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ABSTRACT

This study examined selected characteristics of students entering the teaching profession. Student attitudes regarding the teaching profession, student reasons for selecting teaching as a career, and student reasons for attending Northeastern State University (NSU) in Oklahoma were included. Relationships between selected personal and academic characteristics and reasons which have not been emphasized in the literature were also examined in this study. Subjects for the study were 326 students enrolled in a required introduction to education course at NSU. Observations made from data gathered indicated that there are more females than males, more whites than non-whites, and more students from small high schools than large schools entering the teaching profession. Most students regard teaching as a profession and have chosen it as their first career choice. Reasons for attending NSU included its closeness to home and strong academic reputation. The assumption is made that a large portion of education students entering the teaching profession in Oklahoma are willing to move if a job is offered. (JD)

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Characteristics

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Characteristics of Students
Entering the Teaching Profession
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Running head: CHARACTERISTICS OF STUDENTS ENTERING TEACHING

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Characteristics of Students

Entering the Teaching Profession

The characteristics of students entering the teaching profession has long been a concern. Educators, parents, politicians, national commissions have recently challenged that the quality of students entering the teaching profession has lowered (Savage, 1984; Weaver, 1979). While many implications have been suggested, few studies have addressed the issue of who the students are entering the teaching profession (Savage, 1984). Selected characteristics studied to date have been SAT scores (Savage, 1984); GPA (Horton & Summers, 1984; Book, Freeman & Brousseau, 1984); family background (Pigge & Marso, 1986); gender (Pigge & Marso, 1986) and attitudes towards teaching (Pigge & Marso, 1986).

The purpose of this study was to examine selected characteristics of students entering the teaching profession, student attitudes regarding the teaching profession, student reasons for selecting teaching as a career, and student reasons for attending NSU. Relationships between selected personal and academic characteristics and reasons which have not been emphasized in the literature were also examined in this study.

Method

Subjects

Subjects for the study were students enrolled in a required introduction to education course, "Education in the U.S." at Northeastern State University. Of the 423 enrolled in the course, 326 completed the survey.

Procedure

During the fall semester of 1987 all Northeastern State University students enrolled in a required introduction to education course were administered Characteristics of Students Entering the Teaching Profession, a four-part questionnaire consisting of demographic information, attitudes regarding the teaching profession, reasons for selecting teaching as a career and reasons for attending NSU. The questionnaire was distributed in the individual classrooms by their professors and students were asked to fill it out. Confidentiality was assured.

The demographic information was analyzed for a frequency distribution. Then a comparison of relationships between selected demographic information, age, gender, ethnic classification, college GPA, previous occupation, willingness to relocate, and high school class size, were examined with the latter three portions of the questionnaire through the use of analysis of variance.

Results

Of the 326 students who completed this questionnaire, approximately 67% were female and 33% were male. The average college hours completed by the sample population were 62. The population of entering education students were comprised of approximately 80% white, 16% Indian and 4% black. There was one alien student in the course. The sample ranged in age categories of 18-24 years, 57%; 25-31 years, 22%; 32-38 years, 11%; 39-45 years, 5% and over 45 years, 4%. Most (69%) of the students graduated from high schools with a population of 199 or less. These figures support Pigge &

Marso (1986) who state the prospective teacher is white, female and from a small community.

Item responses to the demographic information indicated that more students (29%) had self-reported college GPAs in the range of 2.5 to 2.99 than any other GPA. Eighty-nine percent viewed teaching as a profession and 69% said that teaching was their first career choice; while 19% said it was a second career choice.

Of particular interest in Oklahoma approximately 79% of the subjects said they were willing to relocate for a teaching job. Of those willing to relocate, 86% said they would relocate to another state for a teaching job.

Low salary was chosen by 54% as the most negative aspect of teaching, with discipline problems being the second choice (22%) and lack of good classroom equipment being the third choice (7%). Approximately 63% chose increase in salary as the most important change that should be made in the teaching profession. Seventeen percent said the need for smaller classes in the public schools was the second most important change that should be made. These findings support Book, Freeman & Brousseau (1981) who found that concern about salary was a major factor in deciding whether or not students chose teaching as a career choice.

Student responses to reasons for selecting teaching as a career indicated that the top reasons in descending order were: (1) the desire to work with children or young people, (2) an opportunity to work in an academic area of interest, and (3) good working conditions. The desire to work with children or young people would support the findings of Horton and Summers (1984) who suggest that a large portion of those entering

teaching do so because of a concern for people. Reasons that were reportedly the least influential to students when selecting teaching as a career were (1) whether or not they had lost a previous job, (2) advice from a career counselor, (3) encouraged to by new student advisement or (4) coming from a family of teachers.

