

Analysis of Recruitment in Special Education Programs

Offered at the Campuses of Texas A&M University

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Executive Summary

Recruiting high school students to become college majors in special education should focus on increasing opportunities for them to meet, work with, and know persons with special needs. In particular, peer-support groups should be developed at high schools not presently offering them. Relative to other recruiting activities these two are much more important (significant at the $p = 0.001$) level with magnitudes of difference ranging from large to medium, respectively.

Recruiting college students to transfer into the special education major should focus on media presentation ($p = 0.02$) to the largest possible number of students in all other majors. Majors in education, business, and early childhood development comprised 52% of the transfers into SPED found in our study.

Tuition grants and scholarships also have a significant positive association ($p = 0.07$) with choosing special education for those who start college in the major relative to those who transfer in during college years. No important differences in composition by sex or age between starters and transfers exist. They are virtually the same in sex and age distribution. No anomalous or counter-intuitive results appeared in the analysis of the data.

This study designed and executed a survey of currently active SPED majors at 9 of the 10 campuses of Texas A&M University system. Complete or nearly complete questionnaires were received from 113 students. Descriptive statistics for the sample, correlations among the various recruiting activities, and discriminant analysis by logistic regression were used as analytical tools.

Any future study on this topic should attempt to increase the sample size to a total of about 500 respondents, including students who considered but did not choose special education as a college major. The online tool kit for special education students and faculty was used by only 13% of the sample and none reported that any aspect of it was important. This last activity may be reviewed for possible discontinuance.

Abstract

This study sought to identify the most important activities among 9 that have been used in the past to recruit students into the major of special education at the undergraduate level. A questionnaire of 21 items was distributed to educators from 10 campuses of the Texas A&M University System offering the special education during April and May, 2006. Of about 400 questionnaires distributed, 113 were returned with complete or nearly complete information. The average of student opinions is that contact with disabled persons ($mean = 3.83$, 1=least important, 5=most) and participation in peer-support groups ($m = 3.33$) were the most important determinants (significant at 0.001 and substantial magnitude of differences) of the choice to pursue a major in SPED. Students in high school are going to be most influenced by these activities, which should be the focus of SPED-major recruitment at that level. College students transferring into SPED are most influenced by viewing a media presentation ($p = 0.02$, and second most influenced, $p = 0.07$) by tuition grants and scholarships. Recruitment of transfers at the college level should focus on media presentations.

