

Career Education Plans and Obstacles

A Survey of Nebraska Community College Students

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Introduction

This report is one component of a research project to examine barriers to success for Special Populations in Nebraska Career Education programs at the secondary and postsecondary levels, and to identify opportunities and strategies to overcome these barriers. The Carl D. Perkins Career and Technical Education Act of 2006 (Perkins IV) requires Nebraska to continue to focus on the performance of Special Populations in career education. Special Populations, as defined by Perkins IV, include English Language Learners (including migrant students), students with disabilities, economically disadvantaged students (including foster students), single parents/displaced homemakers, and students in programs that are non-traditional for their gender. In initiating this research study, the Nebraska Department of Education recognized that there are career education disparities for Special Populations in the state, and that progress in meeting the career education goals for these groups has been inadequate.

This report presents the results of a Career Plans survey of students at Nebraska's six community colleges, including students enrolled for academic credit as well as students in Adult Basic Education programs. The purpose of the survey was to examine students' career and interests and plans, and to identify obstacles that students in general and in different Special Population groups might face in terms of pursuing their career goals through postsecondary education.

The survey was accessed online through a link on the Nebraska Career Education webpage. A total of 217 students completed the survey during July and August of 2008. Appendix A shows the distribution of students by community college and student category (described below). A copy of the survey instrument is provided in Appendix B.

The results of this survey contributed to the development of the project strategic plan: *Overcoming Barriers to Career Education for Special Populations: A Strategic Plan for Nebraska, 2009*. The other companion research reports for this project are *Career Education Status of Special Populations in Nebraska Public Secondary Schools and Community Colleges, 2009* and *Career Education Plans and Obstacles: A Survey of 9th and 12th Grade Nebraska High School Students*. These reports are available upon request from the Nebraska Department of Education, Nebraska Career Education Division.

I. Students Surveyed

The Project worked with the faculty and staff members of the six Nebraska Community Colleges to recruit Special Population students, as well as students from the General Population, to complete the online survey. The student categories included three Special Population groups (GED, ESL and Support Program) and a General Population group. For this report, the ESL and GED groups are considered to be transitional community college students, and the Support Program and General Population groups are considered to be academic community college students.

GED programs, offered through Adult Basic Education, are non-credit and free for students seeking a high school equivalency certificate. Survey participants included those who dropped out of high school, those who completed 12th grade but did not meet the requirements for a high school diploma, students who were home schooled and those who graduated high school in another country. A few of the GED students were enrolled in for-credit classes at the same time. Several GED students who were also in the ESL program were classified as ESL. Nearly all (97%) of the 65 GED students surveyed were from Metropolitan Community College.

ESL program students were either enrolled in free, Adult Basic Education non-credit ESL classes or fee-based, credit ESL classes that did not apply towards the academic requirements of any award programs. Half of the ESL program respondents had earned college credits. Nearly all (89%) of the 37 ESL students surveyed were from Metropolitan Community College.

Support Program students were enrolled in credit classes and supported by a variety of programs across the different colleges: TRIO, Veterans Upward Bound, Single-Parent/ Displaced Homemaker, and Student Support Services. The particular requirements for participation in these programs vary, but generally speaking, students in these programs have one or more educational disadvantages or special needs. The 58 Support Program students surveyed were from Central, Northeast, Southeast and Western Nebraska Community Colleges.

General Population students were those enrolled in credit classes who were not participating in any of the student support programs. They were recruited in various ways by faculty and staff, including invitations posted in computer labs, learning centers, and outreach to classes or other student groups in the general population of students. The 57 General Population students surveyed were from Metropolitan, Northeast and Southeast Community Colleges.

Demographic Characteristics of Students

Table 1 presents various demographic characteristics of the four groups of students who participated in the surveys. This information is presented to provide a context for the students' responses to questions relating to barriers to career education. Because students were invited to participate on a voluntary basis through the most convenient means, and not identified through a scientific process, the data should not be used to estimate characteristics for the entire population of Nebraska community college students who belong to these four groups.

ESL and GED students were fairly equally divided among females and males. However, females predominated among the surveyed Support Program (85%) and General Population (71%) students.

The median age of surveyed students fell between 25 and 29 years. GED and General Population students were twice as likely as others to be younger than 20 years. Support Program and General Population students were more likely than ESL and GED students to be age 40 or older.

Racial/ethnic minority students comprised 16 percent of the surveyed students in the Support Program and General Population groups. Low numbers of African Americans among the Support Program group reflects the lack of surveys for Support Program students from Metropolitan Community College.

Almost all (97%) of the ESL students surveyed identified themselves as a member of one or more racial/ethnic minority groups, evenly divided among African American/African, Asian and Hispanic. More than half (62%) of the GED students were members of racial/ethnic minority groups. The predominance of African Americans (44%) reflects the fact that nearly all of these GED students were from Metropolitan Community College.

Nearly two-thirds (65%) of the surveyed students were single, never-married, with one-fifth (22%) currently married and one-tenth (12%) separated or divorced. ESL students were much more likely than others to be currently married (46%). More than one-fourth (26%) of the Support Program students were separated or divorced, reflecting the presence of students in the Single-Parent/Displaced Homemaker program.

General Population students were less likely to have a child under age 18 (23%) than the other groups (38% to 47%). No ESL student surveyed was a single parent living with a child under age 18. The single-parent rate was lower for General Population students (11%) than for GED (21%) and Support Program (32%) students. The high single-parent rate for Support Program students again reflects the presence of students in the Single-Parent/Displaced Homemaker program.

Most students (89%) lived off campus, especially those in the ESL and GED programs. Few General Population students (4%) lived in subsidized housing, compared to about one-fifth of the students in the other groups (17% to 22%).

Only one out of ten students (11%) surveyed lived alone. They were more likely to be living with their children (37%) than any other category of person. The living arrangements next in prevalence were those with parents (25%), spouse (21%) and siblings (18%). Some living arrangement differences among groups reflect their marital and parenting status: ESL students, who had the highest currently-married rate, were more likely than others to be living with their spouse; Support Program students, who had the highest single-parent rate, were least likely to be living with a spouse and most likely to be living with children.

II. Educational Status and Aspirations

The high school education status of ESL and GED students was understandably very different from the other two groups (see Table 2a). Only 5 percent of ESL students graduated high school in the U.S.A. However, more than two-thirds (68%) had received a high school diploma from another country, including 11 percent who either had or were working on a GED. One-fourth (27%) did not have a high school diploma, including 8 percent who were working on a GED.

