



IDEA

Reader's Corner

Iowa Developmental Education Association Newsletter, August 2017

Dan Nelson **Chapter President, Iowa** **Developmental Education** **Association**



I am the current President of the Iowa Developmental Education Association (IDEA) chapter and will turn the leadership over to Jennifer Kerns at the Fall Conference, Thursday, October 26, 2017.

For the past eleven years, I have worked with Des Moines Area Community College at the Urban and Ankeny campuses. Since 2008, I have taught reading and study strategies courses, and I have assisted students in the Academic Achievement Center Writing Lab on our Ankeny campus. My educational background features English and education, and I have recently completed a specialist degree in Developmental Education. In the past few years, I have also participated in the Kellogg Institute, which served as a great educational experience and introduced me to many of our colleagues from around the country.

As we saw again during our 2016 fall conference, working together and meeting as a network of professionals offers valuable opportunities to refresh our skills, make connections, and reinvigorate our enthusiasm for our experience. Along with Dr. Patrick Saxon's insights and advice regarding the need to advocate for developmental education, members were able to view presentations ranging from dealing with student anxiety to pursuing effective department analysis. In particular, I witnessed the value of our conference through my

own presentation addressing the current challenges of placement scores and their consequences.

Those of us working with developmental education recognize the challenge of placement, and the recent demise of COMPASS testing reminded us at DMACC of just how complicated the situation may be. After choosing Accuplacer as our placement test, we discovered no national or state consensus as to what a "college-ready" score might be. In fact, we discovered broad variations not only across the nation, but we realized that we had varying scores within the state. Considering the implications for student progress through our institution, this situation suggests a difficult and complicated issue for individual institutions, which may have long-lasting consequences.

While the session addressed the process DMACC has followed to determine a preliminary "college-ready" score, our discussion exhibited the common problems confronted by our colleagues across the state. Other institutions, such as Iowa Lakes Community College, had already begun testing and adjusting their Accuplacer scores, while some had just begun to reconsider their current expected scores. At DMACC, we decided to attempt to replicate our previous student distribution with Compass when compared to a set of national Accuplacer scores, but we recognized that the score we selected may not truly provide the desired distribution. Subsequently, as with other institutions, we understood the need to accumulate data and adjust our scores as more students begin taking the tests and begin placement. To some extent, as a group, we recognized that the placement scores are not providing a standard measure, and we as educators must be more engaged within our

institutions in order to establish reliability and consistency.

Without a forum such as our conference, many of us would not recognize the differences in placement scores nor the knowledge others have already accumulated. Considering the implications placement scores have on student experiences and on institutional perceptions of success and effectiveness, this opportunity to share information and consider acceptable standards may prove invaluable to institutions across the state. Members were able to share knowledge, recognize needs, and potentially provide a unified voice that benefits both educators and students. I am looking forward to see even more engagement within our association, and I know our work together may have a positive impact on student experiences throughout the state. As we accumulate data and share our observations through the next year, IDEA may continue to serve as an important resource and guide to educators across the state.

Focus on IDEA Members:

Jennifer Kerns, President-Elect



My name is Jennifer Doke Kerns, and I am president-elect of IDEA this year. I am the head of the Newton DMACC campus Academic Achievement Center, which provides academic support services to our students and houses our ESL and high school completion programs. I also teach developmental English and Composition courses and serve as the disability services campus liaison. While I have attended IDEA conferences the past four years and learned so much about this organization, I am excited to become even more involved in IDEA.

I started my own college career at DMACC before transferring to Grand View to get a degree in English and Secondary Education. I taught high school English for thirteen years before transitioning over to DMACC full time four years ago. In the past, I also taught Human Relations courses for Buena Vista University. I have a master's degree in Effective Teaching and Learning from Drake University, where I focused on students' responses to formative assessment and how that affected performance. I obtained my master's degree in English from Iowa State University, focusing mostly on American Literature and memoir writing. My thesis at ISU examined the life and work of Bronson Alcott, a nineteenth century unconventional educational innovator and father of author Louisa Mae Alcott. In December, I completed my Ph.D. in Educational Leadership at Drake University. My dissertation was entitled: *Learning at Home: A phenomenology examining the perceptions of homeschooling parents regarding the social, emotional, and cognitive development of their children.*

My current areas of interest for research include: barriers to student success in high school completion programs, particularly among underrepresented populations; program evaluation strategies; and societal attitudes toward anti-intellectualism and expert aversion. Through my work here at DMACC, I have become passionate about effective developmental education. I took this job just as Iowa was transitioning from the GED to the HiSET, as well as instituting a managed enrollment cohort model for high school completion programs, so I had to hit the ground running. Now we have a vibrant, busy HiSET program, and we have just started our first ESL program on our campus. I love working on the Newton campus, and I am very proud of what happens in our AAC and in our classrooms.

