In 1976, what is today the National Association for Developmental Education was only an idea in the minds of a handful of developmental educators. For anyone who has not lived through the history of NADE, it is hard to imagine how far we have come. When I was elected president of the association in 1981, our membership included about 400 people. Our annual budget was less than $2,000. We had only two local chapters. Today, NADE is the largest and most influential professional association in the field.

The following history of NADE describes some of the activities and events that have brought us through the past thirty-six years. These activities and events would not have taken place were it not for the extraordinary efforts of those who have served the association as conference presenters, committee members, committee and SPIN chairs, state chapter leaders, and executive board members. This history, therefore, represents their accomplishments.

The Beginnings, 1976-1980
In the spring of 1976, a small group of college and university professionals from the Chicago area met to discuss their work in the field becoming known as developmental education. As an outgrowth of the meeting, the participants decided to establish a professional association for developmental educators. Dr. Gary Saretsky of Chicago State University and Dr. Harold Hild of Northern Illinois University were elected as the association’s first president and vice president. They continued to serve in this capacity until 1981 while a constitution and by-laws were developed.

The association was originally known as the National Association for Remedial/Developmental Studies in Postsecondary Education, or NAR/DSPE. This name was selected for several reasons. NAR/DSPE’s founders hoped that the association would eventually become a truly national group. Furthermore, at the time of the association’s founding, the terms “remedial” and “developmental” were both about equally popular. Consequently, the founders decided to use both names in the association’s title. Although cumbersome, the name NAR/DSPE served its purpose at the time and was used for the following eight years.

A major step in the development of the association during its early years was the establishment of local chapters. The first local NAR/DSPE chapter was established in 1979 in New York City followed closely by the addition of the South Carolina Association for Developmental Education (SCADE) as a state chapter. The New York City chapter was later merged with the New York state chapter (NYCLSA). As a result, SCADE remains as the oldest state chapter continuously affiliated with NADE.

A Decade of Development, 1980-1990
During its early years, the association was centered in the Midwest, its members were drawn from that area, and its conferences were held in Chicago. In the 1980s, however, the association branched out from Chicago, holding conferences in Charleston, SC; Cincinnati, OH; Dayton, OH; Little Rock, AR; New Orleans, LA; Orlando, FL; Philadelphia, PA; and St. Louis, MO. In 1981, following several years of work, a new constitution was approved for the association. This document, with various amendments added in the following years, has continued to govern the association’s operations today.

In 1984, member dissatisfaction with the name “NAR/DSPE” resulted in a movement to find a new appellation for the association. The two names finally considered were the International Developmental Education Association (IDEA) and the National Association for Developmental Education (NADE). The membership voted for the latter; the constitution was altered to reflect this change, and the association has been named “NADE” ever since.

The association’s expansion in the 1980’s was facilitated by the continued addition of state and regional chapters. New chapters were established in Alabama, Indiana, Kentucky, Maryland, Michigan, Tennessee, Virginia and West Virginia. In addition, the NADE leadership was able to encourage several strong existing state organizations to affiliate with the
association. Examples of these included: the Arkansas Consortium for Developmental Education, the North Carolina Association for Developmental Studies, the Oregon Developmental Studies Organization, the Ohio Association for Developmental Education, the Pennsylvania Association for Developmental Education, and the Washington Association for Developmental Education. By 1990, the association had 28 chapters representing 35 states and the District of Columbia.

In 1983, the Journal of Developmental Education, published by the National Center for Developmental Education, was adopted as the association’s official journal. The Journal has since become the premier journal in the field of developmental education with a circulation of nearly 5,000.

In the early 1980s, the association also established a membership database, initiated the systematic collection of dues, enhanced its committee structure, set aside cash reserves, expanded its newsletter, developed a systematic approach to funding and budgeting issues, and strengthened its infrastructure. An awards program was also developed in the 1980s to honor members and non-members who had made significant contributions to developmental education and developmental students.

NADE’s first award was the “John Champaign Memorial Award,” established in 1983 for an outstanding developmental education program. This award honors the memory of John Champaign of the Community College of the Finger Lakes, an active member of NAR/DSPE and an innovative developmental educator who added much to the field before his untimely death in a 1982 automobile accident.

Other awards included those for the “Outstanding Developmental Educator” and the “Outstanding Research or Publication Award.” One of the first winners of this award was Martha Maxwell for her classic work, Improving Student Learning Skills.