A few (8%) GED students had graduated high school in another country but were not in an ESL program (note: students who were enrolled in both GED and ESL Programs were classified as ESL). The rest of the GED students (92%) had either dropped out of school, had been home-schooled, or had otherwise not met high school graduation requirements.

More than three-fourths of Support Program (81%) and General Population (79%) students had graduated high school in the U.S.A. Support Program students were more likely to have a GED (18%) than were General Population students (7%). General Population students were more likely to have graduated high school in another country (14%) than were Support Program students (2%).

Most of the Support Program (73%) and General Population (83%) students were currently enrolled in a community college award program, and nearly all had completed some credit hours at the college level. The majority of students in these two groups who were not enrolled in an award program were earning credits to transfer to another institution. Although nearly half (46%) of the ESL students had earned college credits, only one-fifth (19%) were currently enrolled in an award program other than ESL or GED. Perhaps some ESL students had earned college credits in another country before coming to the U.S.A. Very few GED students had completed any college credit hours (8%) or were currently enrolled in an award program other than the GED program (9%).

Overall, the educational aspirations of students were fairly high, with most aspiring beyond a two-year degree (see Table 2b). The majority of students, except for the GED group, expected to earn a four-year degree or higher (57% to 61%). Although a substantial number of GED students expected their education to terminate with a GED (40%), the majority (53%) expected to earn a two-year degree or higher. ESL students were more likely to expect their education to terminate with a GED or high school diploma (14%) than those in the Support Program (3%) or General Population (6%) groups. Students in the Support Program group had higher expectations for earning a two-year degree or more (95%) than those in the General Population group (90%) or the ESL group (78%). However, ESL students had the highest level of expectation for earning a Master's Degree or higher (38%).

III. Employment and Educational Support

Employment

Two-thirds of the students surveyed were employed at least part-time (67%), (see Table 3a). Employment rates were highest for ESL students (83%) and lowest for GED students (55%). ESL students were also most likely to be working full time, more than 35 hours a week (59%). The lowest rate of full time employment was for Support Program students (21%).

When asked how many hours they would like to be working, students in all groups except General Population were much more likely to want to increase their hours of employment than decrease them (see Table 3b). General Population students showed a small inclination to reduce hours from full-time to part-time employment

Median hourly wages were relatively low, ranging from \$8.00 an hour for GED and Support Program students, to \$8.63 for General Population students, to \$10.00 an hour for ESL students (see Table 3c). Median wages were similar for males and females within each group.

Sources of financial support

Sources of financial support other than employment varied considerably among the groups (see Table 3d). Those least likely to receive any additional support were GED students (27%) and ESL students (42%). However, nearly all the GED students and approximately three-fourths of the ESL students were taking free classes and, therefore, had lower costs for their current education. For this reason, most of the following comparisons in sources of financial support have been made between the two transition groups and between the two academic groups.

ESL students received substantially more support from family members, which includes spouses (29%), than GED students (9%). Not surprisingly, very few ESL or GED students received student loans, Pell grants, or scholarships.

General Population students were less likely to be receiving additional financial support (72%) than were Support Program students (89%). Students in the Support Program group relied much more heavily on Pell Grants (72%) than those in the General Population group (25%), and were twice as likely to have a student loan (53% vs. 25%). More than a third of the students in the Support Program (37%) and General Population (36%) groups received scholarships. In addition, some Support Program students received TRIO grants (16%). General Population students were more likely to be receiving assistance from their families (23%) than were those in the Support Program group (9%).

GED students were more likely than ESL students to be receiving child support, child care assistance or Employment First assistance. Support Program students were more likely than those in the General Population group to be receiving child support or child care assistance. Employment First provided support to about one tenth (9%) of students in each group except ESL (3%).

Family college attendance and support

Students were asked about the college attendance of their parents, siblings, aunts, uncles and cousins (see Table 4a). Nearly two-thirds (63%) of the students surveyed had a parent/guardian and/or sibling who had attended college. Immediate family college attendance rates were highest for General Population students (82%), followed by Support Program (67%), GED (53%) and ESL (46%) students. ESL students were more likely than others to have no relatives who had attended college (29%) and to not know whether or not some relatives had attended college (17%).

Three-fourths (79%) of the students said that their parents were *very supportive* of them with respect to going to college, while few (16%) said they were *somewhat supportive*, and very few (6%) said they were *not at all supportive* (see Table 4b). The high, *very supportive*, level was similar across all groups. However, ESL students were more likely than others to say the parents were *not at all supportive* (13%) and less likely to say they were *somewhat supportive* (9%).

IV. College Access Problems

Potential problems checklist

The student survey presented a list of potential problems for going to college and asked the respondents to check those that applied to them (see Table 5), and to list any other problems. Most students (92%) identified at least one problem. GED and Support Program students were a little more likely to have some problems (95%) than ESL (89%) or General Population (87%) students.

College access problems related to the costs of education and basic living needs were the most prevalent among each of the groups, though the percentages with cost problems varied. Support Program students were much more likely than others to identify cost-related problems: more than three-fourths (82%) had a problem with the cost of tuition and books, compared to less than two-thirds of General Population (63%), ESL (58%) and GED (55%) students. The majority of Support Program students identified the cost of food and other basic expenses (70%) and the cost of housing (59%) as problems. The other groups were much less likely to identify the costs of food and housing. Support Program students also were much more likely than the others to identify lack of affordable transportation (34%) and distance (30%) as problems.

The results reflect the fact that Support Program students were much more likely to be from economically disadvantaged families than General Population students. The lower prevalence of cost-related problems for ESL and GED students perhaps reflects the fact that most were taking free classes and were not currently enrolled in an academic program. The high full-time employment rates, higher wages, and greater family support for ESL students also might have mitigated problems with the costs of going to college. Nevertheless, the majority of ESL and GED students did identify some cost-related problems.

One economic issue was more of a problem for General Population students than for others: the hours needed to work. Two-fifths (42%) of General Population students identified that problem, compared to one-third (32%) of Support Program students and about one-fourth of ESL (28%)

and GED (25%) students. This is consistent with the finding that the General Population group was the only one that preferred to be working fewer hours.

