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Durham Technical tops chart nationally

BY PAUL BONNER, The Herald-Sun
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DURHAM -- Durham Technical Community College, like others in the state, must accept everyone with a high school diploma or GED.

But not everyone who comes in the door is necessarily ready for college-level work.

That's where Durham Tech's Developmental Studies program comes into play, and in a way that's been noticed at the national level. Last week, the program was named the most outstanding in the nation by the National Association of Developmental Education.

Durham Tech officials received the award last week at the association's national conference in Philadelphia, where more than 1,500 educators gathered.

Developmental education also makes it more likely that students whose pursuit of a degree is complicated by such things as child care and transportation difficulties will be able to establish a foothold, said Christine Kelly-Kleese, associate dean of Durham Tech's program.

Placement in developmental studies -- often in just one or a few subject areas -- is determined by an entrance exam called ASSET.

Perhaps as many as one-quarter of Durham Tech's 5,300 students are in developmental courses, she said. They include older students whose recollection of some high school subjects may be sketchy, or those who never quite mastered them. Also, international students often need more work in English, even if they're strong in other areas. Tuition for the courses, \$39.50 per credit hour, is the same as for college-level courses.

The program helps make higher education more universally available, Kelly-Kleese said.

"Developmental education is a democratizing force nationally," she said.

The program includes 15 full-time faculty and more than 30 adjunct faculty, many of whom are also administrators. The college's Achieving the Dream program focuses on developmental studies and has been gathering data on its role, such as the finding that 63 percent of Durham Tech applicants place in at least one developmental course.

Durham Tech also has developed a student peer mentoring program that the national organization took note of in conferring the award, Kelly-Kleese said.

"We've been fortunate at Durham Tech," she said. "We've had such strong support from President Phail Wynn and Chief Instructional Officer William Ingram. That's not the case everywhere."

Besides working in her administrative role, Kelly-Kleese keeps a hand in teaching developmental English, which focuses on composition and grammar.

"I wouldn't give it up for anything," she said. "It's what keeps me focused on what's important. ... I see the change from the way they are the first week they come to us -- frightened -- to the end of the semester when I feel like they're going to be OK. And they do, too."

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