Introduction

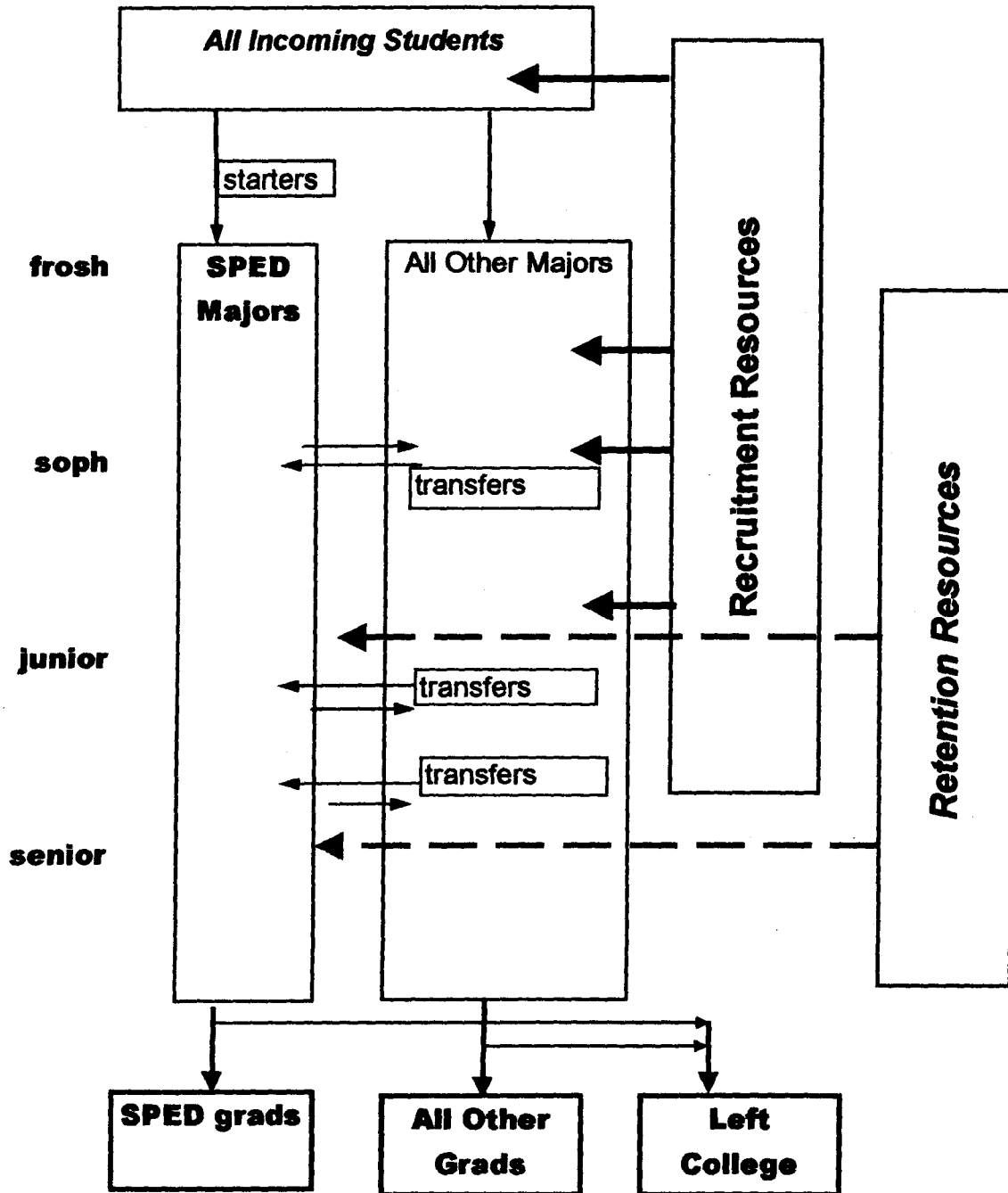
This is a study of recruitment and retention of majors in special education (SPED) programs at the ten campuses of Texas A&M University. The purpose was to learn what activities were most important to the students' choice of this major. Two were most important and had a positive influence on starters and on transfers into SPED. Most important to students starting in this major was funding: tuition, scholarships and grants. Most important to transfers into SPED was presentations by various media.

A questionnaire on individual characteristics and factors influencing the choice of major was designed for administration to SPED majors, and it was distributed to faculty members at the Council for Exceptional Children Conference in Salt Lake City, Utah, on April 7-8, 2006. They in turn administered it to students in the spring term of 2006. Responses from 9 of the 10 campuses were received, and 110 of the 113 questionnaires returned were complete responses. Responses from the SPED department at the tenth campus were lost in the U.S. Mail.

The context of this study is the national shortage of special education teachers in over 95% of School Districts in the United States (*President's Commission, 1999*). Texas schools have a need for approximately 2,000 additional special education teachers at primary and secondary levels. Peer support groups for students with special needs have had a positive and significant influence on high school students' choice to become SPED majors in college. An earlier study (Zascavage, Masten, Armstrong and Schroeder, 2006) by this research group found that peer support groups are more often found in urban school districts with larger budgets per student.

The process by which students move into and through college is shown in Figure 1. Students can change into SPED at anytime during their term at college, although it usually takes two years to complete for those transferring into SPED. Students can leave a SPED program at any point. Since this study had access only to students currently active in this major, the analysis here focuses on differentiating those who started in SPED versus those who transferred into this major after starting college. Information on persons transferring out of SPED programs was not readily available.

Figure 1
Flow Chart of Resources and Students



The flow chart shows that both recruitment and retention can be ongoing activities. It also makes clear the dynamic nature of student populations entering and going through college. A full understanding of enrollment in special education programs would require data on individual students, term by term through their college years. Further, such a complete description would require tracking a sample of students that never transferred into SPED as well as another tracking special education majors who transferred to other majors. The analysis for this study enables us to examine the influence of recruitment resources on two sets of SPED majors: students who started in this field and students who transferred into it. We shall see that starters reported higher influence by tuition grants and scholarships, while transfers reported more influence by media presentations. Both activities for both groups had a positive association with being a SPED major.