College access problems due to lack of information about college choices, programs, procedures or financial aid were less prevalent than cost-related problems, but were issues for a number of students, especially GED and ESL students. Support Program students were least likely to identify problems with lack of information.

A few problems affected students primarily from one group. Nearly half (44%) of ESL students identified language as a college access problem. GED students had problems with poor grades (25%), academic skills (23%) and not knowing what to study (18%). Support Program students identified problems with computer/internet access (20%) and child care costs (16%).

Students also were asked specific questions about the issues of transportation, computer access and, for parents, child care. They were asked details of their arrangements, what problems they might have, and ideas on relieving any problems they had.

Transportation

More than three-fourths (80%) of the students surveyed drove a car to school (see Table 6). ESL and GED students were less likely than others to drive a car, reflecting the fact that most of them were attending Metropolitan Community College and had more access to public transportation. Students who did not drive a car relied primarily on getting a ride from someone (48%) or the bus (40%).

One-fourth (25%) of the students reported problems with transportation, but the rates were much higher for students in the Support Program group (47%). Nearly all (93%) of the students in this group drove a car. These students were more likely than those in the General Population to be economically disadvantaged and most (85%) were attending colleges in non-metropolitan areas, where public transportation options are limited.

Problems for students who drove a car were primarily the costs of gas and maintenance, with a few having problems with insurance and licenses. For students who did not drive a car, the principle problems were unreliability, poor bus service and the cost of bus tickets. Student ideas on ways to relieve their transportation problems included better public transportation, free bus passes for students, lower college expenses so they have more money for car or public transportation costs, and grants for transportation costs.

Computer/ Internet Access

Most of the students surveyed accessed the internet from computers at home (66%) and at the college (54%), (see Table 7). Some students used the library (28%), a laptop with wireless internet (18%), someone's home (17%), work place (12%) and/or community centers (7%). ESL and GED students were less likely than others to use the computer at home or the college, or have a laptop with wireless internet. GED students were more likely than others to use the library (39%), and ESL students were more likely than others to use a community center (22%).

One-fifth (20%) of the students reported some problems with computer access. Students with a laptop were least likely to have problems (6%), while those without a laptop or home computer experienced the most problems (38%). ESL and GED students reported fewer problems with computer access than General Population and Support Group students with the same types of access.

For students without a home computer or laptop, the primary computer access problem was inadequate computer skills. Other problems included difficulty in finding an available computer, the hours the library was open, and costs of getting to where a computer was available, including paying for childcare.

For students with a home computer or laptop, the primary computer access problem was the cost of the internet. Other problems included unreliable internet connections, computer break downs and the associated costs of going to the college for access, inadequate computer skills, and computer compatibility issues with assignments. Student ideas for relieving their computer access problems included discounted internet fees for students, grants for purchasing computers and internet service, a college laptop loan service, hours for college computer access after midnight, and more computer training opportunities.

Child care arrangements and problems

Students with dependent age children relied on several types of child care (see Table 8). No child care was needed for one-third (32%) of these parents because the child was old enough to be left home alone, was in school when the parent was gone, or was cared for by the student's spouse or an older child. The principal child care arrangements were with family members (37%) and day care centers (33%). Other types of arrangements were used primarily in conjunction with a family member provider or day care center. ESL students were most likely to have a family member provider (67%) and Support Program students were least likely (11%). General Population students were most likely to use a day care center (50%) and ESL students were least likely (8%).

Parents whose children all were between the ages of 12 and 18 years old reported no problems with child care, primarily because the children were old enough to care for themselves. More than one-fourth (26%) of parents with children under the age of 12 reported some problem with child care. Child care problems were least likely for ESL students (9%) and GED students (22%), perhaps because they were the more likely than others to use a family member for child care.

The principle child care problem that students reported was the cost. Other problems included the hours that care was available, difficulties making arrangements at certain times (e.g., on snow days, when a child was sick, when the family member was not available), lack of care options for special needs children, and lack of trust in providers. The main idea from students for relieving their child care problems was to have better access to good quality, affordable child care. Other ideas included child care on campus and more availability of part-time care for children who were in preschool.

V. Career Education, Goals and Plans

Career education activities

A little more than half (57%) of the students surveyed had participated in some type of career education activity (see Table 9a). Support program students were much more likely to have participated in one or more activities (82%) than were students in the other groups. Only half (51%) of General Population students and less than half of ESL (42%) and GED (46%) students had participated in any career education activities.

At least one-third of the Support Program students participated in each of the top five activities: *skills assessment* (51%), *interest assessment* (40%), *read career materials* (36%), *college/university visit* (35%), and *career fair* (33%). These participation rates were generally twice that of the other student groups. More than half (56%) of Support Program students participated in three or more types of career education activities, a rate that was twice that of General Population students (24%) and much higher than for students in the ESL (15%) and GED (5%) programs (see Table 9b).

Most of the students rated their high school near the mid-range on a six point scale (3.5) on how well it had prepared them to choose and plan for a career (see Table 9c). ESL students, who had the lowest career education activity participation rate, gave the highest ratings to their high schools (4.2), whereas Support Program students, who participated at the highest rates, gave their high schools the lowest ratings (3.1). One interpretation of these results is that the community college support programs include a substantial career education/exploration component.

Important career considerations

Students were asked to identify important considerations in their choice of a career from a list of 16 factors. The majority of students identified *interesting to me* (75%), *pay/benefits* (63%), *availability of jobs* (53%), and *work environment* (50%) as being important (see Table 9d). However, there were substantial differences among the student groups. Support Program students were much more likely than others to identify any of the factors as important considerations, with nine factors selected by the majority of that group. General Population students had the second highest number of important considerations, with seven factors selected by the majority of that group. In contrast, only three factors were important considerations for the majority of GED students (*interesting to me*, 63%; *pay/benefits*, 60%; *my family's support*, 52%), and none for a majority of ESL students.

The largest differences across groups in the importance of career considerations include *interesting to me* (Support Program 93% vs. ESL 46%), *work environment* (Support Program 71% vs. ESL 14%), *job security* (Support Program 66% vs. ESL 23%), and *pay/benefits* (General Population 77% vs. ESL 34%). The responses to this survey item were examined by gender within the groups to see if the wide differences might be attributable to differences in the gender composition of the groups (ESL and GED were gender-balanced, while Support Program and General Population were predominately female). However, even when controlling for gender, the results were essentially the same.

