

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

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We would like to extend special thanks to Dr. Adrienne Leslie-Toogood, Kansas State University, and Lisa Nordeen, University of Minnesota, of the Research Committee for their assistance developing the online survey and retrieving the data, and to Mary Aman, Texas Tech University, for her help designing the questions.

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. The following report provides a data summary for each survey question that yielded meaningful data and qualitative data and analyses for some questions.

1: Region

Region I:	29
Region II	53
Region III:	30
Region IV	22
Region V	34

2: Conference

Conference	# of Institutions
ACC	23
PAC-10	18
Big 10	17

Big 12	12
SEC	11
Big East	11
Conference USA	7
WAC	5
Mountain West	5
MAC	5
America East, Atlantic Sun, Atlantic-10, Big Easy, Big 7, Big Sky, Big South, Big West, California, CAA, Foothill, Garden State, Gateway, Great North, Gulf South, MAAC, MEAC, MVC, NAIA Florida, NJCAA, Northeast, NW Comm., OVC, Patriot League, Pennsylvania, Southern, Southland, Sun Belt	4 or fewer
No Response	3

3: Division

Division 1-A: 134
 Division 1-AA: 20
 Division II: 3
 Division III: 0
 Division Jr./Com: 9
 Division NAIA: 2
 N/A: 2

4: Does your institution have a Football Program?

Yes: 138
 No: 25

5: Undergraduate Population of School

Under 10,000: 34
 11,000-20,000: 54
 21,000-30,000: 31
 31,000-40,000: 23
 Over 40,000: 12

6: Students with documented learning disabilities

300-400: 4
 400-500: 2
 500-1000: 1
 1000-2000: 1

2000 +: 2
 Unsure: 68
 No answer: 48
 N/A: 8

7: Student-athletes enrolled at institution

Range	# of institutions
0-100	2
101-200	5
201-300	15
301-400	25
401-500	49
501-600	25
601-700	18
701-800	8
801-900	1
901-1000	0
1000+	1

8: Student-athletes with documented LD or ADD/ADHD

1-9: 17
 10-19: 21
 20-29: 24
 25-40: 1
 30-39: 16
 40-49: 12
 50-59: 12
 60-69: 4
 70-100: 7
 100+: 3
 Unknown/Unsure: 32
 No answer: 14

9: Student-athletes deemed “at risk” (no documentation of disability)

1-19: 12
 20-39: 31
 40-59: 34
 60-79: 16
 80-99: 8
 100-149: 17
 150-200: 8
 200+: 1
 400-500: 1

Unknown: 20
No answer: 15

10: Gender

Male: 48
Female: 113
No answer: 2

11: Ethnicity

White/Caucasian: 125
African American: 15
Middle Eastern: 1
Korean: 1
Chinese: 1
Eastern European: 1
European: 2
Latina: 2
Scottish/Irish: 2
Filipino: 1
No answer: 14

12: Salary Range

Under \$30,999 15
\$31,000-35,999 17
\$36,000-40,999 25
\$41,000-45,999 30
\$46,000-50,999 15
\$51,000-55,999 19
Over \$56,000 40

13: How many full-time Learning Specialists are on staff?

See responses to questions 26 and 27.

14: What type of educational degree/background do you think effective Learning Specialists should have?

Special Education: 134
Education: 116
Counseling: 89
Any degree: 8

Qualitative Results (open-ended comments): 4 major categories chosen from responses

- Degree is important and should be in area of teaching, special education, LD or ADHD knowledge, SPED or IDEA/504 laws: (17 responses)
- Degree must be accompanied by relevant work experience in college athletics, or combination of work experience and degree needed: (10 responses)
- Combination of relevant work experience and degree is important, but not experience in college athletics: (10 responses)
- Any degree is fine, as long as it is advanced (master's or higher): (9 responses)

15: Academic support service delivery for student-athletes

Department/Program:	141
Campus Wide Center:	21

16: Academic support service delivery for students with learning disabilities

Special Program:	70
Services, No Program:	87
No Answer:	1

17: Disability service provider for student-athletes

College-wide Department:	79
Department for Student Athletes:	6
Combination:	73
N/A:	4

18: Position title

Learning Specialist:	48
Academic Advisor:	52
Director:	43
Other:	44

19: As a Learning Specialist, with which sports do you work?

