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Profile of Personnel Preparation Programs in Visual Impairments and Their Faculty: A Status Report

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Abstract: This article profiles the program delivery models, funding sources, and faculty demographics of 43 personnel preparation programs in 2002–03. It shows that there was an increase in the number of programs and full-time faculty and a greater diversity of delivery models, although the number of tenure-track positions declined.

The authors express their appreciation to faculty members across the country who contributed to the collection of data for this survey. They also thank Nathan Lowell and the National Center on Low-Incidence Disabilities at the University of Northern Colorado for their invaluable contribution in electronic data collection.

This article is the fourth in a series of surveys that have profiled personnel preparation programs and their faculty in the discipline of visual impairments (that is, blindness and low vision) (Corn & Silberman, 1999; Silberman, Corn, & Sowell, 1989, 1996). The three previous surveys described the characteristics of university personnel preparation programs in this specialization and faculty since 1987–88. The impetus for the first survey was anecdotal information on the shortage of teachers of students with visual impairments throughout the country.

The authors (Silberman et al., 1989) initially sought to investigate and describe personnel preparation programs that prepare teachers of students who are visually impaired and orientation and mobility (O&M) specialists in 1987–88. The survey expanded to include programs that prepare rehabilitation teachers and rehabilitation counselors and teachers of students who are deaf-blind in universities where programs in visual impairments also existed in the 1996 survey (conducted in 1994–95) and low vision rehabilitation therapists in the 1999 survey (conducted in 1997–98).

Attempts were made to attain a 100% response rate in each survey. In the 1989 survey (Silberman et al., 1989), 27 programs responded; in the 1996 survey (Silberman et al., 1996), 32 programs responded; and in the 1999 survey (Corn & Silberman, 1999), 39 programs responded. From 1987 to 1998, there was a net increase of 12 programs in the field of visual

impairments. Twenty-three of the 27 programs that responded in the 1989 survey continued to prepare professionals in visual impairments and responded to the 1996 and 1999 surveys.

From the 1989 survey to the 1999 survey, changes occurred in the number and degree levels of programs available in each of the specialization areas. The number of undergraduate and doctoral programs remained about the same, while the number of master's degree and certification-only programs increased. In addition, women continued to make up more than half the faculty members, and the number of faculty with disabilities decreased from the 1989 survey to the 1996 survey and remained stable in the 1999 survey. Faculty from minority populations increased from the 1989 survey to the 1996 survey and remained stable in the 1999 survey. A comparison of age ranges in the 1996 and 1999 surveys indicated that the percentage of faculty younger than age 50 increased. (Data from the 1989 survey were not included because the age ranges used were different.)

From the 1989 survey to the 1999 survey, a steady decline was evident in the percentage of full-time faculty who held tenure at their universities and an increase in full-time faculty who were not on the tenure track. The number of programs increased overall from the 1989 survey to the 1999 survey.

This article presents the latest survey, on university

programs that prepared personnel in visual impairments in 2002–03, and discusses trends and challenges in the field that may have implications for the survival of personnel preparation programs in this low-incidence field.

Method

Instrument

The 2002–03 survey included nearly all the same questions used in the 1989, 1996, and 1999 studies. One question that was omitted in the current survey dealt with responsibility for the supervision of practicum students. Additional in-depth questions, however, were added to determine the types of distance-learning course-delivery models that universities offered throughout the country. One coordinator from each personnel preparation program (N = 43) completed the coordinator survey, which contained six parts: individual faculty demographics, program demographics, availability of programs, funding, doctoral students, and open questions. Each full-time faculty member from all the universities that were surveyed completed only the first part: faculty demographics.

The current survey was changed from hard copy to electronic format through collaboration with the National Center on Low-Incidence Disabilities (NCLID) at the University of Northern Colorado.

NCLID converted the survey to an online format and assigned a unique Uniform Resource Locator (URL) or Internet address.