The very limited range of factors that were important career considerations for ESL and GED students, as compared to the range of important considerations for other students, suggests that perhaps these students believed that their career choices were fairly limited, and that they couldn't afford to be too discriminating about non-essential characteristics of their employment.

Career goals and plans

Students were asked three open-ended questions about their career goals: *What is your occupation goal for the near future? What is your ultimate career goal? What are the steps you plan to pursue that career?* Responses to the first two questions were very similar, with only a handful of students planning to switch occupations after they achieve their near-future goal. The following discussion focuses on responses to the question about the students' ultimate career goals.

Although most students (71%) listed a specific occupation as their ultimate career goal, others responded that they wanted to get or keep a good job, pursue an education or achieve personal goals, or said that they didn't know what their goal was (see Table 10a). Some of the job goals were *have a job that I like, work from home, do quality work at a good place, not to get fired, and have a good job with benefits*. Education goals included, among others, *getting a Masters degree, going to college, and graduating from the University*. Personal goals included *getting where I want to be, to help at least one individual, be successful and secure with money, and to be all that I can be*.

Support Program students were more likely than others to identify a specific occupation as their career goal (80%). The goal of getting or keeping a good job was most prevalent among General Population students (20%). GED students were more likely than others to not know their career goal (20%). Differences among specific occupation goals are described later by student group and gender.

Responses to the question about career steps were coded into the categories of *education, relevant work experience, getting/keeping a job, personal behaviors, financial goals, a specific occupation* and *don't know*. Some responses included more than one category. Three-fourths (73%) of the students identified education as a step to meeting their career goals (see Table 10b). ESL students were less likely than others to identify education as a career step (52%), and more likely than others to identify personal behaviors (30%) or list a specific occupation (19%). The survey language might have been a problem for some ESL students who simply repeated their occupation as a step to meeting that goal. Only a few students (12%) listed relevant work experience as a step in reaching their career goals. Support Program (20%) and General Population (16%) students were more likely than ESL (7%) and GED (2%) students to identify relevant work experience. GED students were much more likely than others to say they didn't know the steps to reaching their career goal (20%).

Students were asked to identify from a check list: *Who or what have been helpful to you in identifying and pursuing education and/or career opportunities?* (see Table 10c). Overall, parents (57%), friends (45%) and other family members (35%) were more likely to be identified as being helpful than were education professionals in college (< 25%), high school (<20%), or community programs (<10%). There were some differences among the student groups: ESL

students were less likely than others to identify parents (44%), friends (18%) or other family members (9%) as being helpful. Support Program students were, understandably, more likely than others to identify a college student support program as being helpful (35%). ESL and Support Programs students were a little more likely than GED and General Population students to identify college counselors, college instructors or community programs as being helpful.

Student ideas on ways to make it easier to identifying and pursuing career options included increased career exploration programs starting in middle school, more high school programs for helping students with their career options, increased opportunities for job shadowing and other work-based experiences, and improved career counseling.

Occupational Goals by Gender

Students' occupational career goals were coded into six broad career clusters based on the Nebraska Career Education Model. The specific occupation that a student listed as the ultimate career goal was the one that usually was coded. However, if that response was not occupation specific, then any occupation listed for the near-future goal or referenced in the planned career steps was used instead. If none of the three items provided a specific occupation goal, then the response was excluded from the analysis. Overall, responses from 151 of the 217 surveys were coded.

The results were examined by gender because there are strong gender differences in some career areas and several of the student groups were predominately female. Since the numbers in some groups were too small to divide by gender, the two transitional groups, ESL and GED, and the two academic credit groups, Support Program and General Population, were combined for this analysis (see Table 11).

Three of the six career clusters showed strong gender differences: females were much more likely than males to be pursuing careers in Health Sciences (24% vs. 12%) and Human Services (35% vs. 18%). Males were more than six times as likely as females to be pursuing careers in Industrial, Manufacturing and Engineering Systems (IMES) fields (33% vs. 5%). These findings are consistent with the large body of evidence on gender differences in occupations. Among females, differences were relatively small between the two student groups in their career pursuits at the broad cluster level. Male students in the ESL/GED transition group were much less likely to be pursuing Communications and Information Systems careers (3% vs. 25%) and much more likely to be pursuing Health Sciences careers (17% vs. 0%) than males in the academic credit group.

Nontraditional IMES Career Interests for Females

The survey asked students about their interests in a selection of occupations in the Industrial, Manufacturing and Engineering Systems (IMES) career cluster in order to gauge gender differences in a field that is nontraditional for females. IMES has the lowest percent of female workers among all the career clusters. As noted above, only 5 percent of female students were pursuing a career in the IMES field, compared to 33 percent of males.

For both males and females, potential interest in any of the thirteen IMES occupations was substantially higher than the percent pursuing an IMES career (see Table 12a). However, males

were three times as likely as females to express an interest in one or more IMES occupations (68% vs. 21%). For both groups, interest was spread across a wide range of fields. Among females, the differences between the student groups were fairly small. However, males in the ESL and GED group were much more likely than other males to be interested in any IMES occupations (77% vs. 50%).

Students were asked to rate how much they knew about the IMES field on a scale of 1 (nothing) to 6 (a great deal), (see Table 12b). On average, males responded near the mid-point of the scale (3.2), substantially higher than for females (2.1). There were no differences between the student groups for either males or females.

The students were asked, *If you have little or no interest in the above Industrial Technology career options, what are your reasons?* The responses were coded into eight reason categories (see Table 12c). Response rates to this question were fairly low, representing about half of the students who were not interested in any of the IMES occupations. Consequently the response patterns reported here should be considered with caution.

Many students did not articulate a reason for lack of interest and, instead, responded *I'm just not interested*, or *I don't know*. Although no females said *I don't know*, the total responses in these two categories combined were similar for males (45%) and females (38%). The most prevalent specific reason was *I have other interests/skills* both for males (36%) and females (29%). A small percentage in each group indicated a dislike for certain characteristics of the IMES field (males, 9%; females, 6%).

There were three reasons for lack of interest in IMES that were given only by females: *I don't have the needed skills/abilities* (16%), *I've not been exposed to it* (5%); and *It's not for females* (5%). There were differences between the female student groups on these reasons, with the Support Program/General Population group much more likely than the ESL/GED group to say they lacked needed skills/abilities (20% vs. 7%), or had not been exposed to it (7% vs. 0%). ESL/GED females were more likely than other females to say the IMES occupations are not for females (14% vs. 2%).

