

SPECIAL EDUCATION TRAINING FOR PRESERVICE SCHOOL LIBRARIANS

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Background

School librarians, as educators who serve all students in a school, are required by the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act to act as service providers ensuring that special education students receive a free and appropriate public education in the least restrictive environment possible. Professional organizations emphasize the importance of serving these students in their professional guidelines.

Research Question

How well are school librarian preparation programs, either ALA-accredited or recognized by AASL and CAEP-accredited, satisfying their role of preparing graduate students to support members of the learning community with diverse learning styles, physical and intellectual abilities, and needs?

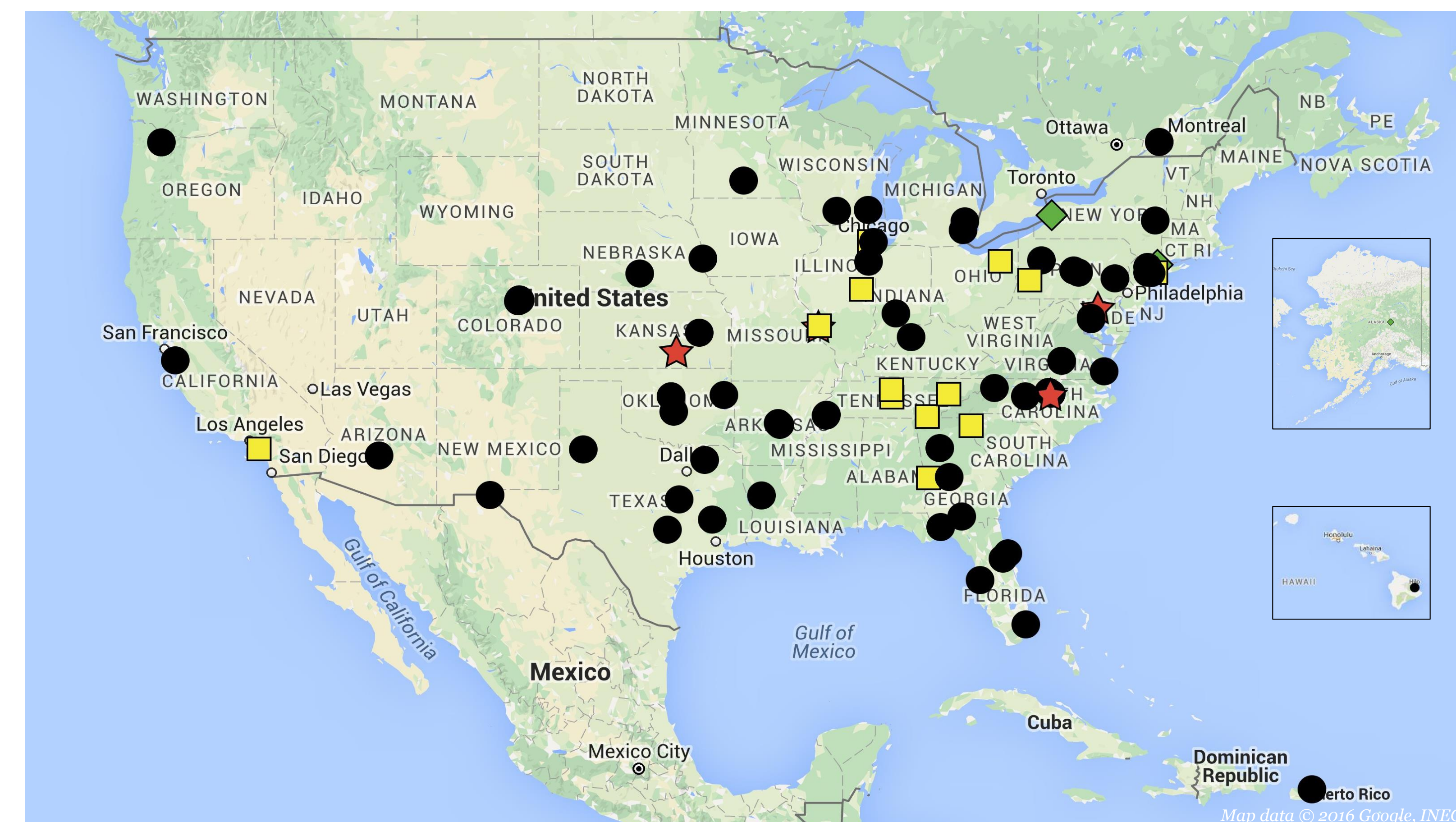
Methods

The researcher reviewed the websites of all AASL-approved school librarian preparation programs, noting any required or suggested courses related to the following keywords: special education, inclusive education, exceptional learners, special needs students, disabilities, and diversity. She then identified whether these courses were located within the school library education program itself or within other programs or departments. Finally, the researcher located and analyzed the descriptions of these courses for the same themes that were used to initially analyze courses, as well as identifying themes that emerged from analysis of the course descriptions.