All sports	32
MBB	8
Football	8
WBB	7
Track and Field	3
Soccer	3
Softball	2
Wrestling	1
Volleyball	1
Lacrosse	1

Golf	1
Hockey	1
Baseball	1

Qualitative Results (open-ended comments): 5 major categories chosen from responses

- Work with all sports 5
- Work exclusively with football 3
- Work exclusively with MBB/WBB 2
- Work with all sports except football 2
- Work with all sports except MBB/WBB 1

20: What type of educational degree/background do you have?

Education	25
Special Education	21
Counseling	16

Qualitative Results (open-ended comments): 4 major categories chosen from responses

- Specific education degree (such as speech pathology, special ed, etc.) 12
- Teaching experience (K-12 or college level) 3
- Any other advanced degree 3
- Work experience in college athletics 1

21: Highest Degree

B.S.	0
B.A.	2
M.S.	11
M.A.	14
Ph.D.	6
Ed.D.	1
M.D.	0
Other:	8

22: Are you currently working on another degree?

Yes, Bachelor's	1
Yes, Master's	5
Yes, Ph.D	8
Yes, Ed.D	2
Yes, M.D.	0
No	28

23: What job/s did you have prior to becoming a Learning Specialist and for how long did you have them?

6 major categories chosen from responses

- Prior experience in college athletics (i.e. advising) 18
- Prior experience teaching in a special needs capacity 18
- Prior experience teaching college level courses 13
- Prior experience teaching general education in K-12 system 7
- Totally unrelated work experience 5
- Prior experience coaching 3

24: What duties do you perform as a Learning Specialist?

Teach general learning strategies	42
Teach time management skills	42
Teach organizational skills	42
Work with student-athletes with learning disabilities	42
Report information to coaches/counselors/advisors	41
Teach test taking strategies	40
Teach self-advocacy skills	39
Teach note-taking strategies	38
Teach how to highlight/annotate	38
Individual tutoring	34
Interpret psychological reports	34
Perform screening for at-risk students	32
Help with recruiting student-athletes	31
Group tutoring	26
Advise on class/major selection	23
Help facilitate course substitutions	20
Perform diagnostic testing	16
Teach college study skills course (for credit)	13
Help with student-athlete admission	10
Initiate NCAA waivers	9
Other (Work with tutors, liaison to disability services, mediate faculty/student relationships)	8

25: In addition to the duties of Learning Specialist, do you have any other duties?

Tutor coordinator	18
Academic advising (sports: _____, fill in below)	13
Field Hockey	1
Volleyball	1
Golf	2
WBB	2
Soccer	1
Baseball	1

Football	1	
MBB	3	
MLAX	1	
Tennis	1	
Diving	1	
No additional duties		12
Admissions coordinator		0
Life Skills/CHAMPS coordinator		0

Qualitative Results: 4 major categories chosen from responses

- Hire/train tutors, tutor coordinator, assist with tutorial program 5
- Advising duties/CHAMPS life skills duties 4
- No time for additional duties 2
- Disability Services office liaison 1

26: If you have one full time Learning Specialist on staff, how is the program set up and how are the students served? 22 responses total – one LS on staff

6 major categories chosen from responses

- Tiered tutor levels (some tutors for at risk students, some for non at risk) (18 responses)
- Individually instructs a caseload of students (12 responses)
- LS sole staff member to make referrals for psychoeducational testing (7 responses)
- LS is sole liaison to Disability Services office (4 responses)
- Have some tutorial help but report no need for additional LS on staff (1 responses)
- Separate LD students from at risk students and LS only works with documented LD students, tutors work with at risk students (1 response)

27: If you have more than one full time Learning Specialist on staff, how many do you have?