Participants

Representatives from 52 programs were contacted: 40 from the 1989, 1996, and 1999 survey lists; 6 from the web site of the Texas School for the Blind and Visually Impaired (TSBVI, 2002); 2 from the web site of the American Foundation for the Blind (AFB, 2002); and 4 additional programs that were not listed in these directories but were known to the authors. These 4 additional programs were the Ball State and Indiana State Collaborative Program; Jackson State University, Missouri; the University of Northern Iowa; and Louisiana Tech.

Procedure

We e-mailed the last known coordinator at each of 52 university programs with instructions for accessing the URL. Each coordinator was asked to complete the coordinator survey electronically and to ask all full- and part-time faculty instructing teachers of students with visual impairments, O&M specialists, rehabilitation teachers, teachers of students with deaf-blindness, low vision rehabilitation therapists, and rehabilitation counselors to complete the faculty survey. Forty-three of the 52 programs that we contacted were found to be preparing professionals in

visual impairments in 2002–03 and were asked to complete the surveys. Five university programs had been closed since the 1999 survey (Butler University, Georgia State University, University of South Carolina at Orangeburg, University of Minnesota, and University of Texas at Austin). The program in visual impairments at Fitchburg State University closed prior to the 1999 survey, and the program at Wayne State University closed prior to the 2002–03 survey. South Carolina State University, although listed in the AFB and TSBVI web sites, indicated, when contacted, that it did not have a program that prepared personnel in the field of visual impairments. The University of Northern Iowa, although known to be a new program, had not filled its vacancies or begun training personnel at the time of data collection.

Once the original deadline for the electronic submission of data for the survey had passed, we found that the response rate was not 100%. Therefore, we interviewed the 19 remaining coordinators or full-time faculty via telephone, and their responses were manually inputted into the database.

Although attempts were made to survey all part-time and per-course instructors (adjuncts) who were employed during 2002–03 at each university, it became apparent that it would be difficult to determine the exact number of adjuncts who were employed and to obtain completed surveys from all of them. Although this information would have been interesting to report,

it would have resulted in incomplete data when analyzed. Therefore, we decided to report only the data for full-time faculty.

NCLID downloaded all survey responses into a Microsoft Office Excel 2003 spreadsheet. All quantitative data were analyzed using SPSS (Statistical Package for the Social Sciences) Version 10.1 for Windows, and all qualitative data were analyzed using ATLAS.ti Software for Qualitative Analysis 4.1 for Windows, a software tool for managing qualitative data.

Results

Types of programs

Of the 43 active university personnel preparation programs that were asked to complete the coordinator and faculty surveys, 37 were in public institutions of higher education and 6 (5 colleges of education and 1 college of optometry) were in private institutions of higher education. Table 1 summarizes the number and types of university programs that were identified, categorized by the same geographic regions as in the 1996 and 1999 surveys.

As Table 1 shows, in 2002–03, all 7 regions offered university personnel preparation programs for teachers of students with visual impairments with programs in 27 states and Puerto Rico, 6 regions (14 states) offered

programs in O&M, and 4 regions offered programs in rehabilitation teaching (6 states) and in teaching students who are deaf-blind (7 states). There was only 1 program in low vision rehabilitation therapy, and 2 regions (2 states) offered programs in rehabilitation counseling. Five programs in visual impairments (listed earlier) had closed since the 1999 survey, and programs had started in 7 states: Ball State University and Indiana State University Collaborative Program (in Indiana), Northeastern State University (in Oklahoma), Northern State University (in South Dakota), Jackson State University (in Mississippi), Silver Lake College (in Wisconsin), University of South Carolina at Spartanburg, and Southwest Missouri State University. Two other university programs that participated in the 2002–03 survey (University of Puerto Rico and Louisiana Tech University) were in existence when the 1999 survey was conducted but did not participate in it.

Since the 1999 survey, six universities added new specializations to their program offerings in visual impairments. Louisiana Tech and the University of Massachusetts at Boston each added a preparation program in teaching students who are visually impaired, North Carolina Central University and the University of Louisville each added a program in O&M, the University of Arizona added a program in rehabilitation teaching, and North Carolina Central University added a program in teaching students who are deaf-blind.