These reasons are often cited among the barriers females face in going into nontraditional fields: lack of exposure, lack of underlying skills and gender stereotypes. Although only one-fourth (27%) of the responding females articulated any of those reasons, overcoming those barriers for even that percent of women would go a long way toward reducing the IMES gender gap.

Appendix A

A.1 Number of Survey Respondents by Community College and Student Category

Student Categories	ESL	GED	General Population	Student Support	Total
Community College					
Central Community College				26	26
Metropolitan Community College	33	63	27		123
Mid-Plains Community College	1				1
Northeast Community College	1	1	14	11	27
Southeast Community College	2	1	16	9	28
Western Nebraska Community College				12	12
Total	37	65	57	58	217

GED programs, offered through Adult Basic Education, are non-credit and free for students seeking a high school equivalency certificate

ESL program students were either enrolled in free, Adult Basic Education non-credit ESL classes or fee-based, credit ESL classes that did not apply towards the academic requirements of any award programs.

Support Program students were enrolled in credit classes and supported by a variety of programs across the different colleges: TRIO, Veterans Upward Bound, Single-Parent/Displaced Homemaker, and Student Support Services.

General Population students were those enrolled in credit classes who were not participating in any of the student support programs.

Community College Student Career Plans Survey
Nebraska Department of Education

(Note: this survey was online through Survey Monkey, and this print version approximates the layout of the online version)

I. Demographic Information

1. ID _____

2. **Community College**

Central Community College

Northeast Community College

Metropolitan Community College

Southeast Community College

Mid-Plains Community College

Western Nebraska Community College

3. Age ____ 4. gender Male Female

5. **Race/Ethnicity** *Check all that apply:*

African American American Indian Asian Hispanic White

other (please specify) _____

II. HIGH SCHOOL EDUCATION

1. **What, if any, elective career education courses did you take in high school?**

2. **What is the highest grade level you completed in high school?**

8th grade or less

10th

12th

9th

11th

3. **Did you ever drop out of high school for a while?** Yes No

4. **Did you graduate from high school?**

Yes, in the U.S. Yes, in another country No

5. **If No: Did you earn a GED?** Yes No Working on a GED Not applicable

6. **Were you ever in an English as a Second Language (ESL) program in high school?**

Yes No

7. **If Yes: How old were you when you began school in the U.S.?** _____

III. FAMILY & HOUSING

1. **Marital Status** single married separated/divorced widowed

2. **Do you live on campus?** Yes No

3. **Who lives with you in your household?** *Check all that apply:*

parent(s) spouse my child(ren) brother(s)/sister(s) grandparent(s)

other relatives fiancée/girlfriend/boyfriend roommate other _____

I live by myself

4. **Do you live in subsidized housing or get Section 8 rental assistance?**

Yes No

5. Are you a parent/guardian of any children under the age of 18? Yes No
[If you are NOT a parent/guardian of any children under age 18 living with you, skip to the TRANSPORTATION section]

IV. CHILD CARE

1. How many children do you have under age 18?

1 3 5 or more
 2 4

2. What are the ages of your children? (check all that apply)

less than 1 year 6 to 8 years 18 and older
 1 to 2 years 9 to 11 years
 3 to 5 years 12 to 17 years

3. What child care arrangements do you have when you are at work or school?

Check all that apply: family member non family baby sitter family day care home
 after school programs day care center preschool
 not needed reason) _____

4. What problems, if any, do you have with child care?

no problems
 problems (please describe child care problems)

5. What do you believe could help relieve your child care problem(s)?

V. TRANSPORTATION

1. How do you usually travel between home and the college and/or work place?

Check all that apply: I drive a car I drive a motorcycle someone gives me a ride
 I'm in a car pool bus walk bicycle other _____

2. What problems, if any, do you have with transportation?

no problems
 problems (please describe transportation problems)

3. What do you believe could help relieve your transportation problem(s)?

VI. COMPUTER ACCESS

1. Where do you usually access a computer with internet service for your school work?

Check all that apply: home college laptop with wireless work place
 friend/family home library community center other _____

2. What problems, if any, do you have with computer or internet access?

no problems
 problems (please describe computer access problems)

3. What do you believe could help relieve your computer access problems (s)?

VII. FINANCIAL SUPPORT AND EMPLOYMENT

1. What types of financial support are you (and any children) receiving? *Check all that apply:*

none of the following Pell grant student loan TRIO grant from my family
 child support scholarship(s)(specify) _____
 Employment First child care subsidy/assistance

2. Please specify any other sources of financial support.

3. How many hours a week on average are you working for pay? _____

(If you do Not work for pay, skip to the POSTSECONDARY EDUCATION section)

4. What kind of work do you do at your job(s)? _____

5. How much do you earn per hour on average? _____

VIII. POSTSECONDARY EDUCATION

1. What student support programs or services are you involved in at this college

Check all that apply: ESL ESL literacy lab Trio Upward Bound
 Veterans Upward Bound Student Support Services Single Parent Homemaker GED
 other student support services (specify) _____

2. How many credit hours, if any, have you completed at the college level? _____

3. Are you currently enrolled in a program of study that will lead to a certificate, license, diploma or degree? Yes No

4. If YES, In what program are you enrolled? _____

5. Are you taking courses for the purpose of transferring credit to another academic institution?

Yes No

6. What is the highest level of education you think you will achieve one day? *Check only one:*

GED high school diploma vocational license/certificate
 2 year degree 4 year degree Master's degree or higher.

