

**N4A Hot Topics Survey Summary 2007:
Learning Specialist Position and Prevalence of Special Populations**

**Data Analysis and Report prepared by:
Allison Lombardi, University of Oregon, and
Dr. Dard Miller, Boston College**

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Purpose

The Learning Concerns and Enhancement Committee (LCEC) partnered with the Research Committee this year to conduct the National Association of Academic Advisors to Athletics (N4A) annual survey. The survey was designed to describe the learning specialist position, determine the prevalence of disabilities and at risk students within the student-athlete population, and identify trends in service delivery and accommodations for these special populations.

Overview

A total of 168 people completed this survey. The majority of respondents (91%) represented Division I institutions (79% IA, 12% IAA). Eighty-five percent of the respondents worked at institutions sponsoring varsity football. All five N4A regions were represented in this survey with Region II posting the largest number of responses (31% of the sample). Respondents represented 45 different athletic conferences.

The survey was divided into two parts: one section for learning specialists and a general section for all respondents. This report provides a data summary for survey questions that suggested a trend. A summary of data from all questions posed in the 2007 Hot Topics Survey can be found on the N4A website (nfoura.org) in the Learning Concerns and Enhancements Committee and Research Committee sections.

Undergraduate Population

Population	Responses	Percentage of Sample
Under 10,000	34	22
11,000-20,000	54	35
21,000-30,000	31	20
31,000-40,000	23	15
Over 40,000	12	8

The sample was comprised of representatives from institutions of various sizes. The number of student-athletes enrolled at the respondents' institutions ranged from less than 100 to more than 1,000. Sixty-six percent of the sample reported student-athlete populations between 300 and 600.

Students with documented disabilities within the student-athlete population

One hundred nine individuals—68% of the sample—had access to this information. The range of responses was less than 1% to 38%. The middle quartiles, representing 50% of the sample, was 4% to 8%. The median response was 5%.

Student-athletes deemed “at risk” (no documentation of disability) within the student-athlete population

One hundred nineteen—74% of the sample—responded to this question. The range of responses was 1% to 80%. The middle quartiles, representing 50% of the sample, was 7% to 17%. The median response was 12%. Because the term “at risk” was not defined, it is difficult to generalize from this data. Questions pertaining to the reading, writing, and spelling skill levels of “at risk” student-athletes yielded a wide range of responses. The responses are included in the 2007 Hot Topics Data Summary on the N4A website.

Services available to student-athletes with learning disabilities

Seventy respondents (45%) reported that their institutions offered a **special program** for students with learning disabilities. Eighty-seven respondents (55%) reported that their institutions provided services but offered no special program for students with disabilities.

Seventy-nine individuals (49%) indicated that student-athletes’ disability services were monitored by a college-wide disability department. Six respondents (4%) reported services for student-athletes with disabilities were monitored within the academic department for student-athletes, and 73 respondents (45%) of the sample cited a combination of the two for service delivery.

The most common services and accommodations available to student-athletes with disabilities included: testing accommodations, diagnostic testing, assistive technology, priority registration, tutorial services and strategy instruction, note-taking services, and individual support plans.

Description of Learning Specialists

Forty-eight survey respondents (26%) indicated their position title as learning specialist with the majority (67%) of respondents serving student-athletes within all sports. Some learning specialists worked exclusively with designated sports. The majority of learning specialists held a degree in education (40%), or special education (34%). Twenty-six percent of the sample reported a degree in counseling. Seventy-seven percent of the sample held master’s degrees (60%) or doctorates (17%).

Responsibilities of Learning Specialists

The majority of learning specialists reported additional role responsibilities including tutor coordination (42%) and academic advising (30%). Within the learning specialist role, respondents reported a wide range of duties that included teaching and direct instruction in specific learning strategies, self advocacy, adjustment classes, and subject tutoring. Another category of duties included administering and interpreting diagnostic tests and screening tools. Most respondents reported working with students with disabilities. The majority of respondents also cited athletics liaison athletics duties such as recruiting and providing information to coaches and counselors.

Recommendations of Learning Specialists

Collaboration with others on campus was an area in which learning specialists agreed was important. They reported collaborating with Writing Labs, Math Centers, and other resources. Ninety-eight percent of the sample indicated that it is important to collaborate with the student disability office on campus.

Concerns of Learning Specialists

The learning specialists reported a wide range of concerns and obstacles. The most frequent responses included: time constraints, misperceptions or unrealistic expectations from colleagues about their job duties, lack of resources, low skill levels of incoming students, and lack of clear job definition.