Literature Review

Recruitment and retention efforts take many forms. Within the state of Texas multiple programs have been initiated to help increase the recruitment and retention rates of perspective Special Education teachers such as grants and scholarships, community outreach, media advertisement, and technology. A review of the literature shows that many of the programs that the Texas A&M University System has implemented are in line with recommendations that have been suggested in previous reports (Jenson, M., Churchill, L., Davis (2000), Cantou-Clarke, C., Easterling, J., & Klepper, T. (2003), Marso, R., Pigge, F. (1994). The use of innovative recruitment efforts, which have been implemented by the Texas A&M University Systems to recruit candidates for a degree in special education and have dealt with the challenges due to many school districts that are located within rural communities.

In examining the literature there is a concurrent theme in what works in recruitment and retention such as "home grown", outreach to local schools and communities, advertisement through literature and radio, tuition and scholarships, and mentor support from faculty and workplace (Rosenkoetter, Irwin & Saceda (2004), Tyler, N., Cantou-Clarke, C., Easterling, J., & Klepper, T. (2003). Other recruitment and retention examples that have been identified within the literature is the use of computer classrooms to select special education as a career option, and media campaigns directed to specific geographic areas or specific groups to help students choose special education through the use of websites (Whitworth, 2000).

Through the use of scholarships and similar incentives Tyler, N., Cantou-Clarke, C., Easterling, J., & Klepper, T. (2003) found in their study that the students tended to be older than traditional college students, were predominantly female, and lived in the local communities close to rural colleges and universities and the grant-funded tuition, fees and stipends were crucial to the recruitment and retention of these students, the majority of which would not obtain a higher education otherwise. In addition, Rosenkoetter, Irwin & Saceda (2004) found that individuals that received stipends or grants were more likely to maintain and finish the program due to the decrease in financial burden such as childcare and expenses for travel.

McClure and Reeves (2004) identified the importance of "grow your own" initiatives, targeted incentives directed at teachers, improved recruitment and hiring practices within local school districts, school level support for teachers, and the use of interactive technologies. Rosenkoetter, et al. (2004) found programs that have been effective include the use of home grown intuitive that are directed at individuals who switch their majors and collaboration with surrounding schools and community colleges for perspective candidates for their programs. Tyler, Cantou-Clarke, Easterling, & Klepper (2003) found that when faculty and project staff maintained a visible presence in a variety of places where potential recruits may be found such as local community organization meeting and local schools increase the word of mouth network for a broader impact on recruits.

In the area of technology, Rosenkoetter, et al. (2004), found that web sites that provide information to perspective special education teachers to make an informed decision about the career they are embarking on. Additionally, technology can assist with decreasing the isolation gap in rural areas by providing support, information, and resources to educators (McClure & Reeves, 2004). Through the use of distance learning and increase of professional development and continuing education opportunities to teacher candidates, an increase of professional development, and continuing education opportunities to teacher candidates the use of technology has shown to increase recruitment response.

A study that was conducted in 2003 by Zeichner of three strategies to recruit and retain teachers showed that there is an increase of incentives for completing a teacher education program before assuming responsibility for the classroom and an increase of teacher education programs that are serving individuals who are working within the school environment and the use of distance technology is here to stay and is part of the solution to the tremendous inequities that exist in public schools (Zeichner, K. 2003, p. 506). In conjunction, mentoring programs were successful in retaining students Tyler, Cantou-Clarke, Easterling, & Klepper (2003) found that providing a safety net through close and constant communication with students about their grants, developing their program of study, and assisting with course work decisions help to guide them through the educational process.

