ABSTRACT The increased attention given to the implementation of personnel preparation programs in the field of autism spectrum disorders (ASD) has directly paralleled the significant increase in the number of students identified with ASD. For this study, we sought to analyze key aspects of programs for professionals who work with students with ASD. In addition to a detailed analysis of multiple demographic characteristics related to these programs (e.g., length of time program offered, level of higher education at which the program is offered, number of courses within a program, field experience, online options), a critical focus in the research was assessing the reliance on evidence-based practices by these training programs. We also examined characteristics and practices relevant to the training of behavior analysts through the Behavior Analyst Certification Board’s (BACB) approved coursework.

SUMMARY

Purpose of Study

This article gave an overview of the state of practice for personnel preparation programs in the field of ASD, as well as the state of practice in regards to teacher education.

This study sought to determine the current support practices offered on college and university campuses for students with AS and provided recommendations for implementing support programs.

Framework

i. Sought out current information on the nature of higher education programs in the area of ASD.

ii. Analyzed and compared the nature of the coursework and course delivery in programs that are approved by the Behavior Analyst Certification Board (BACB) to other programs

iii. Investigated the evidence-based interventions that are being taught in personnel preparation programs and how much emphasis is placed on specific methodological approaches.
Population and Sample

i. A list of 342 IHE programs was generated by the National Center for Special Education Personnel and Related Service Providers offering personnel preparation in ASD, which was ultimately reduced to a list of 139 schools due to duplications and locations.

ii. Deletions from this list were made if they were not located in the United States, if they had not yet started their programs, or if the same program was offered in several locations.

iii. 412 ASD and BACB programs were contacted to participate in the study by completing an online survey of which 191 surveys were returned.

Overview of Methods

Created a 12 question electronic survey for the current survey, which included questions that related to the depth of the focus on teaching evidence-based practices as cited by the NPDC and NAC.

- **Question 1**: descriptive data about IHE replying to the survey
- **Question 2**: job title of participant
- **Question 3**: level of ASD training of the instructors teaching ASD
- **Question 4**: number of ASD specific undergraduate and graduate courses offered now and in the future
- **Question 5**: is the coursework BACB approved or was the institution applying for BACB approval in the future
- **Question 6**: does the institution’s home state have a list of autism competencies
- **Question 7-9**: online course delivery
- **Question 10**: participants had to choose from a detailed list of topics including evidence based practices from NAC and NPDC
- **Question 11**: does the institution offer field experience in ASD and if so how many hours.
- **Question 12**: select the theoretical framework of their coursework

**Variables or Broad Topics**

Not Applicable

**Findings/Results**

i. There is evidence of ongoing increase in the number of preparation programs that are focused on students with ASD. Which leads to the hypothesis that many of the IHE’s that identified as offering ASD programs embedded ASD into other courses rather than single ASD courses. Support services with AS and ASD are greatly needed.

ii. Many ASD specific courses were only offered to undergraduate students and typically only one course. At the graduate level the number of courses offered ranged from 1 to 4, which indicates a “true program.” The faculty that provided training in ASD had extensive field experience. Resource limitations including lack of funding and professionals trained in ASD appear to be barriers to implementing support programs for these students and there is no consensus on the best approach to provide supports.

iii. There is variance in field experience requirements.

iv. There wasn’t a significant relationship between geographic location and the likelihood of online offerings.

v. Most of the approved ASD programs are relatively “new” suggested since the numbers of programs have significantly increased since 2004.

vi. Evidence based practices are beginning to becoming more standard when creating and implementing ASD programs.

**Implications**

i. Need for more field experience hours in the training of professionals.

ii. Need for a greater consistency across the programs.

iii. Schools that offer ASD and BACB programs are aware and respect national findings and apply these findings to their programs.
CRITIQUES & LIMITATIONS

Conceptual
The credentials for how schools were selected by the National Center for Special Education Personnel and Related Service Providers were not provided and would be of benefit for the reader.

Data
i. The study was surveyed based so data was only collected from institutions that responded to the online survey. The Internet did not always provide the most current information on support programs specifically for students with AS.

ii. The survey was based on contacting institutions from a restricted list that had been identified as offering programs serving individuals with ASD. It was not possible to survey all IHEs.

iii. The return rate of the surveys was 46.4% which is less than half which calls to question if the data can be applied and generalized to the whole population.

iv. The questions and state guidelines had to be read carefully and interpreted cautiously since schools within the same state gave different answers.

Analysis
Not Applicable

Interpretation
Not Applicable

Application
This study could be reproduced, but this would require finding participants other than those found through the National Center for Special Education Personnel and Related Service Providers.

FOLLOW-UP

**Little Questions**

Not Applicable

**Big Questions**

**Next Steps**

A next step would be to create a study that involves programs from every state, so that we could apply the research to the entire population. Doing this would cut out the process of having to sort through the mess of programs and universities suggested by National Center for Special Education Personnel and Related Service Providers. Also in doing this, we would have to make sure the survey is easy to interpret with no leading questions.

**Summary/Utility**

This article is useful for our study because it explains the how the guidelines for creating ASD and BACB programs should be created in higher education institutions. Also, how the program guidelines differ across different universities and programs across the nation.

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