10 responses total – more than 1 LS on staff

28: If you have more than one full time Learning Specialist, how is the program set up and how are the students served?

5 major categories chosen from responses

- Split up each caseload by sport (5 responses)
- Designate some LS as “study skills specialist” and other as liaison to Disability Services office/interpreter of LS test results (5 responses)
- LS works with students on building specific skills and uses content tutors as supplement (5 responses)

- Split up each caseload according to level of risk per student/paired with LS based on experience (most needy students paired with most experienced LS) (2 responses)
- No formal procedure set for dividing up caseloads (1 response)

29: If you have mentors/tutors who assist you, what type of background do they have?

Graduate Student	39
Undergraduate Student	26
Retired teacher	10
Faculty member	6
Other:	
Former student-athletes with strong academic backgrounds	2
Recent graduates/professionals from community	2
Former military	1
Current teachers	1
ESL teachers	1

Qualitative Results: 4 major categories chosen from responses

- Prefer to hire grad students 6
- Prefer to hire K-12 teachers 3
- GPA requirement 1
- Based on faculty recommendation 1

30: If you have mentors/tutors who assist you specifically with your program, are they trained differently than the tutor population for the non at risk students?

Yes	30
No	11
N/A	2

Qualitative Results: 4 major categories chosen from responses

- At risk tutors are given mandatory additional LD or learning styles instruction as part of training (9 responses)
- At risk tutors focus on strategies/skill building instead of content (3 responses)
- The tutors are not trained differently (3 responses)
- At risk tutors paid higher wage (1 response)

31: What are the biggest concerns you have as a Learning Specialist?

17 major categories chosen from responses

Concern	# of Respondents
Not enough time	16
Note enough resources (staff, space, etc.)	12
At risk definition becoming too broadly	12

defined and student numbers are increasing	
Low skill levels of incoming students	11
LS creates dependent relationships and students do not learn to take ownership over their own work	7
Unclear distinction between LS and tutor	7
Too many students are being referred for LD testing	4
Too many LS hired with inadequate backgrounds	4
Educating coaches on LD issues	3
Lack of knowledge from management about what LS is really supposed to do on the job	3
Low salary and/or budget	2
LS treated as too separate or elite from advisor, not really much of a difference	1
LS only works with football or MBB and while other student athletes need help	1
Not enough available research on college student learning development	1
Student athlete retention rates	1
Confidentiality	1
Faculty/athletic department relations clash	1

32: What are some obstacles you face as a Learning Specialist?

11 major categories chosen from responses

- Lack of understanding/respect from athletics/advisors/coaches on appropriate job duties for a LS 16
- Lack of time 16
- Lack of funding/resources/space/staff 7
- Caseloads too large/too many students given at risk label 7
- Problematic relations with faculty 4
- Poor relationship with DS office 3
- Negative academic culture on teams 3
- Students won't use their accommodations 2
- Revenue sports take up too much LS time, not enough available for non revenue sports 1
- Inadequate training on specific LD and ADHD 1
- No obstacles 1

33: Semester or yearly evaluation of your program or services

Yes 33
No 13

34: What does your evaluation consist of?

12 major categories chosen from responses

- Student/tutor/staff evaluation form 19
- Feedback from advisors, other LS, director 11
- GPA differences 6
- End of year/semester student reports written by LS 4
- Feedback from coaches/athletic administrators 4
- No show reports/attendance factors 4
- Probation/disqualification status 2
- Student attitude ratings 2
- LS recommendations for next year/semester 1
- Progress toward degree benchmarks 1
- Time spent in program/on LS caseload 1
- Pre/post testing 1

35: How do you determine if your program was successful or not?