I look forward to being active with IDEA for many years to come. The conversations in which I have participated and the insights that others have shared in this process have been invaluable to me. I learn so much at every conference.

Amanda Rodenborn, IDEA Treasurer



M.A. English, emphasis in Rhetoric, Composition, and Professional Communication; Iowa State University
B.A. Communication Studies, emphasis in Rhetoric and Discourse and minor in Spanish; University of Calgary

University of Calgary

Amanda Rodenborn is the new Iowa Developmental Education Association (IDEA) treasurer. She has been an active member of the organization since 2014 and often presents at conferences. She is an Associate Professor at Des Moines Area Community College (DMACC), Ankeny campus, and teaches a mixture of face-to-face and online classes in Developmental Reading, Study Strategies, and The College Experience. She also serves students in the Writing Lab, where she enjoys teaching one-on-one. In the past, Amanda worked for Iowa State University, Grand View University, and Clinton Community College, where she taught Composition I and II and Public Speaking. She also previously worked as an academic advisor and wrote grants for DMACC.

Amanda has put her Communication and English degrees to use in non-academic settings as well. She has worked for a non-profit arts organization where she was responsible for managing the website and social media, creating promotional materials and press releases, writing grants, and coordinating volunteers. She enjoys composing in various modes

and seizes opportunities to do so in her current profession, designing support materials for students and promotional materials for the Writing Lab. Ultimately, Amanda is a lifelong learner, always expanding her skillset through practice, research, and graduate classes.

As a result of her teaching and work experiences, Amanda has a wide range of academic interests including writing center research and best practices, online teaching best practices, gender communication, war rhetorics, and visual and electronic composition. However, her heart truly lies in empowering students to become independent learners by helping them improve their writing, realize their potential, and increase confidence in their abilities to learn something new. She feels IDEA helps her explore new ways to pursue these passions.

Reflections from the Past President

Ruth Kunkle, MS



It gives me great pleasure to address the IDEA membership as past president and share my reflections. The last year has not only been a time of personal growth but a time to deepen friendships with my colleagues.

As past president, I had the outstanding privilege to work directly with the NADE planning committee as co-coordinator for Poster Board presenters in Anaheim. Attending various meetings as well as sharing best practices with other professionals across the country in higher education has been a meaningful privilege. These are the moments I cherish and internalize reminding me the work we do is important on a grand scale to improve the lives of others.

Locally and regionally, IDEA has many opportunities at our front door. I sincerely look forward to offering assistance in planning the 2017 IDEA conference and anticipate input and participation from several IDEA members. The last two years the conference has been held in beautiful Okoboji, Iowa, and now it is time to find a new venue.

Working with and learning from so many talented faculty, instructors, and facilitators with years of experience and a “wealth” of knowledge truly has enriched my life and helped me develop many of my skills in the classroom while maintaining a spirit of “life-long learning.”

Thank you so much for allowing me the opportunity to serve IDEA as your former president-elect and president.

FALL CONFERENCE 2016

Growing Through Developmental Education

Friday October 7th, 2016

Arrowwood Resort, Okoboji, Iowa



Keynote Presenter Dr. D. Patrick Saxon, Sam Houston State University

Dr. D. Patrick Saxon is an Associate Professor and Director of the fully online

Developmental Education Administration Doctoral Program at Sam Houston State University. He has published extensively in the field of developmental education and is coauthor of the book *Attaining Excellence in Developmental Education: Research-Based Recommendations for Administrators* with Dr. Hunter Boylan.