Making the choice to be a special educator can be influenced in multiple ways. In a study conducted by Zascavage & Armstrong (2005) showed that peer support groups during high school can increase the decision to be a special educator. In 2003, the National Clearing house for Professions in Special Education ((NCPSE) published a report titled "Enlarging the POOL" that targeted effective special education teacher recruitment strategies. NCPSE determined that providing after-school clubs would increase peer involvement with diverse populations. The NCPSE stated that time spent with individuals with disabilities was a deciding factor in young peoples choice of special education as a career path. Research confirmed that long-term support groups for students with sever disabilities increases positive attitudes towards individuals with disabilities (Burn, Certo, & Story, 1999; Carter, E., Hughes, C., Copeland & Breen, 2001; Fisher, Pumpian, & Cox, 1998).

Another important aspect in recruitment and retention of special educators is the importance or the understanding of the motivations and characteristics of the individuals that are considering working within education in areas such as special education. In a study conducted by Marso & Pigge (1994), they found that the top five reasons for working within education were like working with children, influence from former teachers, prior experience with youth, their parents, and work schedule and vacations. The five top reasons checked by individuals for becoming teachers were associated with the influences of other people or experiences with people who may of have a disability (Marso & Pigge, 1994). Additionally prospective teachers were examined on when they choose education as a career, either during high school or after. Individuals that choose education after high school said they were influenced the most by peers, publications, teaching as a stepping stone career, and having no other major that influenced their decision to teach. Individuals that choose teaching later after high school were influenced less by parents, teachers, and previous work with children (Marso & Pigge, 1994). Additionally many perspective special educators have had personal contact with some that has a disability. Many individuals that seek certification as special educators either have a child with a disability or know someone with a disability (McClure &Reeves, 2004).

Method

The questionnaire used to acquire information on students and their opinion of what was most influential is shown in Figure 2. It is a literal graphic of the document used, and it was printed on two sides of one page. The items include known recruitment and retention activities (9 items), demographics and education (8), and factors relating special education experience (3). The last three items on the tool kit and disability experience had almost no responses and were not examined further.

This was distributed to SPED faculty from ten campuses of the Texas A&M System. Basic demographic information was obtained such as age and sex, the year they were accepted into the program and the year they plan to graduate were gathered in addition to when did they know they wanted to be a special educator and if they had changed majors and what that major was. Responses from 113 students of nine of the ten A&M SPED programs were returned. Of these 110 were complete responses and 3 were nearly complete. One set of responses was lost in the U.S. Mail. The responses were entered into an Excel spreadsheet and SPSS 13.0 for statistical analysis.

Figure 2

Survey Questionnaire for SPED Majors

Description of the Study Evaluation of Recruitment and Retention of Students Preparing for a Career as Special Educators

The questionnaire attached is part of a study of efforts to recruit and retain more students preparing for a career in special education. This questionnaire is being given to special education majors at the junior and senior level on all the Texas A&M campuses.

The Texas Board of Regents Initiative for Special Education has been funding new and different actions so that more individuals will choose special education as a career. Enough time has passed that the recent effects of these new efforts to recruit and retain can be evaluated.

This study is the evaluation of those efforts. The goal is to increase the number of college graduates majoring in special education.

We seek to learn how you chose special education and why you are (or are not) staying with this major. This will influence how the Texas A&M University system will find and train special educators in the future. Your opinions are essential to finding what does and does not work toward achieving the goal.

This program evaluation will combine individual data from you and others with the overall information about the program on each campus. Your identity will be protected in two ways. Your name will not be entered into the electronic database we will make. This hardcopy response sheet will be kept under lock and key with the Department of Psychology and Special Education at the A&M-Commerce campus.

If you agree to participate in this study, please sign and date and then respond to the questions on the other side.

Signature

Date

If you have question, please email Dr. Victoria Zascavage at

Victoria_Zascavage@TAMU-Commerce.edu

II. Studying of University Students Planning Special Education Career

Thank you for consenting to participate in our survey, we appreciate your time and comments. We are evaluating the influence of special education recruitment and retention methods. Please enter your responses below.

Your age

Sex

Are you currently a Texas A&M University Student

Year accepted

Year of planned graduation

What is your major

When did you first know you wanted to be a special educator

Did you change from another major, if yes which one yes/no former major

On a rating of 1 being the least and 5 being the most important –rate the following as influencing your decision to be a special educator or to remain a special educator.