Qualitative Results: 8 major categories chosen from responses

- Student/tutor/staff feedback or evaluations 21
- GPA progress/passing courses 19
- Improvement in student attitude/confidence 8
- Graduation rates/APR 7
- Attendance/no shows for tutoring 5
- Improvement in learning/study skills 4
- No specific determinant of success 4
- Eligibility/probation status 3

36: With which campus services do you collaborate?

Disability services 40
Writing lab/center 30
Math lab/center 15
Other 8

37: Do you think it is important to collaborate with the student disability office on campus? Why or why not?

Yes 38
No 1

Qualitative Results: 7 major categories chosen from responses

- Student disability office has authority that we do not have regarding deciding on accommodations, etc. (10 responses)
- Collaboration benefits students (10 responses)
- Student disability office is more knowledgeable on this subject (5 responses)
- Our office needs to serve as liaison between disability office and students (5 responses)
- Helps to avoid any appearance of extra benefits for student-athletes (2 responses)
- Student disability office offers additional services to students (2 responses)
- Other (4 responses)

38: Do you undergo professional development training?

Yes (through N4A)	28
Yes (through AHEAD)	11
Yes (through LDA)	8
Yes (through other source)	10
No	7

Comments: 3 major categories chosen from responses

- Looking to find training 8
- Training sought from organizations 7
- Campus provides training 2

39: Do you feel you need any additional training?

Yes	36
No	7

Qualitative Results: 3 major categories chosen from responses

- Have specific research/methods needs 20
- General comment (greater expertise needed) 7
- Need to stay current in the field 6

40: Do you screen all incoming student athletes or a select population?

All student-athletes	17
Select population of student-athletes	22
No screening	6

Qualitative Results: 9 major categories chosen from responses

- Review of HS GPA, SAT/ACT score, and students who self-report past history of learning problems (11 responses)
- All football screened (11 responses)

- All MBB screened (8 responses)
- All freshmen/JC transfers screened (8 responses)
- Students from a summer program/admissions flag are screened (8 responses)
- All WBB screened (7 responses)
- All students meant to be screened, but some are not due to lack of coordination, circumstances, etc. (6 responses)
- Screening is referral-based (from coach, advisor, etc.) (6 responses)
- Unknown (1 response)

41: What type of screening tools do you use?

Writing samples	18
Informal assessments	15
Nelson Denny	14
WRAT-III	10
None	3
WRAT Expanded	1
Other	10

- SATA 5
- Behavior Inventory
- SDRT-4 online reading screening, ACES, VIGIL
- AD/HD surveys
- Learning Style Inventory
- Developmental history questionnaires
- Educational Enhancement Assessment
- Interviews
- Norm-referenced assessments
- SDRT - screening version

Qualitative Results: 4 major categories chosen from responses

- Specific tests named 6
- Screening not provided by our office 6
- School-developed test with school techniques 5
- Other 1

42: Besides in-house screening, what other indicators do you look at before referring a student-athlete for psychological testing for LD or ADD/ADHD?

History of academic learning difficulties	39
Referral from academic advisor	37
Distractibility	34
SAT/ACT scores	32
Disorganized	32
Referral from faculty member	29
HS GPA	28

College GPA	28
Perceptual deficits	23
History of Special Education placement	21
Referral from coach	17
Poor athletic performance	14
Other	6

- Referral from initial eligibility coordinator in compliance
- Student reporting and indication that time put into studying isn't resulting in satisfactory grades
- Reports from tutorial staff about progress
- Student self-referral
- Interviews and test grades
- Strengths and weaknesses in current classes

Qualitative Results: 3 major categories chosen from responses

- Professor/coach/other referral 4
- Behavioral indicators/self-report of behaviors 3
- Do not do screening in these ways 2

43: After conducting in-house screening, about how many student athletes fall below an 8th grade level for READING?

# of Student-Athletes	# of Respondents
0-4	4
5-10	2
10-20	6
20-50	2
Over 50	0
Percentage	
0-10%	1
10-20%	2
20-30%	2
50%	3
We do not screen for these skills	17

44: After conducting in-house screening, about how many student-athletes fall below an 8th grade level for SPELLING?