The “Henry Young Memorial Award” was established in 1988 for the individual who had made an outstanding contribution to the association as a worker and leader. Henry Young, of Southern University in Louisiana, was a long-term committee chair, was active in the Louisiana Association for Developmental Education, and served as Vice President of the association in the mid-1980s. Even as he fought terminal illness, he continued to serve the association until his death in 1987. Other awards established during the 1980s included the award for outstanding administrative support for developmental education and awards for ongoing and completed research projects.

The association’s conference attendance passed the 1,000 mark for the first time at the annual NADE Conference in Cincinnati in 1989. Membership, which numbered about 400 in 1980, was to approach 2,000 by the end of the decade.

A Decade of Expansion, 1990-2000
NADE opened the last decade of the 20th century with its annual conference in Boston. This conference marked the beginning of NADE’s international efforts as a special conference track was established to explore the international dimensions of developmental education. More than 50 postsecondary educators from around the world attended this conference and several presented sessions describing the approaches used for developmental education in other countries.

NADE also continued to expand its national presence by holding conferences throughout the United States during the decade of the 1990s in locations such as Atlanta, Chicago, Denver, Detroit, Little Rock, Nashville, San Antonio, Kansas City, and Washington, DC. Throughout the 1990s, attendance at NADE Annual Conferences continued to exceed 1,000. During the 1990s, record attendance marks were set at the NADE Conferences held in Kansas City in 1994, Chicago in 1995, and Atlanta in 1998.

Following almost a decade of work, a milestone for the entire field of developmental education came with the publication of the NADE Self-Evaluation Guides in 1995. A product of the Professional Standards and Evaluation Committee led by NADE veterans Martha Casazza, Susan Clark-Thayer, Georgine Materniak, and Gladys Shaw, the self-study standards provide a comprehensive approach to formative evaluation for developmental programs. They also form the basis for the NADE program certification project, originally conceived in 1996. This project provides recognition for programs that maintain high standards of professional practice.
A major step in the association’s development was the design and implementation of a strategic plan in 1995 and 1996. This plan enhanced the consistency and stability of NADE by establishing goals, objectives, and priorities to guide association activities. The plan was the product of collaboration among the NADE Executive Board, NADE Committee Chairs, and the NADE Emeritus Council with input from the NADE membership. The strategic plan is a dynamic document reviewed regularly and updated as necessary by the NADE Executive Board. This insures that it continues to address current trends and issues in the field.

Another milestone for the field occurred under NADE leadership in the fall of 1998, when the association joined with the U.S. Office of Education and the Harvard Graduate School of Education to present the first Harvard Symposium on Developmental Education. The purpose of the symposium was to bring public school and postsecondary educators together with government officials to explore potential areas of collaboration in working with at-risk students. At this symposium, a series of key position papers was presented by national figures in developmental education. These papers were featured in the 1999-2000 volume of the Journal of Developmental Education. The symposium also led to the establishment of the NADE think tank on developmental education, designed to explore key issues in the field.

In the 1990s, NADE renamed two of its major awards to honor former presidents of the association for their contributions to the field. An award for the outstanding state chapter of NADE was designated as the “Curtis Miles Award” in recognition of his efforts to develop and promote the association’s state chapters. The NADE award for outstanding research was designated the “Hunter R. Boylan Award” in recognition of his efforts to promote developmental education as a legitimate field of higher education research. The association also added an award for professional development and named it in honor of Anne Ferguson, a former president of the association’s Louisiana chapter and a NADE Vice President, who passed away in 1997.

The association also added a new award for the “Outstanding Alumnus of a Developmental Program. The presentation of this award to a former developmental student who has overcome academic adversity and been successful in college has become one of the high points of NADE Conferences. Another NADE award established in the 1990s was the “Martha Maxwell Scholarship” for a developmental student, instituted at the association’s 1997 conference in Denver.

During the 1990s, new state chapters were added in Georgia, Iowa, Maryland, Minnesota, and Oklahoma. A regional association called the Southwest Association for Developmental Education (SWADE) was established representing Arizona, New Mexico, southern California, Utah and Nevada.

The Twenty-First Century
The association’s first conference of the new century was held in Biloxi, Mississippi, and initiated several new features. The nation’s first developmental programs to receive NADE certification were recognized at this conference. The “NADE Think Tank” was also held during the conference as a follow-up to the Harvard Symposium.


NADE has also continued to expand its state and regional chapters. The association added the Pacific Rim Chapter headquartered in Hawaii in 2008. It also held an organizational meeting to explore the possibility of setting up a Caribbean chapter of NADE at the 2008 International Conference on Research in Developmental Education. California NADE members decided to form their own chapter, CalADE, after having been members of SWADE for many years. CalADE was installed at the NADE 2010 Conference in Columbus, OH. Today, NADE is represented in all 50 states by 28 local and regional chapters.