Four universities—Florida State University, Vanderbilt University (in Tennessee), Illinois State University, and the University of Toledo (in Ohio)—provided degree programs in visual impairments at all three levels (undergraduate, master's degree, and doctorate). In addition, four universities—Northern State University, Silver Lake College, Ball State and Indiana State University Collaborative Program, and Mississippi State University—indicated that they provided only nondegree certification programs in visual impairments (see Table 1).

Program delivery models

The respondents answered questions related to the types of courses and program-delivery models offered at their universities. The models ranged from traditional on-campus delivery to extension programs in which faculty travel to other instructional sites to online delivery to video conferencing to hybrid delivery (a combination of online and face-to-face instruction).

Table 2 reports the number of programs that offered various combinations of delivery models. A summary of the types of combinations revealed that 43 universities offered 149 variations of traditional, extension, online, video conferencing, and hybrid instructional models in their programs for teaching students with visual impairments, O&M, rehabilitation teaching, teaching students with deaf-blindness, low

vision rehabilitation therapy, and rehabilitation counseling during the academic year only, summers only, and the academic year and summers. That is, each university used approximately 3.5 different instructional models. Thus, at the 43 university programs, there were 56 offerings of the traditional model, 19 offerings of the extension delivery model, 17 offerings of an online model, 12 offerings of the video-conferencing model, and 45 offerings of the hybrid model.

External funding sources

During the 2002–03 academic year, 35 universities obtained partial or full support from external sources of funding. These 35 universities received a total of 71 grants from a variety of sources; 22 received 1 grant each, 5 received 2 grants each, 3 received 3 grants each, 1 received 4 grants, 2 received 5 grants each, 1 received 6 grants, and 1 received 10 grants. Of the 71 grants, there were 66 identified sources. Of the 66, 19 were provided by the U.S. Department of Education, Office of Special Education Programs (OSEP); 14 by the U.S. Department of Education, Rehabilitation Services Administration (RSA); 28 by state sources; 3 by private sources; and 2 by other sources (such as a Local Education Agency, LEA). Table 3 reports the sources of grants in specific program areas.

Several universities received combination funding in two areas of specialization. OSEP awarded five grants

and three states awarded one grant each in the combined areas of teaching students with visual impairments and O&M; RSA awarded four grants and a private source awarded one grant in the combined program areas of rehabilitation teaching and O&M. OSEP awarded one grant in the combined areas of teaching students who are visually impaired, O&M, and teaching students who are deaf-blind.

The respondents provided only 47 ending dates for the 71 grants that were reported. Of the 47, 41 ended before or in 2005, 1 will end in 2006, 4 will end in 2007, and 1 will end in 2009. Eleven respondents indicated that their grant awards were continuous and noncompetitive throughout the life of the programs.

Doctoral candidates

Responses from 14 coordinators revealed that a total of 34 doctoral students would graduate by 2006. With regard to roles that the future graduates would pursue, the data revealed that 19 graduates would most likely pursue careers in personnel preparation (14 in preparing teachers of students with visual impairments, 2 in preparing O&M specialists, 1 in preparing teachers of students with deaf-blindness, and 2 in preparing teachers of students with visual impairments and O&M specialists combined). In addition, 9 graduates would most likely pursue careers in administration, and 6 were undecided.

Nine coordinators indicated that 18 individuals had received doctoral degrees in the years 2000 to 2003. Three of these graduates took positions in other countries. Of the 15 who were employed in the United States, 4 were employed in personnel preparation university programs in visual impairments, 2 were administrators in residential schools for students with visual impairments, 3 were in direct service roles with students with visual impairments, and 6 were employed as faculty in university programs in other special education areas.

Faculty and their responsibilities

The following data represent the responses of 96 full-time faculty members from 42 of the 43 universities who filled out the faculty demographics portion of the survey. Since faculty members at the Ball State and Indiana State University Collaborative Program worked only part time at the university, their responses are not included here (see Table 4).

