

# Supporting Student Success: An Interview With David Arendale

*Retired yet fully active in the field, one of our premiere scholars shares his journey.*

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## ABOUT DR. DAVID ARENDALE



**David Arendale**, at the University of Minnesota-Twin Cities, served as an associate professor in the Department of Curriculum and Instruction within the College of Education and Human Development and manager for the Educational Opportunity Association Best Practices Clearinghouse. Arendale formerly served at the University of Missouri-Kansas City in several capacities, including senior research fellow for the Office of the Vice Chancellor of Student Affairs and Enrollment Management, national project director of Supplemental Instruction, and interim director for the Center for Academic Development. Since the mid-1980s, he has been an active member of both the College Reading and Learning Association and the National Association for Developmental Education (NADE; renamed as the National Organization for Student Success). He served as president of NADE from 1996 to 1997. In 2000,

Arendale was recognized by the Council for Learning Assistance and Developmental Education Associations (CLADEA) for induction as a Founding Fellow of the profession.

Arendale is devoting more time to the use of social media such as websites, YouTube channels, podcasting, and Twitter (renamed as X) to communicate in addition to publishing in print and online open-access journals. The use of the Internet, publications, presentations, and workshops communicate the best practices that others have already created. Part of this priority is reflected in his leadership of the Educational Opportunity Association National Best Practices Clearinghouse, which identifies, validates, and disseminates best practices developed by TRIO programs to increase the success of students who are low-income, first-generation college, and historically underrepresented.

**J-CASP:** You began your college career between 1979 to 1989 working at two community colleges in Kansas: Highland Community College and Pratt Community College. During this period, you were coordinator of a learning center, director of adult and basic education, and instructor of study skills, history, and social science, among other roles. Can you describe the influence that these early experiences had on your future role as one of the country's leading experts and scholars in the field of developmental education and learning assistance?

**Arendale:** I cannot imagine a better place to start than at a small community college. The real action is at community colleges because that is where you have a much more diverse set of students and

fewer levels of bureaucracy. Good ideas could be implemented more quickly. Many of the students are first-generation students and economically disadvantaged, and I had the opportunity to set up a learning center. Lacking a professional degree in developmental education, I joined many professional associations associated with our field, such as the College Reading and Learning Association, the International Reading Association, the National Association for Developmental Education, now renamed the National Organization of Student Success, and

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others. Those early years were spent reading journals. I was going to the conferences and asking people in the hallways at the meetings, “How do I do my work?”

We created something from scratch: individual tutoring, developmental education classes, and computer-assisted instruction (CAI). And if you can believe it, audio cassettes, and the rest, and it was a wonderful inventive time. I did not have anyone to mentor me or give me clues about how to help students to become successful. I had to do all of those things on my own, and my time with the community colleges gave me my first teaching experience. I learned that there are many different approaches for students, but I loved my community college life. As a first-generation college student myself, I felt right at home.

**J-CASP:** You received your master’s degree in history from Emporia State University in 1985. You then earned a certificate in higher education policy with a major in developmental education from Appalachian State University through the Kellogg Institute in 1990. During this time, you were also pursuing an Educational Specialist degree from the University of Missouri-Kansas City (UMKC), completed in 1991. Subsequently, you became director of the National Center for Supplemental Instruction (SI) between 1991–2001 while completing your doctoral degree in history and higher education policy, both from UMKC in 2000. How did your educational background and research focus inform your work with SI during this period?

**Arendale:** I am very grateful to the professors I studied with in all those places. In 1989, I went to the Kellogg Institute at Appalachian State University, which is when I committed my career to the field of developmental education. It put me into a network of other professionals who kindly trained and mentored me. The most influential person was Dr. Hunter Boylan, with whom I have maintained a lifelong relationship as a personal friend and professional colleague. The rest of the graduate work, along with what I learned at the Kellogg Institute, gave me the tools I needed to be a good researcher and develop meaningful research question relevant to my study. My focus was to write for my peers serving as practitioners in the field.