# of Student-Athletes	# of Respondents
0-4	0
5-10	2
10-20	3
20-50	2
Over 50	0

Percentage	
0-10%	0
10-20%	1
20-30%	2
50%	3
We do not screen for these skills	24

45: After conducting in-house screening, about how many student-athletes fall below an 8th grade level for MATH?

# of Student-Athletes	# of Respondents
0-4	0
5-10	2
10-20	2
20-50	2
Over 50	1
Percentage	
0-10%	0
10-20%	2
20-30%	2
50%	1
We do not screen for these skills	22

Open-Ended Comments

- Math works a little bit differently at my school. They do not need to take college algebra or anything with computation.
- Have just started math screening
- We use math placement tests at this time to screen.
- I look for specific deficits, but do not measure grade level.
- My experience would say there are fewer that score in this area for math—that may be different now

46: About how many student-athletes have deficient writing skills? (8th grade or below)

# of Student-Athletes	# of Respondents
0-4	0
5-10	1
10-20	2
20-50	2
Over 50	2
Percentage	
0-10%	0
10-20%	2

20-30%	1
50%	3
We do not screen for these skills	18
N/A	5

47: How many years have you conducted in-house screening?

Less than 1 year	3
1	3
2	4
3	7
4	3
5	7
6	1
8	1
10	1
15	1
20	1
21	1

48: If you replied 2 or more years, do you think that basic skill levels in incoming student-athletes have become more or less deficient over time?

More deficient	10
Less deficient	4
About the same	10
N/A	11

49: Considering your opinion of the basic skill levels of incoming student-athletes, why do you think this trend is happening?

9 major categories chosen from responses

- Lack of adequate HS preparation (perhaps due to high stakes testing, student-athletes passed through the system, gap increasing between student-athletes and general student population) (19 responses)
- Pressure of needing to win from athletics causes coaches to recruit student athletes with skill deficits (9 responses)
- Pressure of NCAA academic reforms (3 responses)
- Sliding scale for SAT/ACT during admissions process has allowed more skill deficient students to be admitted into college (2 responses)
- University administration and objectives (1 response)

50: How is the student caseload determined for you and/or other Learning Specialists on staff?

Academic advisor referral:	32
Results of in-house screening:	31
Admission information (SAT/ACT scores, HS GPA, etc.):	31
Coach's referral:	21
Eligibility coordinator/compliance referral:	14
Referral from another source (please list below):	11

Qualitative Results:

- Basically, I just do my best to handle however many students are referred, which is why we need another LS on staff. The ratio is too high right now.
- Admissions committee - although some are also being referred for having a bad semester regardless of ability level
- We have a summer course for some incoming freshmen. I work very closely with the students and can determine who needs extra support/structure.
- Changes on a semester by semester basis as to needs of student population.
- Any student athlete who is at risk (based upon criteria above) or has a diagnosis
- As the Assistant Director the final decision is mine, but we take the input of everyone on staff who has had contact with the student in the past as well as any information we have from other sources
- No longer done
- Supervising Director/Coordinator. Student request. Struggling student in academic 'reality'.
- Assessment by Director of Academic Services
- Psych Dept
- Student
- Learning Specialist can limit the load, but uses all of the referrals above to determine the load.
- Sometimes a dean may recommend to a student athlete that he/she meet with me

51: Services available at your institution to student-athletes with learning disabilities

Test Accommodations:	155
Note-taking:	139
Assistive Technology:	130
Test/Diagnose:	122
Priority Registration:	116
Individual Support Plans:	103
Academic Strategy Instruction:	102
Tutoring Services:	92
Test/Support Plans:	64
Under-loading:	59
Waive degree registration:	53
Skill Dev.:	38

Summer School (enrichment):	35
Summer School (credit):	34
Waive admission registration:	24
Special Courses:	19