% to 63%. The completion rate stayed about the same (27%-28%), and the "did not complete" rate dropped a lot, from 22% to 9% (p. 63).

Among students earning successful grades in DEVE 070 and 109 in 2006, only 42% were successful in their target course, ENGL 111x. This percentage rose to 56% in 2011. The "did not complete" rate in ENGL 111x for students who had taken DEVE 070 and 109 went down from 26% before mandatory placement to 15% after (p. 63).

Students who are taking DEVM courses before target MATH classes are outperforming those who don't. The average DEVM to college-level Math success rate in FY 2009-2011 was 62%. The overall (including but not limited to DEVM students) college-level Math success rate was 58% (57.4% for MATH 107, 69% for MATH 103, and 49.6% for MATH 161). The fact that the DEVM success rate in target college-level MATH courses is higher than the overall success rate in those courses tells us that students who took a DEVM course are actually *pulling up* the overall average. In fact, the MATH success rate without DEVM students is only around 52%, 10% lower (p. 63).

The following classes showed large increases in their success rates from the pre to post time periods. In CHEM 100x, the success rate increased 10.8%. In HIST 100x, the success rate increased 8.8%. In MATH 103x, the success rate increased 10.2%. In ENGL 111x, the success rate increased 6.2%. Courses that showed more modest gains were ANTH 100x (3.5%), CHEM 105 (2.9%), and PHYS 104 (4.7%). Other courses showed decreases. The biggest ones were BIOL 100 (-5.9%), BIOL 104 (-6.1%), COMM 141x (-4.1%), and MATH 161 (-10.6%) (p. 65).

The Math and English increases are what we expected and had targeted with mandatory placement. Other classes that had increased success rates were those that also specified placement or prerequisites around that time, such as CHEM 100x, HIST 100x and ANTH 100x. As for the classes with decreased success rates, COMM 141 still has no prerequisites and there haven't been any changes in the prerequisites for MATH 161. There has been a time lag for some classes in getting prerequisites established, which has meant that students who needed to fill prerequisites for other classes likely took the "easier" route of taking non-prerequisite classes instead (p. 65).

Classes that had increased success rates were those that also specified placement or prerequisites at around that time, such as CHEM 11x, HIST 100x, and ANTH 100x. The Math and English increases are

what we expected and targeted with mandatory placement. As for the classes that had decreased success rates, Communications 141 still has no prerequisites, MATH 161 has the same prerequisites it's had for years, the same ones as MATH 107 has, and BIOL 100 and 104 created stricter prerequisites (which include ENGL 111x and DEVM 105) in 2009-10. There has been a lag in some classes in getting prerequisites established, which has meant that students who needed to fill prerequisites for other classes took the non-prerequisite classes instead (p. 65).

HIST 100x placement is dependent on ENGL 111x placement. ANTH 100x placement is also dependent on ENGL 111x placement, but it requires a higher reading level than ENGL 111x and HIST 100x do. ANTH 100x wouldn't have been impacted much by the action plan, but would be greater impacted if changes were made to mandatory placement in reading (which is overseen by DEVS) (p. 65).

Retention to 24 Credits

For students who place into DEV courses, enrolling in them makes a difference in their retention to 24 credits. Of students who placed into DEV courses for 2006-2008, for those enrolled in DEV courses, 53% got at least 24 credits. For those not enrolled in DEV courses, only 41% got at least 24 credits. Of students who placed into DEV courses for 2009-2011, for those enrolled in DEV courses, 43% got at least 24 credits. For those not enrolled in DEV courses, only 29% got at least 24 credits (p. 65). And 34% of those who placed into DEVE and enrolled in DEVE within a year made it to 24 credits while only 24% who did not enroll made it to 24 credits (p. 66).

This data highlights the fact that Developmental Education is a critical part of student success and retention. It highlights the need for students who place into DEVE to find their way to those classes and not get lost in this potential gap in the university support system (p. 66).