IX. CAREER PLANNING

1. Have you participated in any of the following activities to help you decide on possible career options? *Check all that apply:*

none
 interest assessment skills assessment career fair workplace field trip/job shadowing
 read career materials career exploration course/workshop/presentation
 specific career-related courses student career organization member (specify) _____
 workstudy/apprentice/employment in career field college/university visit

2. Please specify any other type of career planning activities.

3. How well do you think your high school education prepared you to choose and plan for a career?
Circle a number: not well 1.....2.....3.....4.....5.....6 very well

4. Which of the following considerations are important to you in your choice of a career?

Check all that apply:

- interesting to me matches my skills pay/benefits work environment
 people I'd work with value to society my family's support friends' support
 education requirements scholarship availability cost of education job security
 opportunity to travel flexible schedule availability of jobs location of jobs
 other _____

X. CAREER PLANNING (continued)

1. What is your occupation goal for the near future?

2. What is your ultimate career goal?

3. What are the steps you plan to take to pursue that career?

4. Have any family members attended college?

- parent/guardian brother sister aunt uncle
 cousin (male) cousin (female) none of the above don't know

5. How encouraging are your family members for you to go to college?

- very supportive somewhat supportive not at all supportive
comments: _____

XI. CAREER PLANNING (continued)

1. Which of the following problems do you face in terms of going to college? Check all that apply

- cost of tuition and books cost of housing cost of food and other basic expenses
 lack of affordable transportation distance hours needed for work physical disabilities
 lack of interest poor grades academic skills lack of family support language
 discrimination don't know what to study lack of information about college choices
 lack of information on financial aid lack of information on how to apply or register
 lack of information about programs child care access child care quality child care costs
 paying child support computer/internet access
other (specify) _____ nothing

2. Who or what have been very helpful to you in identifying and pursuing education and/or career opportunities? Check all that apply:

- parent/guardian other family member high school guidance counselor
 high school teacher high school principal/administrator college recruiter
 college counselor college instructor college student support program
 community/religious organization program friend
 other (specify) _____

3. What ideas do you have for ways to make it easier for you and others to identify career options and obtain the necessary education to pursue your goals?

XII. CAREER FIELD: INDUSTRIAL TECHNOLOGY

The following questions concern your attitudes about two different broad career fields: Industrial Technology and Business

Career Field: Industrial Technology, including Architecture, Construction, Manufacturing, Engineering and Transportation

1. Are you potentially interested in any following Industrial Technology career options for yourself? Check all that apply:

drafter architect building inspector civil engineer welder electrician
 woodworker carpenter automobile mechanic autobody repair
 truck driver small engine mechanic aircraft mechanic heavy equipment operator
 other Industrial Technology careers _____

2. How much do you know about this career field?

Circle a number: nothing 1....2....3....4....5....6 a great deal

3. What people do you know working or studying in this career field? Check all that apply:

no one family member (male) family member (female)
 friend (male) friend (female) other (male) other (female)

4. If you have little or no interest in the above Industrial Technology career options, what are your reasons?

XIII. CAREER FIELD: BUSINESS

Career Field: Business, including Management, Marketing, Finance, Human Resources, Business Analysis, Communications and Administrative/Information Support

1. Are you potentially interested in any of the following Business career options for yourself?

Check all that apply:

general manager market research analyst sales manager accountant bookkeeper
 financial analyst human resources manager insurance agent real estate broker
 public relations specialist customer service representative public administrator
 database manager web designer other Business careers _____

2. How much do you know about this career field?

Circle a number: nothing 1....2....3....4....5....6 a great deal

3. What people do you know working or studying in this career field? Check all that apply:

no one family member (male) family member (female)
 friend (male) friend (female) other (male) other (female)

4. If you have little or no interest in the above Business career options, what are your reasons?

Table 1.	Demographic Characteristics of Community College Students by Student Category				
	ESL	GED	General Population	Support Program	Total
Number of responses	37	65	57	58	217
Gender					
female	47%	49%	71%	84%	64%
male	53%	51%	29%	16%	36%
Total	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%
Age Group					
15-19	14%	30%	29%	12%	22%
20-24	17%	23%	20%	26%	22%
25-29	21%	21%	20%	19%	20%
30-39	38%	11%	7%	21%	17%
40-49	7%	11%	20%	10%	13%
50-59	3%	5%	4%	12%	7%
Total	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%
Race/ Ethnicity					
African American/African	32%	44%	7%	2%	21%
American Indian	0%	0%	0%	7%	2%
Asian	32%	3%	2%	2%	8%
Hispanic	32%	14%	7%	5%	13%
White, non Hispanic	3%	38%	84%	84%	56%
Total	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%
Marital Status					
single	54%	72%	69%	62%	65%
married	46%	19%	24%	10%	22%
separated/divorced	0%	9%	7%	26%	12%
widowed	0%	0%	0%	2%	1%
Total	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%
Parental status					
Have Children < 18 years	38%	46%	23%	47%	39%
Single, custodial parent of child < 18	0%	21%	11%	32%	18%
Housing					
Lives on campus	3%	2%	18%	21%	11%
Lives in subsidized housing	17%	22%	4%	21%	16%
Other persons in household	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%
parent(s)	14%	38%	18%	26%	25%
spouse	41%	21%	23%	9%	21%
my child(ren)	32%	41%	23%	48%	37%
brother(s)/sister(s)	19%	22%	9%	22%	18%
grandparent(s)	0%	3%	4%	0%	2%
other relatives	3%	11%	4%	3%	6%
fiancée/girlfriend/boyfriend	0%	11%	12%	5%	8%
roommate	19%	2%	23%	10%	13%
I live by myself	8%	13%	11%	10%	11%

Table 2.	Education Status and Aspirations of Community College				
	by Student Category				
a. High School Education Status	ESL	GED	General Population	Support Program	Total
Did not graduate high school:					
No GED	19%	0%	0%	0%	3%
Currently working on GED	8%	92%	0%	0%	29%
Has GED	0%	0%	7%	18%	7%
Graduated High School in another country:					
No GED	57%	0%	14%	2%	14%
Currently working on GED	3%	8%	0%	0%	3%
Has GED	8%	0%	0%	0%	1%
Graduated High School in U.S.A.	5%	0%	79%	81%	43%
Total	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%
b. Postsecondary Education Status	ESL	GED	General Population	Support Program	Total
completed any college credit hours	46%	8%	90%	100%	57%
currently enrolled in community college award program	19%	9%	83%	73%	47%
c. Highest Level of Education Expected	ESL	GED	General Population	Support Program	Total
GED	8%	40%	0%	0%	13%
high school diploma	5%	3%	6%	3%	4%
vocational license/certificate	8%	3%	4%	2%	4%
2 year degree	22%	18%	29%	36%	27%
4 year degree	19%	10%	31%	31%	23%
Masters degree or higher	38%	25%	29%	28%	29%
	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%