Of the 96 full-time faculty members, 58 were women and 38 were men. All but 6 were Caucasian; 1 was Hispanic, 2 were African American, and 3 were Asian American. Nine respondents had visual impairments. With regard to their ages, 11 respondents (9 women and 2 men) were aged 30–39, 26 (17 women and 9 men) were aged 40–49, 49 (28 women and 21 men) were aged 50–59, and 10 (4 women and 6 men) were aged 60–69. None of the full-time faculty members

was 70 or older.

As in the 1996 and 1999 surveys, an open-ended question asked for the percentage of time that the 96 full-time faculty members had responsibilities in each specialization area. Of the remainder, 30 respondents spent 100%, 13 spent 50% or more, and 53 spent 49% or less of their time in one or more visual impairment specialization areas. Because of course assignments and multiple responsibilities in more than one specialization area, the faculty members were not evenly distributed among the types of programs. Of the 30 respondents who spent 100% of their time in only one specialization area, 17 prepared teachers of students with visual impairments, 4 prepared O&M specialists, 1 prepared rehabilitation teachers, 1 prepared teachers of students with deaf-blindness, 5 prepared rehabilitation counselors, and 2 prepared low vision rehabilitation therapists.

The sum of the percentages of time for the 65 respondents who prepared teachers of students with visual impairments was equivalent to 36.6 full-time faculty. Time equivalents for the remaining respondents were as follows: 34 respondents who prepared O&M specialists, 17.7 full-time equivalent (FTE) faculty members; 17 respondents who prepared rehabilitation teachers, 4.9 FTE faculty members; 11 respondents who prepared teachers of students with deaf-blindness, 4.1 FTE faculty members; 10 respondents who prepared low vision therapists, 2.0

FTE faculty members; and 11 respondents who prepared rehabilitation counselors, 6.8 FTE faculty members. In summary, although the 96 respondents were full-time faculty members, the percentage of time they actually spent preparing personnel to work in the field of visual impairments (services for both children and adults) was equivalent to only 72.2 FTE faculty members.

Rank, status, and salaries

Of the 96 full-time faculty who responded to questions on academic rank and status, 29 were full professors, 22 were associate professors, 18 were assistant professors, and 10 were lecturers/instructors. In addition, 17 respondents indicated “other,” a category without academic rank that included project coordinator, grant project director, clinical professor, and research associate. There were 17 men and 12 women in the full professor rank, 9 men and 13 women at the associate professor rank, 7 men and 11 women at the assistant professor rank, and 1 man and 9 women at the lecturer or instructor rank. Four men and 13 women indicated their rank as “other.”

At the time of the survey, 45 of the 96 full-time faculty who answered this question had tenure. Of the 51 who did not have tenure, only 16 were on the tenure track. Thus, 35 of the 96 full-time university faculty in visual impairments did not have tenure or tenure-track positions. A review of the ages of these faculty

revealed that of the 35 who were not on the tenure track, 26 were aged 40–59.

Of the 96 full-time faculty members, 61 indicated that they planned to remain in personnel preparation for the next five years. Of the 20 who planned to retire or leave the field within the next five years, 8 expected to be replaced, 7 were uncertain whether they would be replaced, 3 expected they would not be replaced, and 2 did not respond to this item. Of the 15 full-time faculty members who were unsure of their plans, 7 expected to be replaced; 2 expected they would not be replaced; 5 were uncertain whether they would be replaced and 1 did not respond to this item. (Two of the full-time faculty members did not answer this question.) If all 35 individuals who planned to retire or were unsure of whether they would retire in the next five years do retire, then more than a third of the country's faculty in personnel preparation in the field of visual impairments will need to be replaced, even to sustain current insufficient levels of personnel preparation.