For 22 years, he managed the research activities of the National Center for Developmental Education. He is the editor of *Research in Developmental Education*, an advisor for the Kellogg Institute, a member of the National Association for Developmental Education Executive Board, and serves on the Editorial Review Board of the *Journal of College Reading and Learning*. In 2015, he was inducted as a Fellow in the Council for Learning Assistance and Developmental Education Associations.

Keynote Review by Tom Mueller

Dr. Saxon presented and led a discussion about political advocacy in developmental education. During his presentation, he informed the group that these are times of change, reform, redesign, and even some push for the elimination of developmental education. Professionals need to be prepared to discuss and defend our profession in the spirit of upholding academic standards and promoting the success of our students.

Dr. Saxon began by outlining some of the external challenges that programs and faculty in developmental education face. He reviewed the Complete College America (CCA) group and some of their arguments in the publication "Remediation: Higher Education's Bridge to Nowhere". Dr. Saxon argued that their talking points of remediation and failure are greatly exaggerated and we need to look



at real data and develop real solutions. He also discussed some of the states that have struggled with redesign, noting that the focus of being comprehensive was lost.

complete package to include advising and outside the classroom support.

We also need to understand that not all students will be successful in only one model and approach. When working with students, we will do more by looking at accountability measures and by looking at the complete experience of the student. We cannot allow the "quick fix it" ideas of the "one model" to take over our ideas on how to serve students, but stay comprehensive and inclusive.



He continued to state how we need to demonstrate that we are professionals open to improve, and show that developmental education promotes quality, diversity, and open access to all for education. As



professionals and as programs, we need to stay true to our mission and realize that comprehensive developmental education is the answer. We need to look at different approaches within our programs and not focus on only one model. We need to see the relationship

between advisors, instructors, and tutors in working with students to be successful. He argued that this is not a problem of instruction alone, but of the

America Reads Recipient— Okoboji Elementary School



This year's recipients of the books donated by IDEA Conference attendees were children attending Okoboji Elementary School. The presentation was made during the lunch and business meeting with

Justin Bouse, Principal, accepting the donation.

Breakout Session Reviews

Review by Amanda Rodenborn

Combating Test Anxiety in College Students **Jennifer Kerns**

Mental health continues to be a topic of concern on college campuses. We know that our developmental education students lag in reading, writing, and/or math skills, but we also acknowledge, and address at conferences, the need to support our students in developing their affective skills. Some are emotionally fragile due to their upbringing, social problems, past school experiences, patterns of failure, and more. These issues often go hand in hand with mental health concerns, specifically, anxiety and test anxiety. President-elect Jennifer Kerns's presentation at this year's IDEA Conference invited us to consider the experiences and mental health problems our students bring with them when they enter our classrooms and sit down to take exams.

Jennifer Kerns is an Associate Professor of English at Des Moines Area Community College, Newton

Campus. She also serves as the Academic Achievement Center Group Leader and Disability Services Liaison. In her presentation about helping students overcome test anxiety, Kerns recounted some of her students' and her own test anxiety experiences. She also shared many practical approaches for managing anxiety before and during exams, including arriving early, surveying the exam to budget time, visually isolating questions, using positive self-talk, and not worrying if others finish in advance.

These tips on how to help our students manage any level of stress and anxiety are always welcome. They certainly added to my list of tips for students and reinforced others. For example, a common theme in my Study Strategies class is, "Lie to yourself." "Lie to yourself about deadlines (to finish ahead of schedule), and "Lie to yourself when other students finish a test before you—they couldn't answer very many questions, of course!" Like Kerns, I have seen students latch on to these tips and successfully overcome anxiety. It is a truly rewarding experience to help anxious students leave an exam with smiles on their faces and confidence in their steps.

Review by Amanda Rodenborn

Unstandard Variations: Examining "College-Ready" Placement Test Scores

Dan Nelson

For the last couple of years, our colleges have experienced the changing tides of college placement assessments as we bid farewell to the COMPASS. Community colleges across the nation are transitioning to other assessments, some colleges have already made this shift, and still others are taking this opportunity to examine and drastically modify longstanding placement methods.

As developmental educators, we have a vested interest in ensuring that our students are accurately placed and supported throughout their academic journeys. Incoming President Dan Nelson's presentation at this year's IDEA Conference served as a timely reminder. We must continue to involve ourselves in these ongoing conversations about placement and stay informed of trends and changes on our campuses, across Iowa, and throughout the nation.