Results

Special Education Requirements in AASL-approved school library preparation programs

The overwhelming majority of school library preparation programs require no special education training. Of 84 programs, only 20 either recommend or require special education coursework; most of these only require it if the student is not a certified teacher already.



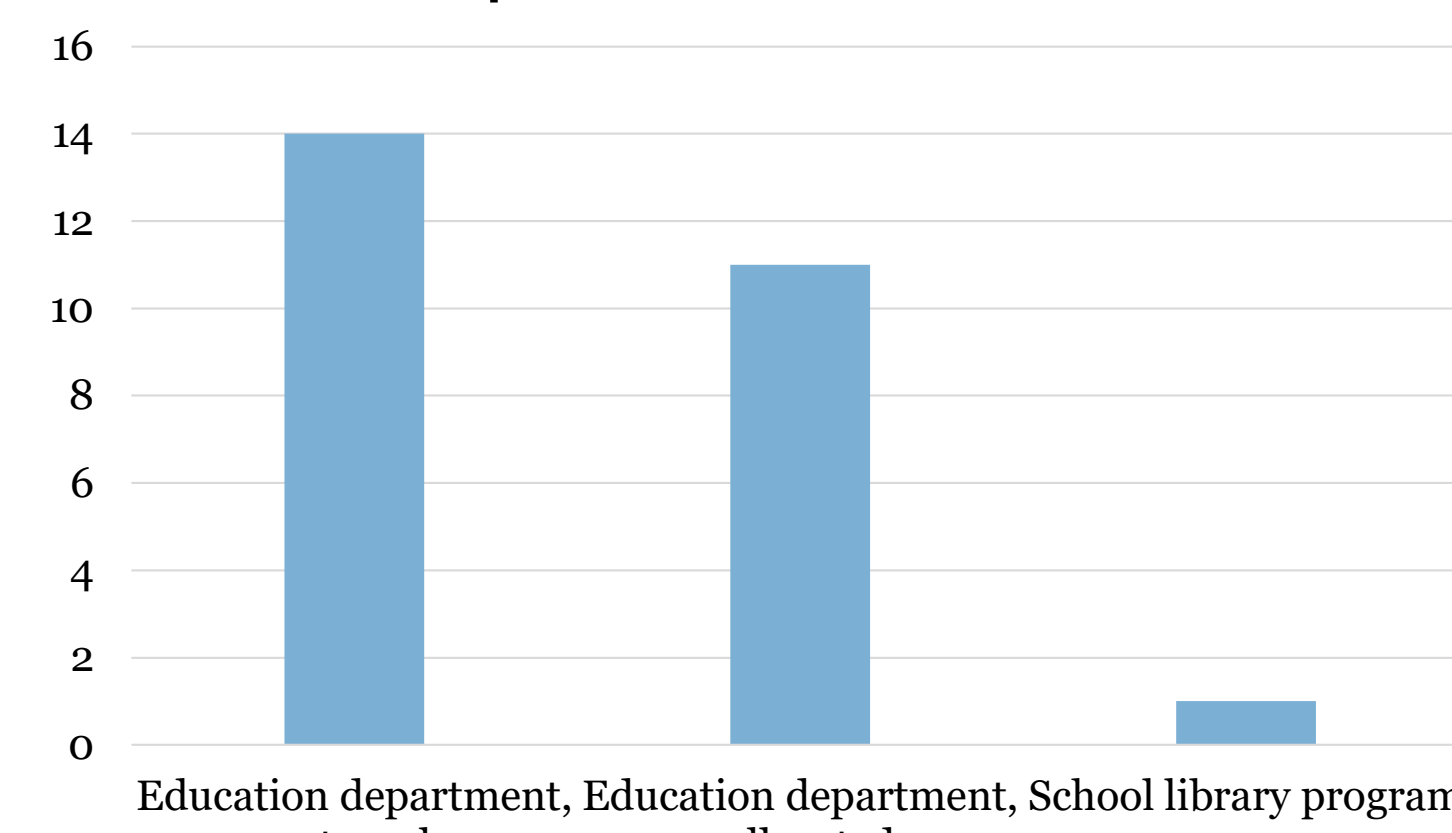
Legend

- Does not require special education training
- Requires special education training if student lacks teacher credential/previous coursework
- ◆ Requires special education training
- ★ Other, see Notes