Table 3.		Employment and Financial Support for Community College Students					
		By Student Group					
a. Hours a week working for pay	ESL	GED	General Population	Support Program	Total		
none	17%	45%	31%	30%	33%		
1 to 10	10%	5%	6%	8%	7%		
11 to 20	7%	9%	10%	21%	12%		
21 to 35	7%	9%	25%	21%	16%		
36 to 40	31%	24%	10%	17%	19%		
41 to 50	28%	5%	13%	2%	10%		
51 or more	0%	2%	6%	2%	3%		
b. Hours a week would like to be working	ESL	GED	General Population	Support Program	Total		
none	4%	20%	33%	8%	18%		
1 to 10	0%	7%	6%	4%	5%		
11 to 20	11%	9%	14%	20%	14%		
21 to 35	7%	13%	27%	26%	19%		
36 to 40	32%	28%	12%	28%	24%		
41 to 50	36%	17%	2%	8%	13%		
51 or more	11%	6%	6%	6%	7%		
	ESL	GED	General Population	Support Program	Total		
c. Median Hourly Wage	\$10.00	\$8.00	\$8.63	\$8.00	\$8.52		
d. Sources of Financial Support	ESL	GED	General Population	Support Program	Total		
none of the following	58%	73%	28%	11%	40%		
student loan	0%	0%	25%	53%	22%		
Pell grant	3%	2%	25%	72%	29%		
TRIO grant	3%	0%	0%	16%	5%		
scholarships	3%	0%	36%	37%	21%		
from my family	29%	9%	23%	9%	16%		
child support	0%	7%	2%	12%	6%		
child care subsidy/assistance	0%	6%	0%	12%	5%		
Employment First	3%	9%	9%	9%	8%		

Table 4.	Problems faced in going to college				
	Community College Students by Student Group				
a. Family members who have attended college	ESL	GED	General Population	Support Program	Total
parent and sibling	3%	18%	37%	21%	21%
parent, no sibling	11%	14%	20%	18%	16%
sibling, no parent	31%	21%	24%	28%	26%
parent or sibling	46%	53%	82%	67%	63%
other relatives only	9%	18%	4%	9%	10%
don't know	17%	11%	6%	0%	8%
none of the above	29%	19%	8%	25%	20%
Total	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%
b. Parent/Guardian Support for student going to college	ESL	GED	General Population	Support Program	Total
not at all supportive	13%	6%	4%	4%	6%
somewhat supportive	9%	20%	17%	15%	16%
very supportive	78%	75%	79%	82%	79%
Total	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%

Table 5.	Problems faced in going to college				
	Community College Students by Student Group				
Potential problems:	ESL	GED	General Population	Support Program	Total
cost of tuition and books	58%	55%	63%	82%	65%
cost of housing	25%	21%	33%	59%	36%
cost of food and other basic expenses	17%	25%	40%	70%	40%
lack of affordable transportation	14%	13%	6%	34%	17%
distance	14%	11%	17%	30%	18%
hours needed for work	28%	25%	42%	32%	32%
physical disabilities	0%	5%	2%	13%	6%
lack of interest	3%	9%	13%	2%	7%
poor grades	3%	25%	4%	5%	10%
academic skills	8%	23%	8%	11%	12%
lack of family support	3%	2%	4%	7%	4%
language	44%	7%	6%	0%	12%
discrimination	6%	7%	2%	2%	4%
don't know what to study	6%	18%	10%	5%	10%
lack of information about college choices	14%	13%	6%	4%	9%
lack of information on financial aid	19%	27%	13%	5%	16%
lack of info on how to apply or register	14%	13%	6%	4%	9%
lack of information about programs	14%	14%	13%	7%	12%
child care access	3%	9%	2%	9%	6%
child care quality	0%	7%	2%	7%	5%
child care costs	8%	11%	6%	16%	11%
paying child support	0%	0%	4%	4%	2%
computer/internet access	8%	9%	6%	20%	11%
nothing	11%	5%	13%	5%	8%

Table 6.	Transportation Methods and Problems				
	Community College Students by Student Category				
	ESL	GED	General Population	Support Program	Total
Drives a car to school/work	75%	62%	91%	93%	80%
Has problems with transportation	17%	21%	13%	47%	25%
Modes of Transportation for Students who do not drive a car					
gets a ride from someone	**	**	**	**	48%
bus	**	**	**	**	40%
walk	**	**	**	**	21%
motorcycle	**	**	**	**	5%
bicycle	**	**	**	**	2%
**number of students too few for analysis					

Table 7.	Computer Access and Problems				
	Community College Students by Student Category				
Usual access to computer and internet	ESL	GED	General Population	Support Program	Total
home	60%	53%	75%	76%	66%
college	43%	41%	60%	69%	54%
laptop with wireless	0%	10%	26%	29%	18%
work place	11%	10%	9%	16%	12%
friend/family home	8%	22%	13%	22%	17%
library	19%	39%	18%	26%	26%
community center	22%	9%	0%	2%	7%
Any problems with computer/internet access					
have laptop with wireless	NA	**	7%	0%	6%
have home computer (no laptop)	5%	8%	15%	29%	15%
no laptop or home computer	33%	35%	50%	40%	38%
Total	17%	21%	20%	23%	20%
** number of students too few for analysis					

Table 8.	Child Care Arrangements and Problems				
	Community College Students by Student Category				
Usual child care arrangements for children < 18 years	ESL	GED	General Population	Support Program	Total
family member	67%	41%	25%	11%	37%
non family baby sitter	8%	7%	0%	11%	8%
family day care home	8%	7%	0%	30%	5%
after school programs	0%	0%	8%	41%	5%
day care center	8%	30%	50%	22%	33%
preschool	0%	4%	0%	33%	3%
not needed	17%	22%	50%	15%	32%
Number of students	12	27	12	27	78
Any child care problems, children <12 years	9%	22%	40%	33%	26%
Number of students	11	23	10	21	65