Dan Nelson, Developmental Education and Writing Lab Instructor at Des Moines Area Community College (DMACC), delivered an engaging presentation on the research methods used to establish DMACC's ACCUPLACER college-readiness cut scores in reading and writing. In his thought-provoking discussion, he shared score conversion methods provided by two of his math colleagues as well as his own research into the trends across the state of Iowa, in surrounding states, and throughout the nation. DMACC ultimately decided upon a percentage conversion method, adopting cut scores of 73 in Reading and 82 in Writing.

Interestingly, Nelson's research revealed significant discrepancies in ACCUPLACER cut scores, ranging from 64 to 90 in Reading and 56 to 98 in Writing, just among Iowa's community colleges. Nelson's research showed similar inconsistencies across the nation. His presentation stimulated much discussion, provoked questions, such as whether or not we should adopt a statewide measure, and perhaps even caused some alarm over the wide range in cut scores.

As we return to our respective campuses, I hope we continue to reflect on our placement practices, remain informed, and make our—and by extension our students'—voices heard. I, for one, look forward to updates on this topic throughout the year and hopefully at next year's conference as well.



Idea president, Ruth Kunkle receiving her award for service as IDEA president 2016/2017.

**WHAT A GREAT 2016
CONFERENCE—SEE YOU IN
2017!**

Complete College America and Iowa's Community Colleges: a Review of Recent Meetings

(Please note how this review of recent meetings relates to last year's keynote address and our upcoming 2017 conference—both the Thursday keynote address and Friday's discussion)

As we begin a new semester and prepare for our fall conference, the board wanted to inform our membership about recent events involving developmental education in our state. Over the summer, members of our association were invited to participate in discussions regarding the manner in which our institutions are addressing developmental education. Initiated by the governor's office, the discussions involved faculty, administrators, and the Department of Education. From our understanding, the governor's office inquired specifically about the application of co-requisites as advocated by the organization Complete College America (CCA) (<http://completecollege.org/>), and the governor's office expressed an interest in "joining" with CCA. The community colleges presented the successful best practices currently being used to reach our students, and the representatives from the Governor's office and the Department of Education, at this time, have declined the partnership with Complete College America. Although the discussions resulted in no immediate change, educators should be aware that some of the questions and pressures influencing other states may be impacting our policymakers.

As the name suggests, CCA focuses on increasing the number of students completing a program. In fact, administrators should be aware that one of the ideas proposed by the organization included making education funding dependent on completion. CCA gained a national profile with a document entitled

"Bridge to Nowhere," in which they argued that developmental courses were a barrier to students, which prevented them from progressing and were essentially unnecessary. This publication almost immediately impacted several states in which legislatures altered or even eliminated developmental programs based on the assertion that such courses were more of a problem than a benefit. CCA has effectively attracted funding from foundations and influenced political leaders by suggesting critics are against reform and by lauding the governors who "get it." Focusing on streamlining the student experience and eliminating "off-ramps," CCA has advocated guided pathways with fewer choices for students and the use of co-requisites, particularly the program at Baltimore County. Broadly speaking, CCA advocates students immediately taking college-level courses while providing a structured, simple pathway that reduces potential distractions or courses that do not count in a program. Their approach, despite endorsing particular approaches that have worked in developmental education, implies that preparatory work and a variety of support systems actually create a negative impact.

Although the political and rhetorical approach of CCA has proven very effective, educators and administrators should consider the variety of criticism related to CCA. The organization does not conduct research, and the research they utilize is not extensive. There is further concern that they have misrepresented or misinterpreted the research conclusions they primarily rely on, namely the suggestion that developmental courses actually cause students to stop college work. Further, CCA's presentation implies that there are only a few legitimate workable options for students and that all student populations are essentially the same. The examples CCA offers as success stories are, upon examination, usually targeted at notably narrow populations, such as students scoring near a cut score or attending an institution that is more

selective than community colleges. This may reflect the fact that CCA is responding to particular conditions in some states, in which hard, inflexible cut scores require large numbers of students to take a series of preparatory courses. In this scenario, assessment and placement may actually be more of a problem than the course sequence. Critics have also noted that, in the research CCA cites, instructors may actually have a greater influence than course sequence. Furthermore, skeptical observers often note that retention diminishes in any sequence in college regardless of the types of courses or the type of college.