That is part of why I did not pursue a pure history background. I did not want to study the thirteenth-century monks in France. I am sure that is a very interesting topic, but it would not have been as interesting and relevant to me as helping first-generation students succeed. So that is why it was important for me to have quality questions, to develop quantitative and qualitative research skills, and to write meaningfully.

Many practitioners teaching in our field never thought of themselves as scholars, but they would have liked receiving some insights that could help them with tomorrow’s lesson plans, how to organize class sessions, and how to organize their peer learning programs. I marched across America doing presentations about learning programs for decades. I helped these practitioners do more research studies and publish more publications. I was very fortunate.

My skill set became a perfect match when I was hired at the National Center for Supplemental Instruction at the University of Missouri, Kansas City (UMKC). I was mentored by Dr. Deanna C. Martin, who created Supplemental Instruction, and we wrote several publications together, conducted training workshops, and presented at conferences across the United States and other countries. I traveled with her to Sweden and England, and I went to Mexico to do training workshops with other colleagues. It was a fabulous time at the National Center for SI.

**J-CASP:** After your time at UMKC, you became an assistant professor at the University of Minnesota’s (UM) General College in 2002. In 2006, the General College was downsized into the Department of Postsecondary Teaching and Learning within the newly constituted College of Education and Human Development. During this same year, you were promoted to associate professor. Please describe what occurred at UM during this period and how these structural changes, including the dismantling of the General College, affected your career.

**Arendale:** I began at the General College because I received a phone call from a faculty member who said “We are hiring dozens of new faculty members to expand the General College. And we know about your work.” After a rigorous interview process, I was then hired as assistant professor to teach an introductory world history course that was infused with best practices of developmental education.

It was wonderful and turbulent time at UM because the General College was well-known across the United States. It existed for nearly 90 years. It was a place where students who showed promise but could not meet UM’s stringent entrance requirements could be accepted into the university. If they came into the General College, whenever they finished their coursework infused with best practices of developmental education with us and transitioned into the mainstream university population, their graduation rates would be about the same as the other students. So, the General College was an excellent model, and other colleges emulated it, but it also attracted enemies.

One of the reasons why some UM administrators wanted to dismantle General College was that the college was bringing in students with lower ACT composite scores. One of the metrics for the so-called systems for ranking institutions was the average ACT or SAT score of incoming students. The administration at UM figured out that if they could dismantle the General College, they could raise average incoming test scores and, therefore, increase the university's institutional ranking.

All this turmoil occurred at UM and other institutions across the United States. A national trend began of very few four-year institutions offering developmental-level courses. And the universities made all kinds of excuses, such as, "You've got community colleges, and they can do the job." Then the community colleges ask, "Well, why can't the high schools do the jobs? Why can't they take care of it?" And it became an endless cycle of blame. As I was thinking about all of this, I was thinking about language and politics, the politics making political language, and the words developmental education and remedial education. These words became dirty—we wanted to scrub them out of our memory and take them out of our institutions.

When the General College was dismantled, I was promoted to associate professor and moved to the Department of Postsecondary Teaching and Learning within the newly constituted College of Education and Human Development, which was once again integrating best practices of developmental education into the students' first two years of college instruction. We also had a graduate program with a mission of turning out new instructors or designers of learning centers. That was a fledgling program, which was, unfortunately, dismantled as well. I ended up in the Department of Curriculum and Instruction, which turned out to be a really good home. A couple of my colleagues were moved to this department as well. That just confirmed even more of my dedication to developmental education. With further research, publications, and presentations, I was able to use all of the institution's social media and academic resources to share best practices of developmental education. So, in a sense, it accelerated my work.

In 2019, about five months before the pandemic, I chose to take an early retirement because tenured faculty members were incentivized to retire early. I thanked them, left, and then continued my

work—publishing and doing conference presentations, webinars, podcasts, and the rest. But now I've got total freedom to do what is best for me, my readers, and indirectly I hoped, students.

**J-CASP:** In 2010, you began to manage the Educational Opportunity Association's (EOA) Best Practices Clearinghouse, a position you still hold. Please share with our readers your role with this clearinghouse and the mission of EOA.