With regard to faculty vacancies, it was reported that 13 university tenure-track positions and 8 soft-money positions (that is, positions financed by grant money) were open in visual impairments. Fifteen of the vacancies were in teaching students with visual impairments, 3 were in O&M, 1 was in rehabilitation teaching, and 2 were in teaching students with deaf-blindness.

As in the previous surveys (Corn & Silberman, 1999; Silberman et al., 1989, 1996), a broad range of salaries was reported. In the current survey, 52 of the 94 respondents who answered this question earned $60,000 or more in 2002–03. See Table 4 for the complete salary distribution.

With regard to sources of salaries, of the 93 respondents who answered this question, 47 reported that their salaries came from hard-money sources (that is, salaries financed by the university); 27 reported that their salaries were totally funded by soft-money sources; and 19 reported that part of their salaries were funded by soft-money sources. Of the 19, 6 were paid with 50% hard money and 50% soft money, 7 were paid with greater than 50% hard money, and 6 were paid with greater than 50% soft money. Thus, the salaries of about 50%, or 46, of the 93 full-time faculty who responded to this question were partially or entirely funded by grants. Only 3 of the 46 full-time faculty who were paid more than 50% from soft-money sources indicated that their universities would fund their positions if these soft-money sources become unavailable.

Challenges to programs

Beginning with the 1999 survey, coordinators of personnel preparation programs were asked to report their perceptions of the challenges facing these programs. In both studies, the open-ended question,

"What do you consider to be the greatest challenge(s) facing personnel preparation programs with a specialization in visual impairments?" was included. Forty of the 43 coordinators responded with a total of 103 statements; 9 coordinators listed 1 challenge, 19 coordinators listed 2 challenges, 12 listed 3 challenges, 3 coordinators listed 4 challenges, and 1 coordinator listed 8 challenges. ATLAS.ti Software for Qualitative Analysis was used to code the coordinators' responses. Forty-five different codes were generated. These codes were analyzed for common themes. This analysis revealed 12 "greatest challenges" in 2002–03: funding, recruitment, enrollments, leadership, stability of programs, university support, alternative models for personnel preparation, shortage of teachers, lowering of hiring standards, national planning, regionalization, and academic pursuits. All these challenges, with the exception of national planning and regionalization, were also reported in the 1999 survey.

Fifty-five percent of the coordinators mentioned funding as a major challenge. Nine coordinators identified the challenge simply as the "lack of funding"; "money, money, money"; and "consistent funding." One coordinator stated, "Stability and diversity of funding will continue to be the primary challenge," and another wrote that "funding for research" is a challenge. Eight coordinators indicated that the greatest challenge is the "lack of funding for students and faculty." The remaining three comments identified challenges related to obtaining grants. Two

coordinators reported that “outside funding is limited,” and one coordinator stated, “The need to locate my own funding to support and expand the program means that grant writing and administration take time that I would prefer to spend on teaching and on research.”

The recruitment and enrollment of students in undergraduate and graduate programs were reported as challenges by 52.5% of the coordinators who responded to this question. While the majority of coordinators identified “recruitment” as a challenge, one coordinator reported that “our programs must be fairly lengthy to truly prepare qualified teachers, and this makes them less attractive to students who want to complete quickly.” Another coordinator explained that the greatest challenges are the need to cover content on preschool through the 12th grade and the need to include all the developmental and academic standards in specialization courses.

Low enrollment was reported as the greatest challenge by five coordinators. One coordinator explained, “It isn’t any less expensive to educate 5 students in the cohort than 15, but the institutions of higher education don’t generate the tuition necessary to ‘break even’ with only 5 enrolled.” Two coordinators linked low enrollments to the lack of support from LEAs. One coordinator reported that getting LEA administrators “to support working professionals in their work toward licensure or certification, [by providing] time and tuition” was the greatest challenge. Another

coordinator stated: “LEAs [are] not identifying kids readily [and] do not seek training for personnel.”