Compounding these issues, many note that CCA appears immediately concerned with immediate political reaction and public relations attention, which creates national interest from policy makers and well-financed foundations. To some, the “Bridge to Nowhere” document presents itself more as propaganda than a researched piece of educational policy. Follow-up research or attempts to replicate research does not appear to be a CCA priority. In fact, while CCA recruits states that “get it,” some critics question whether the endorsed solutions actually achieve greater completion at all and if CCA may actually be ignoring the potentially more impactful variables in students’ lives. CCA makes no note or recommendation regarding social and economic conditions. CCA may lament two or four-year completion rates, but if those completion rates are much higher after one or more years extra, the problem may not necessarily be low completion or sequence but other issues that interfere with time, such as finances and work. In fact, some have noted that since CCA’s efforts seem to focus on a narrow slice of the student population, it may as an organization simply be willing to ignore the segment of the student population that is very low performing or economically challenged by the logistics of college today. CCA’s approach also seems to incentivize reduced standards or more stringent

entry barriers in order to achieve higher completion numbers.

While relying on many efforts within developmental education, CCA’s approach has clearly had a controversial and disruptive influence. CCA clearly utilizes the work of developmental education and accepts, somewhat, the idea that some part of the student population needs academic support. Furthermore, the basic issues of completion and the need for stronger placement and advising opportunities are clearly long-standing concerns within developmental education. However, the organization endeavors to minimize the value of anything that might interfere with students quickly accumulating college-level credit, regardless of potential consequences in terms of quality, standards, and expectations. This combination of simple solutions and divisive public relations creates a politically attractive opportunity for risky, reckless, budget-cutting actions that may generate publicity along with years of disruption in higher education. Participants in the discussion this summer believe we as a state are actively engaged with supporting developmental education and feel that we do not need to “join” an outside organization’s agenda. Although the governor’s office may not pursue such a course now, clearly an organization such as CCA has influenced members of our state government, and members of the developmental education community should be aware that we may need to articulate our purpose and defend our methods. We should be aware that we may need to help educate our colleagues and coworkers about our role in our institutions and the potential uncertainties offered by organizations such as CCA.

Dan Nelson—IDEA President

Jennifer Kerns—IDEA President-Elect

IDEA Fall 2017 Conference Preview



Save the date for the Fall IDEA Conference **October 26-27, 2017**

Conference Theme: Transitions

Keynote Speaker: **Robin Ozz, NADE President**

- **Keynote Title: "Desiderata: Advice for Developmental Educators from an Old Hippie Poem"**
- **How does a developmental educator keep calm in the midst of the chaos of reforms, the invasion of legislation, and the constant questioning of the worth of his or her practice?**

FRIDAY DISCUSSION: Board members will lead a discussion about the recent meetings at the state level involving discussions of developmental education. Jeremy Varner from the DE has agreed to be part of the discussion on Friday, and will be bringing others with him!

Conference Site: **Clarion Inn University Plaza** in Cedar Falls

- **Special conference room rate: \$79.00/night + taxes.**
- **Ask for IDEA block before September 29, 2017**

IDEA Fall 2017 Conference Website

https://www.dmac.edu/idea/SitePages/Fall_Preview.aspx

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Check the IDEA website for 2017 conference updates, student scholarship information, and member resources.

<https://www.dmacc.edu/idea/SitePages/Home.aspx>

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and our annual conference!

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NADE List Serve:

<https://groups.google.com/a/thenade.org/d/forum/na-de-discussion-forum>

Join the IDEA Conversation

- Have you recently attended a conference of another professional organization? Summarize a session relevant to our membership for the Reader's Corner.
- Has your institution revamped its placement policies, developmental studies offerings, or academic support program? Provide a quick update.
- Have you located a great academic resource for student or faculty use? Share the wealth.
- Have you transitioned to a new position or received special recognition for your professional accomplishments? Let us celebrate with you!

To submit articles or information for future editions of "IDEA Reader's Corner," please send to:

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