Videos, brochures

Committee activities

Recruitment booth at CEC

Tuition payments/scholarships for special education majors

Research Grants (research in special education)

Project expansion grants (working with a faculty member)

Technology/media – seeing a presentation

Special Ed peer support group participation (Circle of Friends, PALS, Special Olympics)

Contact outside school with individual/s having disability type of disability

Have you ever used Educators Online Toolkit? if so, what part was outstanding

Findings

Special Education majors responding to this survey ranged from 20 to 59 years old, and the average was 30.0 years (Table 1). Of 111 students reporting sex (Table 2) 10 were male and 101 female. Their age distribution was similar (Table 2). About one third of the men and of the women was 35 or more years old.

Table 1
Age Statistics for SPED Majors

Statistic	Value
Mean	32.03
Std. Deviation	10.0
Skewness	0.697
Kurtosis	-0.405
Range	39.0
Minimum	20.0
Maximum	59.0
<i>n</i>	111

Table 2
SPED Majors Age by Sex

Age Group	Male	Female
25 & under	2	39
26-35	5	27
36-45	2	22
46 & over	1	13
Total	10	101

Contact with disabled persons (*mean importance* = 3.83) and participation in peer support groups (*m* = 3.33) are the most important activities reported both for starters and transfers into the special-education major at the undergraduate level (Table 3 and Figure 3). Starters and transfers into SPED are insignificantly different with respect to importance of recruiting activity. The single exception is viewing media presentations such as videos PowerPoint slide shows, which had more importance for transfers. Contact and peer-support are not readily controlled policy variables (Zascavage, Masten, Armstrong, and Schroeder; 2006). Committee activities include working one-on-one with SPED professors or visiting a college-day booth manned by special education faculty. This set of activities are next most important (*m* = 2.53) and these can be implemented more easily, since such an activity can be offered at the secondary level with a small time investment, compared to inducing students to have contact with disabled persons and to faculty time required for running a peer support group.

Table 3

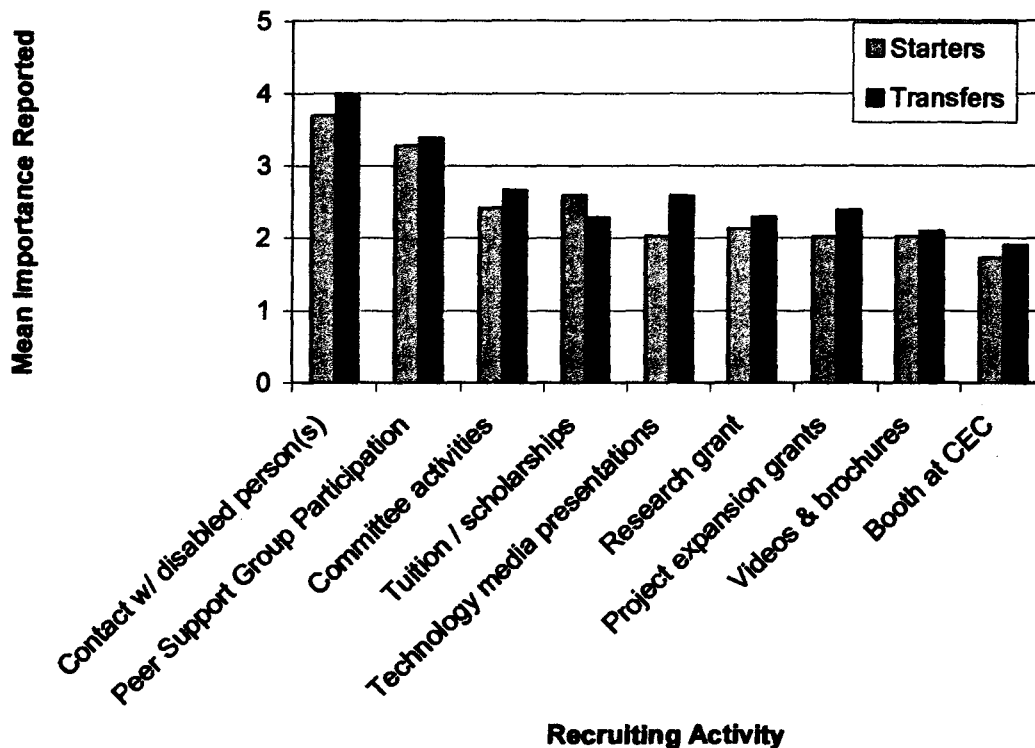
Starters Versus Transfers: Importance of Recruiting Activity to SPED Students