Notes

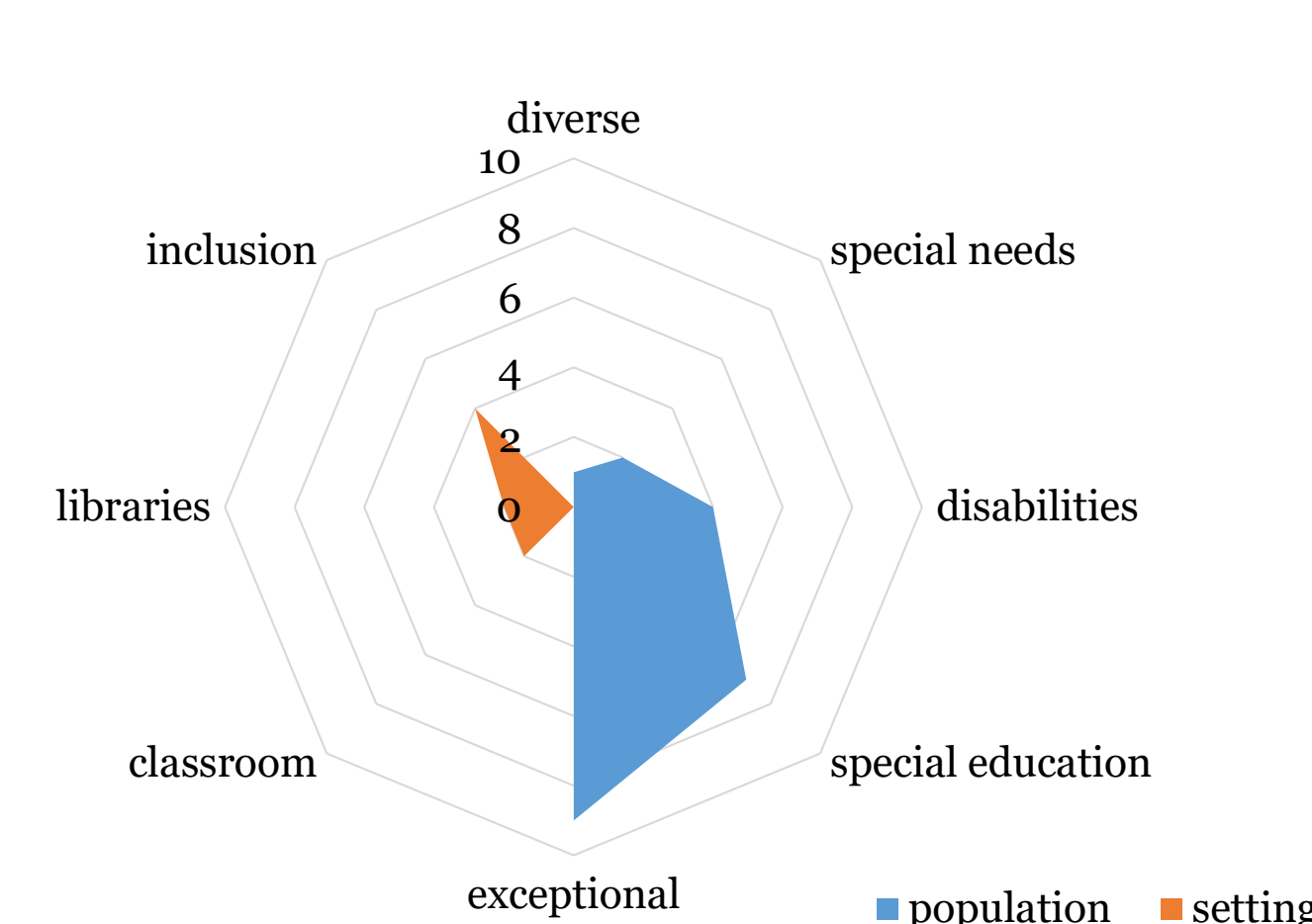
- As of Fall 2015, Drexel University (Philadelphia, PA) isn't admitting new students for school library media certification.
- East Central University (Ada, OK) offers an elective in special education, but requires no special education coursework.
- The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill school library media program has a diversity requirement which can be fulfilled by taking a special education course. No other program has a similar requirement.
- Towson University (Towson, MD) requires special education training as a prerequisite for admission.

