

Barriers to Access and Success in Higher Education for Early Childhood Educators: A Study of Perceived Barriers Identified by T.E.A.C.H. Scholarship Recipients, T.E.A.C.H. Counselors and Higher Education Faculty

Introduction

The [T.E.A.C.H. Early Childhood® \(T.E.A.C.H.\) scholarship](#) initiative has been providing comprehensive scholarships for the early childhood workforce to attend college to earn early childhood credentials and degrees since 1990. Beginning in North Carolina, but quickly expanding to states across the country, T.E.A.C.H. scholarships have been giving the incumbent early childhood workforce the opportunity to attend community colleges and universities in their states to take coursework leading to early childhood education degrees and graduate debt-free. The [T.E.A.C.H. Early Childhood® National Center](#) (National Center) licenses the replication of the T.E.A.C.H. scholarship model to a single non-profit in each participating state.

Scholarships recognize the challenge of a low-wage workforce, often living in poverty, often attending college for the first time and often becoming the first in their family to either attend or graduate from college. Scholarships most often cover the majority of the cost for tuition, books and travel, provide paid release time to allow students to balance work, family and school, and offer compensation incentives each year for completing a set amount of credit hours. They and their employers each pay a small part of the costs, but the scholarship substantially helps both the working student and their employer meet their financial obligations. Each scholarship recipient is assigned a counselor who helps them develop strategies to navigate higher education, maintain their work obligations, meet the needs of their families and meet the commitments of the scholarship. Scholarship counselors are very engaged in ensuring the success of their students, and understand the barriers that the students face.

Study Description

To better understand the barriers facing T.E.A.C.H. scholars, the National Center began a three-tiered study of some of these barriers as perceived by the T.E.A.C.H. scholarship counselors, the T.E.A.C.H. scholarship recipients working toward two- and four-year degrees in early childhood education and the higher education faculty at the institutions of higher education that these students attend. The first phase of the study began with T.E.A.C.H. counselors in 21 states. In fall 2018, a survey was sent to state T.E.A.C.H. program administrators, asking them to share the survey with their T.E.A.C.H. counseling staff. Surveys were sent three times, ultimately receiving 61 responses from 20 states. Surveys were constructed in survey monkey, using Likert scales and covering a total of 49 possible barriers within six different categories: (Q1), College Application and Admission Processes; (Q2), T.E.A.C.H. Scholarship Application Processes; (Q3), Meeting College Expectations for Coursework and Degree Completion; (Q4) Services for English Language Learners; (Q5), Special College Requirements or Accessibility Issues; and (Q6), Work/Life/School Balance.

The second phase of the study was to reach out to current T.E.A.C.H. scholarship recipients receiving Early Childhood Associate and Bachelor Degree scholarships. The Survey on Barriers to Access and Success in Higher Education Facing T.E.A.C.H. Scholarship Recipients opened on February 1st, 2019, to a sample of T.E.A.C.H. recipients in 21 states. State program administrators sent the survey to a total of 4,945 recipients. The survey was available in both Spanish and English, and asked recipients to rate the same 49 barriers as described in the T.E.A.C.H. counselor version. Over a month's time, 2,071 answered the survey, for a total response rate of 42%. Questions about the cost of college were not included in these surveys, as T.E.A.C.H. recipients have full financial support.

The third survey, basically identical to the ones used for counselors and recipients, was sent to higher education faculty in T.E.A.C.H. states identified by the T.E.A.C.H. Early Childhood® state administrative agencies. Overall 170 higher education faculty responded, with every state having at least one respondent from a higher education institution in their state.

Findings

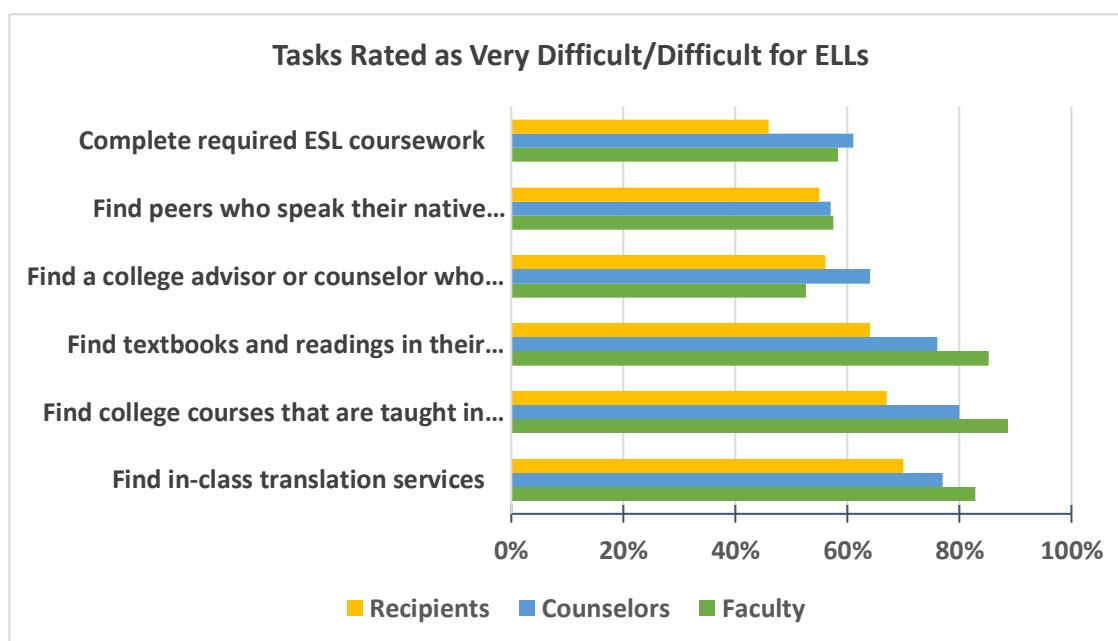
The responses from all three surveys were compared and the top ten barriers from each population were identified. Counselors and higher faculty agreed with the top nine barriers identified by T.E.A.C.H. recipients in eight out of nine cases. Figure 1 illustrates the ranking of the barriers by each population

Figure 1: Rank Order of Perceptions of Significant Challenges

TASK	Recipients	Counselors	Faculty
Having past student loan or specific college debt	1	11	13
Juggling school responsibilities with family responsibilities	1	4	3
Pass the basic math proficiency exam upon admission	3	1	2
Juggling school responsibilities with work responsibilities	4	5	5
Pass any required math remedial courses	5	3	6
Student teaching not allowed in current workplace	6	2	8
Finding desired courses offered on weekends	7	9	4
Successfully passing the Praxis II	8	7	7
Successfully passing the Praxis I	9	5	1

In addition, all 3 survey populations identified the six barriers defined in the Services for English Language Learners in their higher ranked barriers. These include 1) finding in-class translation services, 2) finding college course taught in their native language, 3) finding textbooks and readings in their native language, 4) finding a college advisor who could speak to them in their native language, 5) finding peers who speak their native language and can help them navigate the higher education system and 6) completing the required ESL coursework. In almost every case, more than 50% of recipients, counselors and faculty defined finding these supports as extremely difficult or difficult. See Figure 2.

Figure 2: Perceptions of Missing Services for English Language Learners



The National Center will develop a complete final report and create issue briefs on each of the barriers, to better define the problem and to offer some promising practices that are working across the country to address these barriers.