Leadership was mentioned as the greatest challenge by 30% of the coordinators. Twelve coordinators reported the challenge of training and hiring leadership personnel. One coordinator indicated that there are “too few leadership training programs to fill future faculty vacancies”; another said that the challenge is to find “good students with teaching experience who want to return to school, probably at reduced income, and complete leadership programs”; and still another noted that there is a “lack of tenure-line positions in universities.”

The stability of programs and the lack of university support were challenges for 27.5% of the coordinators. The concern for the stability of programs was linked to the lack of state support. Two coordinators reported that the lack of university support was linked to low enrollment. For example, one coordinator explained that “dealing with administrative challenges (the dean and so forth) regarding small class sizes, nondegree-seeking students, and the need to offer courses with low enrollments” are the greatest challenges. Four coordinators noted that there is a lack of university support, in general, for low-incidence programs; for example, one coordinator included in this general lack of support the dearth of “tenure-track positions (thus making the field unattractive to faculty).”

Twenty-five percent of the coordinators reported that alternative models for personnel preparation are a challenge. Five coordinators described some of the difficulties in creating high-quality personnel preparation programs for distance learning that include "developing supervised intern sites" for students via distance education and curriculum development that is appropriate for distance education strategies." Two coordinators indicated that the time and cost of developing high-quality distance education courses were a challenge. Two coordinators stated that obtaining university support for and learning new technology that is needed for distance learning were challenges.

The inability to meet the demand for teachers on the state and national levels and the lowering of professional hiring standards for vision rehabilitation and education professionals were considered challenges by 12.5% of the coordinators. Two coordinators said that the challenge is to "recruit a sufficient number of students to meet the demand." Three coordinators noted the challenges to the profession made by the National Federation of the Blind (NFB) and the reduction of hiring standards. One coordinator stated that the challenge is "NFB involvement in peer reviews, state agency hires, and RSA philosophy at the federal level"; another stated that there is a "trend [toward the] reversal of professionally trained instructors in rehabilitation and education"; and still another cited "threats to

professionalism (such as certification)."

Three coordinators indicated that national planning and regionalization are the greatest challenges. One coordinator stated the challenge as "figuring out how to develop cooperative programs serving regions of the country without hurting good, existing programs (some programs may not be in a position to collaborate across states)." Another described the challenge as the "willingness of current leaders in personnel preparation to change policies regarding personnel preparation (such as the planned closing of certain programs as people retire to start restructuring vis-à-vis the online models and the better use of human and other resources)."

Three coordinators reported that academic pursuits are the greatest challenge. One stated that it is a challenge "to provide high-level teaching and complete scholarship (publication and research)" because of such demands as grant writing and administering programs.

Trends across the four surveys

In many of life's scenarios, there is good news and bad news. When considering the trends and challenges of personnel preparation programs, the good news–bad news approach seems to be applicable. However, in this situation, the bad news seemed to overwhelm the good news in our analysis of trends.

First the good news: Since the 1989 survey, there are more programs in visual impairments in more states, more delivery models for personnel preparation, and more full-time university faculty preparing direct-service personnel for children and adults with visual impairments. Furthermore, some programs cross state lines to prepare professionals in states that do not have personnel preparation programs. Indeed, many changes have taken place that provide more opportunities for preparing personnel and for including a greater diversity of delivery models that bring training to locations that are at a distance from traditional university programs.

These positives may cause readers to believe that the preparation of personnel in visual impairments is on the way to addressing the concerns that were identified in the previous surveys. One may assume that the risks to personnel preparation programs have diminished or that there will soon be a sufficient number of graduates to fill existing direct-service positions.

Unfortunately, a further analysis revealed that the risks to personnel preparation in the field appear to be increasing, rather than holding steady or decreasing. Among the areas of concern are these:

1. Fewer undergraduate programs are preparing teachers of students with visual impairments.

2. The number of faculty from minority populations

does not reflect the racial or ethnic makeup of the U.S. population.

3. The average age of all faculty members continues to increase; more than 60% of full-time faculty in programs in vision impairments are over the age of 50.