**Arendale:** It was a partnership with Mr. Clark Chipman, an essential leader in the field of TRIO equity programs. I became involved with Clark because of my past UM community service with TRIO. Clark and I had long conversations for over a decade on how there is no simple one-stop shop you can go to identify educational practices that would help students who are economically disadvantaged and academically underprepared. Mr. Chipman and I talked about developing a best practices clearinghouse where people can come and find practices in tutoring, academic advising, and global curriculum, and more relevant to many TRIO programs. This position allowed me to bring in other skill sets, such as building websites. I also understand how to set up systems to identify, validate, and disseminate education practices from my experience with SI at UMKC. There is an old saying about what luck is, "Luck is defined as preparation meeting opportunity." I had all of this preparation, but I knew I was being prepared for creating this Clearinghouse when the opportunity came.

The Educational Opportunity Association is one of the regional professional associations for TRIO professionals across the United States. There are eight of these associations, and EOA more or less represents the Midwest. My responsibility is to recruit external reviewers to review submitted education practices to make sure that they pass the standard needed to be listed on the website. This has been my enjoyment, and I have a unique love for doing this. I have that website, which is more than a website. It's an active academic community.

The EOA Best Practices Clearinghouse is like the What Works Clearinghouse sponsored by the Department of Education. That is a wonderful resource with very rigorous standards on what they list. However, they have yet to focus on first-generation and economically disadvantaged students.

I was mentored by Dr. Deanna C. Martin, who created Supplemental Instruction, and we wrote several publications together, conducted training workshops, and presented at conferences across the United States and other countries.

So, the EOA Best Practices Clearinghouse is a niche, and I am happy to see us meet the niche because I am one of them—a first-generation college student.

**J-CASP:** You mentioned that your retirement actually is not retirement. Since 2019, you have undertaken an impressive range of project and research themes, including Supplemental Instruction; peer-led learning assistance; developmental education; transitional courses and programs; learning technologies; history curriculum and simulations; and access, equity, and antiracism. Many scholars tend to focus on one or two major themes within their career, but you have embraced a diverse set. Can you share insights into how these varied themes intersect and influence your work?

**Arendale:** I have a plethora of interests. A traditional scholar would have focused on one or two projects, and that is wonderful. I am interested in so many areas because I think of myself as a practitioner, first, and a scholar, second. All of my passions converge with inclusive and culturally sensitive pedagogy, research, peer learning, and learning technology. My passion result in a more powerful way to improve student outcomes.

**J-CASP:** Given your extensive service at the state, national, and international levels, including being president of the NADE in 2000, how did your role as president align with your broader commitment to college access and developmental education? Can you reflect on the overall trajectory of your service to the profession?

**Arendale:** Becoming involved in leadership with NADE chapters at the state, regional, and national levels makes you feel more and more responsible as you are elected to those positions. It reminds you that you have a responsibility to do something with your influence. You have a public voice. You can influence others and policymakers to influence practitioners and conduct research projects. It was a tremendous professional and personal development to get involved in those positions.

Secondly, it was an enormous sense of responsibility. I wanted to do well and to recruit people to replace me. The work continues because organizations can never be dependent upon personalities; they have to be dependent upon a succession of volunteers. Being a leader and providing service to our field can be overwhelming because (with infrequent exceptions for a few staff members and organizations) everyone works as a volunteer. No one pays us; they pay our expenses to travel to meetings, but somehow, we add this to

our everyday workload. However, being president of NADE was a great honor and brought prestige to my department and an enormous opportunity to get to know the field and develop a national network of contacts with whom I could do research, ask questions, and be supportive. Service to our field is something I recommend for everyone in our field.

**J-CASP:** You were honored in 2000 by being selected as one of CLADEA's first Founding Fellows. Selection as a Fellow represents the highest honor conferred upon professionals within our field of learning assistance, tutoring, and developmental education. The mission of CLADEA is to coordinate the work of its member organizations, promote collaboration among the member organizations, serve as a forum for communication, provide leadership on policy development, recognize outstanding contributions, encourage professional development, and advocate for research in postsecondary learning assistance and developmental education. Can you share a specific instance or project where your role as a CLADEA Fellow allowed you to make a meaningful contribution to one or more of these purposes?