The association launched its own professional publication, the NADE Digest, in 2005. Since 2005, the association has also benefited from the hiring of an executive assistant, former president Dr. Carol O’Shea, to manage the NADE database, promote communications with members, and maintain the association web site. NADE has also created an ad hoc marketing committee to help state and regional chapters increase their membership and is emphasizing political advocacy as a part of NADE chapter responsibility.
In the new century, NADE has also provided leadership in bringing about greater collaboration and communication among professional associations in the field. NADE officers worked with the leaders of the Association for the Tutoring Profession (ATP), the College Reading and Learning Association (CRLA), the National Center for Developmental Education, and the National College Learning Center Association (NCLCA) to maintain the American Council of Developmental Education Associations (ACDEA). The council was renamed as the Council of Learning Assistance and Developmental Education Associations (CLADEA) in 2008. This council, including the chief executive officers of member organizations, works to promote collaboration among professional associations in the field.

One of the Council's initiatives, the “Fellows Program,” pioneered by Martha Maxwell, honors those who have made outstanding contributions to the field through leadership, research, or service. Thirteen “Founding Fellows of the American Council of Developmental Education Associations” were initiated at a special ceremony during the 2000 NADE Conference. To date, more than forty learning assistance and developmental education professionals have been named as council fellows.

A major thrust of the association during the first decade of the 21st century was expanding the certification program. At the 2009 NADE Conference, the association celebrated the publication of the second edition of the NADE Self-Evaluation Guides edited by Susan Clark-Thayer and Lisa Putnam-Cole, and again published by H & H Publishing in Clearwater, FL. Today the Certification program and the NADE Certification Council celebrate fourteen years of success in helping program increase their effectiveness.

NADE has continued to work to promote greater collaboration with other organizations, both nationally and internationally. NADE has established liaisons with the Forum for the Access and Continuing Education (FACE) in the United Kingdom and the European Access Network (EAN). NADE representatives have attended and presented regularly at these conferences.

NADE is also currently exploring collaborative projects in South Africa and Japan. In addition, NADE has entered into reciprocal agreements with the American Mathematical Association of Two-Year Colleges (AMATYC), the National Academic Advising Association (NACADA), and the National Institute for Staff and Organizational Development (NISOD) to continue to meet the evolving professional needs of its members.

During this decade, NADE developed grants for chapter development and scholarships for professional development. NADE awarded the first scholarship to attend the Technology Institute for Developmental Educators (TIDE) in 2009 to enable developmental educators to explore use of technology in education. In 2010, the first Adjunct Scholarships were awarded to enable adjuncts to attend NADE conferences. The William G. White, Jr. Graduate Study Scholarship was first awarded in 2011. This award, named after this long-time mentor of Grambling State University graduate students in the field, will promote graduate study in developmental education in order to advance research and practice in the field.

The 2011 NADE Conference was held in Washington, DC, and some of the highlights were the Town Hall meeting (“NADE, Politics and Hot Apple Pie”) pulling together folks from some of the major foundations and other leaders including Hunter Boylan, Sue Cain, Tamara Clunis, Michael Collins, Uri Treisman, and Suzanne Walsh. Also, political advocacy was given a boost, as a number of NADE leaders made visits to their representatives on Capital Hill.

The 2012 NADE conference, under the leadership of Jane Neuburger, NADE President, and conference co-chairs Janita Patrick and Sandrah Offieah-Hawkins, met for the second time in Orlando, Florida, with the theme of “Developmental Education: A Mosaic of Learning.” This theme honored the diversity of programs, professionals, and students who make up the field of developmental education. The conference featured the continuation of the NADE Town Hall Meeting and announced the winner of the first Gladys R. Shaw Award for Outstanding Service to Developmental Education Student. The award, of course, was named to honor Gladys for her commitment and many years of service to her students. All those who knew Gladys remember her as a selfless, committed, cheerful, and hard-working professional who contributed mightily to both NADE and CRLA. Also, the plenary speaker, Dr. Suzanne Walsh, senior program officer of the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, heralded the imminent changes for many developmental programs across the nation.

This year, the 2013 NADE conference, under the leadership of Rebecca Goosen, NADE President, and co-chairs Arturo Terrazas and Dr. Tina Getz, meets for the second time in Denver, CO, with the theme “Pioneering the Education Frontier.” In many colleges, developmental programs are the first to innovate and be change agents for their institutions.
As NADE continues into the new century, its members have much to reflect upon with pride. The association’s motto: “Helping underprepared students prepare, prepared students advance, and advanced students excel” symbolizes an exciting and expanding role for NADE and its members in the years to come.

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