4. Despite the greater number of faculty members, there have been only small increases in FTE positions in the field.

5. The percentage of tenured faculty has declined.

6. The percentage of nontenure-track faculty has increased, with more than a third of the teaching faculty now on nontenure lines.

7. More faculty are unsure if they will remain in the field for the next five years than in the previous surveys.

8. Fewer faculty believe that they will be replaced if they leave their current positions; only 15.6% of the respondents in the current survey thought that their positions are stable.

9. More faculty receive their entire salaries from soft money.

The greatest challenges reported by the faculty are also indicative of the continuing risks to programs. Ten of these challenges, reported in the 1999 survey, continue to cause concern. Furthermore, two new challenges

that were noted in this survey—national planning and regionalization—may reflect efforts to resolve many of the other ongoing challenges, such as recruitment and low enrollments, leadership, alternative models for personnel preparation, and the shortage of teachers.

Funding, recruitment, and low enrollments, reported as the top three challenges by the faculty, are tied to the direct-service needs that the faculty see in the field, as well as to the stability of the programs. The faculty expressed concerns about the lack of support from university administrations for low-enrollment classes and the possible dissolution of a program when a tenured faculty person retires.

At the same time that faculty members are working hard to keep programs going, they expressed concern that there is not a sufficient pool of faculty who are employed or will be available in the future. This seems to be a circular issue: When there are pervasive concerns about the longevity of programs, there seems to be little incentive for experienced teachers to return to school to enter the professorate.

Just over half of the universities included in this survey (23) appeared in the 1989 survey; all but 2 of these participated in all four surveys (the University of Nebraska and the University of Toledo did not participate in 1996). A statistical analysis of these 23 programs indicated that faculty status and tenure may be the most relevant indicators of the longevity of

programs. For example, 84.4% of the tenured faculty and 91.1% of the ranked faculty in this survey were in these 23 programs (52.3% of all programs). Although the faculty at these universities were only half of those who indicated they would likely retire in the next five years, 66% of them believed that their positions would remain after they retired. At the same time, these universities had only 54% of the awarded grants, and only 53% of those faculty were paid 100% in hard money. In short, these 23 programs represented a little more than half the total number of programs in the survey, and although all the other characteristics studied were equally distributed among them, these 23 programs accounted for the majority of tenured and ranked faculty, important indicators that demonstrate universities' commitment to programs.

Does the trend toward fewer tenure-track faculty members in the field of visual impairments mean that the longevity of programs is at risk? Since there are no raw data on the demographics of the faculty in programs that have closed, it is not possible to compare the number of tenured faculty or the rank of faculty at these universities.

While all specializations in the field of visual impairments experienced many of the same trends and challenges, one issue that is of critical concern is related to FTE faculty. For example, although one additional faculty member was added in deaf-blindness, the FTE of contributed time to preparing

teachers rose by only 0.1 FTE. Similarly, there were 3 added faculty members in O&M since 1999, but the FTE fell from 23.5 in 1999 to 17.8 in 2003. Overall, it appears that there are more faculty who have more responsibilities, other than their major focus on activities related to supporting programs in visual impairments. Since 1996, the number of full-time faculty increased by 84%, but the FTE increased only by 7.8%.

Conclusion

Aging faculty, coupled with the uncertain future of programs, cannot be ignored. What can the field anticipate for the available programs and faculty in 10 or 15 years? Will there be even a sufficient number of programs to maintain the current number of new direct-service providers? This survey did not consider the number of graduates of programs that are produced by the different models. What will be the impact on the field of more direct-service providers who are taught by faculty with multiple responsibilities? What will be the impact of having more direct-service providers prepared under distance education models?

The field must address the trends that affect personnel preparation and how the field will alleviate perceived challenges. Although this discussion has focused on trends in and challenges to the field, further research on the characteristics of programs that are stable or thriving may yield guidelines and direction for all

programs. Concerted efforts to address the issues raised herein are the only assurance that students who are visually impaired will be taught disability-specific skills by qualified professionals in the field.

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