**Arendale:** Let me first say that selection for this award was the most humbling experience I have ever had. I was only, I think, 40 years old at the time. Being on the stage with field leaders like John Gardner and others was overwhelming. It gave me a great sense of responsibility that I still had a long professional career in front of me; I needed to live up to that responsibility and continue to propel myself into new work.

What did I do regarding part of the mission of CLADEA? I accelerated my work with research on peer-assisted learning programs. I did even more publications and research. I also created an annotated bibliography for each national model on peer-assisted learning. I update that each year, and I do that as a service to the scholars in the field, making it easier for them to find professional literature. These bibliographies include more than 2,000 annotations. I also recently published a more detailed history of Supplemental Instruction.

One of the most incredible things that's happened to me in my professional career has been mentorship from others such as Dr. Hunter Boylan, Dr. Deanna Martin, Dr. Amy Lee (my department chair at the University of Minnesota), and many others. And part of my opportunity now is to mentor others. Additionally, I am doing more research and publications with other co-authors now more than ever and am still working with and mentoring graduate research assistants.

**J-CASP:** After the University of Minnesota, you have become a co-convenor of the Colleagues of Color for Social Justice. I know you already touched a little bit on that, but what is the mission of this group? Can you please tell us some details about it?

**Arendale:** It was 2019, and I realized that I could not move forward unless I had more co-authors who were educators of color. My work did not reflect enough about cultural sensitivity and more inclusive pedagogies. I have my limitations as a White person, particularly as a White male person. So, I put out a three-sentence invitation on our field’s national listserv for people who work in learning assistance and developmental education. I had 53 people, ranging from counselors to a college vice president, who responded that they would like to get involved in a writing group with me.

I saw that many people of color wanted to do something with the national conversation on race and education. I decided that I needed to reinvent my writing group as a writing group composed of colleagues of color. I recruited a colleague of color to be the co-convenor. Although I am not a person of color, I believe that I fit into the group because I am an *ally*, a technical term for people of privilege who support others to be successful.

I had many incomplete publications for the group to work on, and we also came up with some new ideas. We devised a system for group members to show their preferences for which writing projects they wanted to be involved with. Our mission is to function as a media production group that writes about success, classroom instruction, student services, and equity programs that intersect with social justice. We have produced 10 publications, conducted three webinars, and done numerous conference presentations. We still have another half a dozen publications to work on.

The most influential publication that we have completed is “Antiracism Glossary for Education and Life,” published in *J-CASP* (Pokhrel et al., 2021). The glossary is especially unique because of the lived examples that several of the co-authors shared. While other glossaries on racism and anti-racism provide excellent definitions (which we often quote in our manuscript), these glossaries do not provide authentic examples to illustrate meaning. Co-authors shared with me how painful it was to write about microaggressions against them and other forms of racism they had experienced. However, their examples have allowed me and our read-

ers to gain a further understanding of privilege, microaggression, and the other 30 or so terms defined in the glossary.

As of the last time I checked, the article has been downloaded over 3,000 times, and by now, it could be over 4,000 times. Has our glossary changed the world? No, but we hope our Colleagues of Color for Social Justice’s contribution helps others to create classrooms and student service activities that are more inclusive for a culturally diverse student body. The most wonderful part of the writing group is that I get to follow along and learn with my colleagues. It has been a remarkable experience for me. At some point, I will step down from my role as a co-convenor and someone else will replace me. But I would like to continue to be an ally and be a member of the group because I think it is making its contribution in a small way to the national conversation.

There is an old saying about what luck is. Luck is defined as preparation meeting opportunity.

**J-CASP:** Finally, you recently co-founded the Alliance for Postsecondary Academic Support Programs (Alliance). The Alliance is currently composed of a small group of experts from the field of postsecondary student success, developmental education, and learning support. These scholars, including yourself, are tasked with revising and updating the *NADE Self-Evaluation Guides (Guides)* previously published by the National Association for Developmental Education for that organization’s certification initiative. NADE is now called the National Organization for Student Success and no longer offers certification nor

is publishing these updated and revised *Guides*. What is the purpose of revising these *Guides*, and is the Alliance partnering with any learning assistance organizations to promote and publish these *Guides*?