Relationship of DEV Grades & Target-Course Grades

Among DEV students, 74% pass the next course (C or higher) if they get an A in DEV, 59% if they get a B, 44% if they get a C, 38% if they get a D, 15% if they get an F. Those who get an Incomplete or Deferred Grade have a 28% chance of passing the target course, and those who get a Withdrawal or No Basis have a 27% chance. We found this to be very significant data. Developmental students have a significantly better chance of passing their next course if they get an A or a B in their developmental course. If they got an A, chances of getting A or B are highest in the target course. If they got a B, chances of getting B or C in the target course are highest. If they got a C, chances are highest they'll get a C or lower in the target course. And so the risk is greater for C students that they will not complete successfully (p. 66).

Grades data shows that what we're doing really works. Look at the As and Bs: that's where we're really making an impact. We see here that if students come to DEVE classes, do their work and engage in the course, they'll be significantly more likely to get an A or B in ENGL 111x than if they hadn't gotten a C or lower in a DEVE class. In DEVM too, it looks like A and B grades are still robust enough to help students succeed in their target course, though a grade of C is not (p. 66).

The Trend Towards Acceleration

University of Alaska President Patrick Gamble has stated that UAF shouldn't be in the business of developmental education and that if it is done at all it should be done at the UAF Community & Technical College. The Governor would like to see UAF join Complete College America, a national program encouraging accelerated completion rates in postsecondary education. Developmental faculty see this as a business model approach, with four- and six-year graduation rates being in the interest of the institution

rather than its students. And we have seen the failure of isolating Developmental Education programming to the community college given that our students integrate developmental education courses into their ongoing course of study (p. 70).

This would cause a number of problems for the large percentage of UAF students who are nontraditional. They do not need an isolated developmental program at a community college separate from the university. They need to be enrolled in whatever program they are ready for, with developmental courses integrated into that program, and accessible on the campuses where they are taking other classes. Because they go part-time at school, often working full time and having family obligations, they need to be able to take whatever time they need to finish their educational objectives. This matches with a recent measure from the Education Department, which broadened graduation rate reporting required for institutions of higher education to include part-time and other students who have previous attended post-secondary education. The new statewide Stay on Track incentives program offers students financial incentives if they take 15 credits a semester; this program does a disservice to students who will not pass their classes if they take that many of them (we already have this problem now), who cannot go to school full-time: it sounds home a message to part-time students that full-time students deserve more incentives than they do, when really, the latter seems more correct. Measures of post-secondary success can no longer afford not to take such students into account. Developmental Education serves at least 54% of the UAF student population; any measure of our success as a program depends on research and policies that encourage these students' access to and completion of programs in whatever ways they can. The Student Academic Development & Achievement (SADA) Committee and the Curricular Affairs Committee drafted a policy to take to the Faculty Senate this May to express faculty disfavor with national programs like Complete College America. We feel that our students are too different from the national population to benefit from a program with such specific requirements regarding acceleration of completion and graduation (pp. 70-71).

Hunter Boylan says, currently 10% of students placing nationally into developmental programs can probably succeed in 100-level coursework (Fain). We need to figure out where we stand in relation to this figure. Is 10% the percentage at UAF? Does our assessment need to change to reflect this issue? How do we best assist that 10% while not losing the support systems in place for the other 90%? The national push has been to divert all students from what they call "remedial" programs, to allow only one semester of "remediation" and provide all other developmental support in the form of co-requisites. This obviously will not work if only 10% of students placing currently into developmental coursework are ready to be placed higher with developmental support. We have students who need at least two semesters of developmental work in one or two areas. We are fighting, with an institutional research system that is overloaded, to provide accurate research that can keep up with the demand to measure how our students are actually doing and make it clear which policies we need to adopt, to increase retention and educational success for our students (p. 71).

Dana Greci
NADE Certification Coordinator
Dept of Developmental Education, UAF
August 27, 2012