Activity	Mean Importance Score ^a			Standard Deviation	n	t Statistic	Sig.
	All	Starters	Transfers				
Contact w/ disabled person(s)	3.83	3.69	4.00	1.55	113	1.05	n.s.
Peer Support Group Participation	3.33	3.28	3.39	1.56	112	0.38	n.s.
Committee activities	2.53	2.42	2.67	1.56	111	0.84	n.s.
Tuition / scholarships	2.45	2.59	2.29	1.69	108	0.94	n.s.
Technology media presentations	2.28	2.03	2.58	1.46	111	1.99	0.05
Research grant	2.21	2.14	2.29	1.55	110	0.53	n.s.
Project expansion grants	2.19	2.02	2.39	1.57	111	1.26	n.s.
Videos & brochures	2.13	2.02	2.10	1.38	111	0.20	n.s.
Booth at CEC	1.81	1.73	1.90	1.32	109	0.68	n.s.

^aImportance rated from 1 (least) to 5 (most) by SPED majors responding to survey.

Figure 3

Importance of Recruiting Activity to Special Education Majors



The importance scale for rating the activities is 1 (least important) to 5 (most important). Table 4 shows the percent of SPED students reporting a 4 or a 5 for each of the nine activities. Contact with disabled persons and participation in peer-support groups are more important to students than are scholarship/tuition, the next most important activity. The significance of these differences is high ($p < 0.001$). Contact with disabled and peer-support group participation are by a substantial magnitude (110% and 65%, respectively) more important recruiting experiences.

Table 4
Activities by Percent Students Assigning Highest Importance

Recruiting Activity	Percent of Students Ranking Activity at Very Important or Most Important ^a
Contact outside school with individuals with disability	69.0% ^b
Sp. Ed peer support group participation	54.5% ^b
Tuition payments and scholarships	33%
Committee activities	32%
Project expansion grants	26%
Technology and media-seeing a presentation	24%
Research Grants	24%
Videos and Brouchures	20%
Recruitment booth at CEC	16%

^aFor the ranks of 1= least important and 5=most important, these percentages represent the 4s and 5s reported as a percentage of all ranks reported.

^bThese activities are significantly more important than tuition/scholarships at better than 0.001.

The opinion ranks are highly inter-correlated (Table 5). All of the correlations are positive and nearly all are significant at 0.01 two-tailed. Only 4 correlations between contact (with persons having special needs) and other activities are negative and none of them are significant.

To distinguish the differential influence of recruitment-related activities on starters versus transfers into special education, a discriminant analysis was performed using logistic regression in SPSS 13.0. This procedure evaluates all variables simultaneously and selects those with a minimum level of significance for inclusion in the final computation. This method enables one to distinguish the individual influences of the recruiting activities despite their significant correlations.

The analysis shows (Table 6) that transfers into SPED are more likely to be women ($b=+1.71$, $p=.05$), less likely to have been influenced as strongly by tuition

grants or scholarships ($b = -.25$, $p = .07$), and more likely to have been influenced by viewing a media presentation ($b = +.38$, $p = .02$).

Table 5
Correlations Between Recruiting Activities

Activity	videos	cmactiv	booth	tutschol	resgrant	prjexpan	techmeda	peersup	contact
videos	1	.519**	.613**	.365**	.426**	.333**	.540**	0.039	-0.041
cmactiv		1	.581**	.290**	.459**	.416**	.543**	.372**	0.119
booth			1	.456**	.496**	.389**	.467**	0.153	-0.012
tutschol				1	.624**	.479**	.357**	0.099	-0.041
resgrant					1	.730**	.464**	.198*	-0.047
prjexpan						1	.525**	.222*	0.038
techmeda							1	.219*	0.092
peersup								1	.327**
contact									1

** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

* Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

Sex is not a variable that can be controlled by policy makers, and there is no good reason for targeting recruitment on women. It serves as a control variable in the regression. The role of tuition grants and scholarships is positive (Table 3) for both starters and transfers but has a greater effect on the decision to start in SPED (the negative coefficient $-.25$ in Table 6, $p = 0.07$). The role of viewing a media presentation is positive for starters and transfers (Table 3, again) but has a higher significance ($p = 0.02$) for the decision to transfer into SPED. Transfers comprised 46% of the sample. On-campus media presentations to first and second year college students, irrespective of whether they have declared a major could be a very cost-effective recruiting activity.