Table 9.		Career Education Activities, Preparation, and Career Considerations				
		Community College Students by Student Group				
a. Participation by type of Career Education activity:	ESL	GED	General Population	Support Program	Total	
none	58%	54%	49%	18%	43%	
skills assessment	9%	15%	24%	51%	27%	
read career materials	21%	10%	20%	36%	22%	
college/universtiy visit	18%	8%	22%	35%	21%	
interest assessment	9%	8%	16%	40%	20%	
career fair	6%	15%	13%	33%	18%	
workplace field trip/job shadowing	15%	6%	18%	27%	17%	
career exploration course/workshop/presentation	3%	6%	9%	31%	14%	
workstudy/apprentice/employment in career	9%	4%	7%	29%	13%	
specific career-related course	3%	0%	13%	27%	12%	
student organization member	0%	2%	4%	13%	5%	
b. Students participating in three or more types of career education activities	ESL	GED	General Population	Support Program	Total	
	15%	5%	24%	56%	26%	
c. How well high school prepared them to choose and plan for a career:	ESL	GED	General Population	Support Program	Total	
average on scale (1=not well; 6=very well)	4.2	3.5	3.4	3.1	3.5	
d. Important considerations in the choice of a career	ESL	GED	General Population	Support Program	Total	
interesting to me	46%	63%	86%	93%	75%	
pay/benefits	34%	60%	77%	72%	63%	
availability of jobs	43%	37%	55%	72%	53%	
work environment	14%	45%	55%	71%	50%	
my family's support	37%	52%	55%	48%	49%	
matches my skills	26%	37%	55%	64%	47%	
job security	23%	33%	53%	66%	46%	
flexible schedule	29%	35%	43%	64%	44%	
education requirements	20%	37%	39%	52%	39%	
location of jobs	26%	28%	49%	48%	39%	
people I'd work with	14%	30%	37%	50%	35%	
value to society	14%	27%	35%	45%	32%	
opportunity to travel	29%	32%	31%	29%	30%	
cost of education	11%	15%	28%	41%	25%	
scholarship availability	23%	17%	24%	26%	22%	
friends' support	9%	27%	22%	24%	22%	

Table 10.		Career Goals and Plans				
		Community College Students by Student Group				
a. Type of response to "Ultimate career goal" question:	ESL	GED	General Population	Support Program	Total	
specific occupation	76%	64%	63%	80%	71%	
education goal	15%	6%	7%	6%	8%	
get/keep a job	0%	6%	20%	6%	8%	
personal goal	3%	4%	4%	2%	3%	
don't know	6%	20%	7%	6%	10%	
Total	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	
b. Types of responses to "Plans to pursue the career goal" question	ESL	GED	General Population	Support Program	Total	
education plans	52%	76%	81%	76%	73%	
relevant work experience	7%	2%	16%	20%	12%	
personal behavior	30%	8%	16%	14%	15%	
financial goal	0%	0%	2%	4%	2%	
specific occupation	19%	2%	2%	0%	4%	
get/keep a job	4%	4%	2%	6%	4%	
don't know	7%	20%	2%	4%	9%	
c. Those most helpful in identifying and pursuing education and/or career opportunities	ESL	GED	General Population	Support Program	Total	
parent/guardian	44%	55%	64%	61%	57%	
other family member	9%	51%	34%	35%	35%	
high school guidance counselor	12%	9%	17%	15%	13%	
high school teacher	21%	15%	19%	19%	18%	
high school principal/administrator	3%	2%	2%	4%	3%	
college recruiter	3%	4%	2%	2%	3%	
college counselor	18%	9%	17%	30%	18%	
college instructor	32%	11%	9%	41%	23%	
college student support program	12%	9%	6%	35%	16%	
community/religious organization program	18%	2%	4%	15%	9%	
friend	18%	56%	51%	44%	45%	
government program worker	0%	2%	0%	7%	3%	
Myself	0%	0%	4%	4%	2%	

Table 11.	Occupational Goals by Career Cluster						
	Community College Students by Gender and Student Group						
	Females			Males			
		Support Program and General Population			Support Program and General Population		
	ESL and GED		Female Total	ESL and GED		Male Total	
Career Cluster							
Agriculture, Food & Natural Resources	0%	4%	3%	3%	0%	2%	
Business, Marketing and Management	28%	23%	24%	26%	25%	26%	
Communications & Information Systems	7%	10%	9%	3%	25%	10%	
Health Sciences	28%	23%	24%	17%	0%	12%	
Human Services	28%	38%	35%	17%	19%	18%	
Industrial, Manufacturing and Engineering Systems	10%	3%	5%	34%	31%	33%	
Total	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	
<p>Note: Responses were analyzed only for the 151 students who listed a specific occupation in response to one of the questions about near-future and ultimate career goals, and plans to reach those goals. If students identified more than one occupation, the response to the "ultimate career goal" question was used</p>							

Table 12.		Interest in Selected Industrial, Manufacturing and Engineering Systems Career Options					
		Community College Students by Gender and Student Group					
		Females			Males		
		ESL and GED	Support Program and General Population	Female Total	ESL and GED	Support Program and General Population	Male Total
a. IMES Field Occupations							
drafter		2%	4%	3%	6%	5%	6%
architect		7%	4%	5%	21%	14%	19%
building inspector		5%	2%	3%	13%	5%	10%
civil engineer		5%	1%	2%	15%	0%	10%
welder		0%	4%	2%	9%	18%	12%
electrician		2%	2%	2%	21%	5%	16%
woodworker		0%	5%	3%	17%	9%	14%
carpenter		2%	4%	3%	28%	0%	19%
automobile mechanic		2%	5%	4%	28%	5%	20%
autobody repair		2%	4%	3%	13%	5%	10%
truck driver		5%	2%	3%	21%	5%	16%
small engine mechanic		2%	2%	2%	26%	0%	17%
aircraft mechanic		0%	0%	0%	13%	9%	12%
heavy equipment operator		2%	2%	2%	21%	5%	16%
none of the above		74%	81%	79%	23%	50%	32%
number of respondents		43	84	127	47	22	69
b. How much student knows about this career field							
(1=nothing, 6=a great deal)		2.0	2.2	2.1	3.2	3.2	3.2
c. reasons not interested in IMES							
		ESL and GED	Support Program and General Population	Female Total	ESL and GED	Support Program and General Population	Male Total
don't like characteristics of the work		7%	5%	6%	**	**	9%
don't have needed skills or ability		7%	20%	16%	**	**	0%
have other interests/skills		29%	29%	29%	**	**	36%
not been exposed to it		0%	7%	5%	**	**	0%
not for females		14%	2%	5%	**	**	NA
like it, but don't want for a career		0%	0%	0%	**	**	9%
just not interested		43%	37%	38%	**	**	18%
don't know		0%	0%	0%	**	**	27%
total		100%	100%	100%	**	**	100%
number of respondents		14	41	55	5	6	11
**number of students too small for analysis							