Student responses indicated that the three most important reasons in descending order, for attending NSU were (1) it was close to home, (2) a reputation for its strong academic programs, and (3) friendly teachers and students. Those reasons least influential in students selecting NSU for their education were (1) ease of getting a degree at NSU than other colleges in the area, (2) whether or not a scholarship was offered through NSU, and (3) whether or not parents encouraged them to attend NSU.

A one factor analysis of variance was used to analyze the data with $p < .05$ as the level of significance. Results indicated a significant difference between age and job security as reasons for selecting teaching as a career ($F=5.47$). Examination of the means (Table 1) indicated that ages 25-31 viewed job security as a more important reason for selecting teaching as a career than did other groups. Post-hoc comparisons using t contrasts and $p < .05$ as a level of significance revealed that the significant differences were between (a) ages 18-24 and 32-38 ($t=2.59$); (b) ages 18-24 and 39-45 ($t=2.49$); (c) ages 18-24 and over 45 ($t=2.34$); (d) ages 25-31 and 32-38 ($t=3.26$); (e) ages 25-31 and 39-45 ($t=3.06$); (f) ages 25-31 and over 45 ($t=2.88$). In effect, the youngest age groups viewed job security more important than the older age groups.

Other results relevant to age were that job availability was viewed as an important reason for selecting teaching as a career ($F=2.6$). Examination of the means (Table 2) indicated that ages 18-24 viewed job availability as a more important reason than did other groups. Post hoc comparisons indicated that the significant differences were between (a) ages 18-24 and over 45 ($t=2.72$); (b) ages 25-31 and over 45 ($t=2.69$); (c) ages 39-45 and over 45 ($t=2.20$). It can be concluded that those students over age 45 do not view job availability as an important reason for selecting teaching.

Results also indicated a significant difference between age and advice of parents as reasons for selecting teaching as a career ($F=5.9$). Examination of the means (Table 3) indicated that ages 18-24 viewed advice of parents as a more important reason than did other groups. Post hoc comparisons showed that the 18-24-year-olds were more likely to be influenced by advice of parents as compared to the 32-38-year-olds ($t=3.37$) or the 39-45-year-olds ($t=3.50$).

Significant differences were found between gender and desire to work with children or young people ($F=6.2$). Examination of the means (Table 4) indicated that females felt a desire to work with children or young people was a more important reason for choosing teaching as a career than did males. Another reason for selecting teaching as a career where gender made a significant difference was encouragement by new student advisement ($F=5.7$). Examination of the means (Table 5) indicated that males said encouragement by new student advisement was a more important reason for choosing teaching as a profession than did females.

The data showed significant differences were found regarding ethnicity and salary ($F=5.2$). Examination of the means (Table 6) indicated

that Blacks and Hispanics selected salary as a more important reason for selecting teaching as a career than did Whites. Post hoc comparisons revealed that salary was more important for Blacks as compared to Indians ($t=2.43$) or Whites ($t=3.70$). It should be noted that although all means for all ethnic groups are reported, post hoc analyses were only reported for Blacks, Indians and Whites because of low N value in other categories.

Other significant differences regarding ethnicity (Table 7) were that Blacks were more likely to select encouraged by advisement as a reason for selecting teaching as a career ($F=2.6$). When examining post hoc comparisons, it was noted that Blacks were more likely than Whites to rank encouragement by new student advisement as an important reason for selecting teaching as a career ($t=3.03$). A third significant difference regarding ethnicity (Table 8) was that Blacks and Hispanics were more likely to rank lost previous job as a reason for selecting teaching than were Whites ($F=2.8$). Post hoc comparisons indicated that the significant difference was between Blacks and Whites ($t=2.71$). Examination of the means (Table 9) indicated that Whites were less likely than other ethnic groups to rank advice by a career counselor as an important reason for selecting teaching as a career ($F=3.4$). Post hoc comparisons showed there was a significant difference between Indians and Whites ($t=2.48$).

Other significant differences were found in those students willing to relocate ($F=6.9$). Examination of the means (Table 10) shows that those students not willing to relocate were more likely to check job availability as a reason for selecting teaching as a career. Students who were willing to

relocate out-of-state were more likely to choose an opportunity to work in an academic area of interest as a reason for choosing teaching ($F=5.8$); see Table 11). Finally, a significant difference was found between students not willing to relocate and importance of three months vacation in the summer as a reason for teaching ($F=5.3$). The means (Table 12) showed that those students viewed summer vacation as a more important reason for teaching than students willing to relocate.

Conclusions

Salient observations that can be made from the data are that there are more females than males; more Whites than non-Whites and more students from small high schools than large high schools entering the teaching profession. Most students regard teaching as a profession and have chosen it as their first career choice. These findings also suggest that students entering the teaching profession are effected by and aware of Oklahoma's poor economy. The assumption can be made that a large portion of education students entering the teaching profession in Oklahoma are willing to move if a job is offered.