**Arendale:** The Guides provide another example of co-authorship. Participating in this venture dates back 30 years because I was involved with the first edition, which consisted of a guide for tutoring and one for course-based learning assistance, a clumsy term for peer learning programs inside or outside of the classroom, another for developmental-level courses, and the final one focused more broadly on the teaching and learning process. Although I personally authored the third edition of the *Course-Based Learning Assistance Guide*, the other *Guides* each have two or more co-authors. The Alliance members meet periodically to share ideas and get feedback on our work.

A strength of these guides is that in addition to co-authorship, each guide has or will be distributed to field practitioners for review, piloting, and recommendations. We are using this field-tested approach to identifying a best practice rather than a quantitative or qualitative approach.

We are currently allied with the International College Learning Center Association (formerly the National College Learning Center Association), which will promote the *Guides* through their organization (see <https://nclca.wildapricot.org/BPG>). We are also approaching CLADEA to see if they can help facilitate these guides to the member organizations of CLADEA. I have already recruited four colleagues to take over editing the fourth edition of the *CLA Guide* in a few years when I step back in 5 or 10 years.

**J-CASP:** Is there anything else you would like to share with the field?

**Arendale:** I love learning how to use technology to facilitate and share my work. I believe I mentioned earlier that I love podcasting. It is a fantastic way to influence, entertain, and educate others. Currently, I have seven podcasts—one for each day of the week. Topics include the history of the field, learning technology, and peer learning programs. I incorporate AI in many of the podcasts to provide multiple voices that interact with each other to make the podcasts more engaging to listeners. I believe that podcasting is a fantastic way to influence others. The total number of downloads for my publications and podcasts is now reaching about 2.5 million. I am also using AI to generate video summaries of my articles and podcasts, which I post on seven corresponding YouTube video channels and seven Facebook pages.

I regret not being in the classroom. It is an exciting, challenging time, with AI causing faculty to create different learning environments and require different ways of assessing students regarding student competencies in the classes. But technology allows me to celebrate the freedom that I have from my home office. I get to do great things, and I get to work with great people. And I constantly interact with people outside of my house. As you can see, I am definitely not retired. Instead, I consider myself to be on the world's most extended unpaid sabbatical.

I ran across a short story with a compelling question: "Are you a candle or are you a mirror?" Candles create light to illuminate the darkness and a mirror behind the candle helps to reflect the light. Both are important to illuminate the room. This has helped me to understand my present role. I still conduct research and publish with others. That is similar to the candle. I also promote the scholarship of others through the Best Practices Clearinghouse, Col-

leagues of Color, podcasting and other social media, and other activities. Those activities would be examples of the mirror. The older I become, the more I shift my efforts to serve as a mirror for the emerging and established scholars of our field. I embrace this experience. Over my desk is a framed copy of the final Calvin and Hobbes comic strip gifted to me by Dr. Karen Agee, one of the historic leaders of our profession. In it, Calvin says to Hobbes, "It's a magical world Hobbes ol' buddy. Let's go exploring." And off they go sledding. Like Calvin and Hobbes, I have the privilege of exploring new horizons every day.

### Disclosure Statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the authors.

### About the Authors

**Zohreh Fathi** earned her MS degree in mind-brain education from the Institute for Cognitive Science Studies (Pardis, Iran) and is currently pursuing her doctoral degree in developmental education with a concentration in learning support at Texas State University, where she is currently a research assistant and an assistant editor for *J-CASP*. Zohreh's research interest focuses on support success, advancing motivation, self-regulation, and social connections among postsecondary students to facilitate their academic journey.

**Diptendu Kundu** earned his MS degree in mathematics from Texas A&M University-Kingsville, and is currently pursuing a doctoral degree in developmental education with a concentration in mathematics at Texas State University. As a lecturer in mathematics at Texas A&M University-Kingsville and a doctoral teaching assistant at Texas State University, Diptendu has taught developmental and college-level courses. Diptendu currently serves as a research assistant in his doctoral program and as an editorial assistant for the *J-CASP*.

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