Table 6

Differentiating Transfers from Starters: Logistic Regression by Transfer Status

Variable	Coeff. ^a	Sig.
Sex (0=male, 1=female)	1.708	0.045
Tuition or Scholarship	-0.249	0.070
Viewing Media Presentation	0.375	0.019

^aTransfer status is 0 for students starting in SPED and 1 for students transferring into SPED.

Table 7 shows the prior majors of the transfers. Education majors comprise 24% of the transfers into SPED, business (business!) and early childhood studies each comprise 14% of the transfers. These define target audiences for presentations concerning careers in SPED.

Table 7
Distribution of Majors Transferring into SPED

Original Major	Number	Percentage
Education	12	24%
Business	7	14%
Early Childhood	7	14%
Communication	3	6%
Nursing	3	6%
Other	3	6%
Sports	3	6%
Engineering	2	4%
English	2	4%
Liberal Studies	2	4%
Physical Therapy	2	4%
Accounting	1	2%
History	1	2%
Music Education	1	2%
Pre-Medical	1	2%
Zoology	1	2%
Total Transferring into SPED^a	51	100%

^aTotal Starting in SPED 59

Recommendations

Recruitment at the High School Level

The statistical findings are strong. Contact with persons having special needs and participation in peer-support groups have a much greater importance to SPED majors than the next most important variable, tuition and scholarships:

- | | | |
|----------------------------|------|----------------------------------|
| 1. Contact mean importance | 3.83 | (<i>Cohen's d</i> = .76, large) |
| 2. Peer-support group | 3.33 | (<i>d</i> = .51, medium) |
| 3. Tuition or scholarship | 2.53 | (reference mean for impotence) |

Both items 1 and 2 are significantly different from item 3 at $p < 0.001$. The effect size, taken as relative importance in this study, is large with Cohen's $d = 0.76$ for Contact and medium at $d = 0.51$ for peer-support participation.

Thus contact and peer-support are the two most important activities to choosing the SPED major at the high-school level. These are activities to promote at the high-school level, if more college majors in SPED are desired.

Recruitment at the College Level

Viewing media presentations is the most important activity for recruitment at the college level. The results are shown in Tables 5, 6 and 7. Viewing media presentations are more important than tuition grants and scholarships to students who transferred into SPED after starting college. Business, education and early childhood studies account for 52% of these transfers. That defines the primary target audience for on-campus recruiting. This offers a very cost-effective path if increasing SPED enrollment is desired.

Financial Aid

Tuition grants and scholarships for SPED majors in college have a positive association with student choosing the special education major before and during college years. Their cost-effectiveness cannot be evaluated without a study that includes persons who considered but did not choose the SPED major.

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Special Education Recruitment and Retention/Zascavage
 Account Number 460040-20406

Salaries	
1000.00	Kelly Marrs-Butler - Format survey, collect data and enter data
2750.00	Phillip Armstrong - Specification of survey content, survey format design, sample design, analysis plan
249.28	Kelly Marrs-Butler - Final proof and publication draft of research report
249.28	Phillip Armstrong - Final proof and publication draft of research report
11.00	Biweekly Payroll - fringe benefits for Kelly Marrs-Butler and Phillip Armstrong
4259.56	Total

Travel	
681.44	Kelly Marrs-Butler - presentation at 2006 Council for Exceptional Children Convention and Expo at Salt Lake City, Utah
681.44	Total

Other Expenses	
8.40	Quick Copy - 60 copies of survey
8.40	Total

4259.56	Total Salaries
681.44	Total Travel
8.40	Total Other Expenses
4949.40	Total