Consistent with other studies are the fact that most education students still view low salary and discipline problems as the major problems in the teaching profession. Apparently education students feel that smaller classes in the public schools would somewhat remedy the discipline problems since they ranked that as their second (salary increase was first) most important change needed in public schools.

Most students still go into teaching as a desire to help children or young people and secondly, as an opportunity to work in an academic area of

interest. A weakness of the questionnaire was that the researchers failed to include academic major. The assumption was made that because all students were enrolled in the first education class, all students were education majors. It would have been helpful in terms of reasons students go into teaching to know if the students were elementary, elementary-secondary, or secondary education students.

Although reasons which were least influential overall to students selecting teaching as a profession, i.e., whether they lost a previous job or not and advice from counselors, were significant within certain ethnic groups.

Other observations were that job security and availability were more important to younger age groups. As might be expected, age was influential as to whether or not students selected teaching on advice from parents. With regard to gender, females were more likely to want to work with children and young people while males were more likely to go into teaching to work in their favorite academic area. Apparently, our students entering teaching have not changed much since earlier research.

Another weakness of the study was the self-report GPA. The researchers suggest that in future studies, GPAs be taken from the records since many students were unsure of their GPA.

Since the sample was drawn from only one midwestern university, subject may represent a rather limited population. However, NSU has prepared the largest number of students entering the teaching profession in Oklahoma for the last three years, according to State Department of Education figures. The researchers are assuming that other students in

Oklahoma who enter the teaching profession will share many of the same characteristics with NSU students.

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Table 1

Responses to Job Security Broken Down by Age

Age	\bar{X}	S.D.	N.
18-24	3.4	.68	184
25-31	3.5	.58	70
32-38	3.1	.75	36
39-45	2.9	.57	16
Over 45	2.9	.64	13

Table 2

Responses to Job Availability Broken Down by Age

Age	\bar{X}	S.D.	N.
18-24	3.2	.80	181
25-31	3.3	.70	70
32-38	3.0	.94	34
39-45	3.3	.88	15
Over 45	2.6	.90	12

Table 3

Responses to Advice of Parents Broken Down by Age

Age	\bar{X}	S.D.	N.
18-24	2.3	.97	183
25-31	2.0	.91	68
32-38	1.7	.96	35
39-45	1.4	.73	16
Over 45	1.8	.03	12

Table 4

Responses to Desire to Work with Children or Young People
Broken Down by Gender

Gender	\bar{X}	S.D.	N.
Male	3.5	.65	108
Female	3.7	.57	215

Table 5

Response to Encouragement by New Student Advisement Broken
Down by Gender

Gender	\bar{X}	S.D.	N.
Male	1.7	.83	101
Female	1.4	.73	206

Table 6

Responses to Salary Broken Down by Ethnicity

Ethnicity	\bar{X}	S.D.	N.
Alien	3.0	.00	1
Black	3.7	.47	11
Indian	3.1	.85	49
Hispanic	4.0	.00	2
White	2.8	.76	251

Table 7

Responses to Encouragement by New Student Advisement Broken
Down by Ethnicity

Ethnicity	\bar{X}	S.D.	N.
Alien	2.0	.00	1
Black	2.2	.98	11
Indian	1.6	.80	47
Hispanic	1.5	.71	2
White	1.5	.75	243

Table 8

Responses to Loss of Previous Job Broken by Ethnicity

Ethnicity	\bar{X}	S.D.	N.
Alien	1.0	.00	1
Black	1.8	.87	11
Indian	1.4	.83	47
Hispanic	2.0	1.4	2
White	1.2	.65	240

Table 9

Responses to Advisement by Career Counselor Broken Down by
Ethnicity

Ethnicity	\bar{X}	S.D.	N.
Alien	3.0	.00	1
Black	1.8	1.03	10
Indian	1.7	.95	47
Hispanic	2.0	1.4	2
White	1.4	.69	242

Abstract

Characteristics of students entering the teaching profession has long been a concern. A questionnaire was administered to students in a beginning course in the profession education sequence to discern attitudes towards teaching. Results indicated that the average beginning education student was female, White and from a small high school. Forty-three percent of the students were over 25 years of age. Students chose the teaching profession primarily to work with children or young people and because it was an opportunity to work in an academic area of interest. Low salary and discipline problems were cited as the most negative aspects of the teaching profession. Other observations included the fact that most of the students said they would be willing to leave the state of Oklahoma for a teaching job. Academic subject-oriented students were more likely to locate out of state. Job security and availability were more important to younger age groups. Future research is recommended to compare beginning education student attitudes with those who are already teaching.