Departments offering required or recommended special education courses



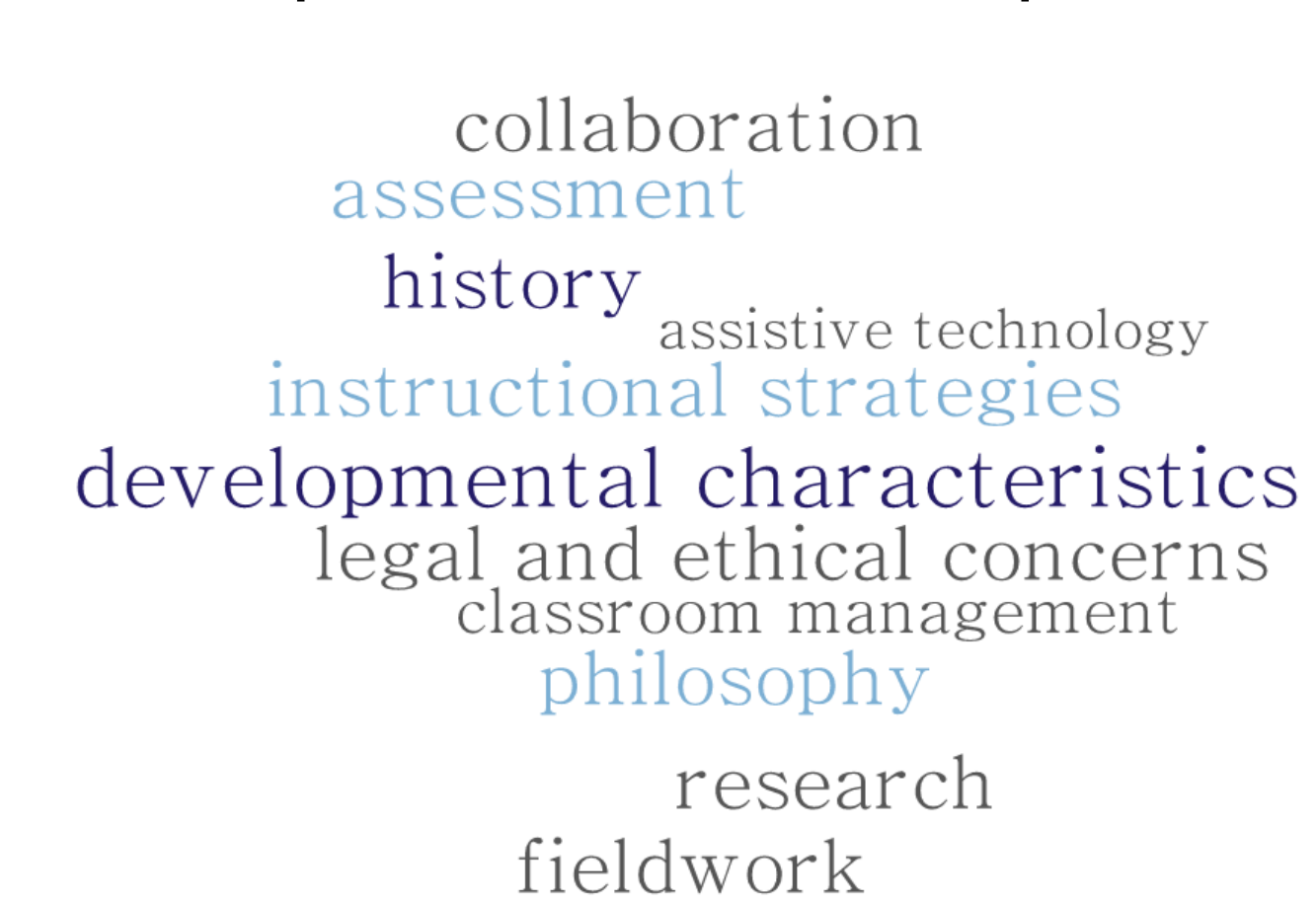
The 20 schools that required or recommended special education courses offered them in one of three departments: the school library preparation program itself, an education department in which the school library preparation program was housed, or an external education department. Syracuse University is the only program to offer the special education courses as part of the school library preparation program itself.

Terms used in course titles



Analysis of course titles revealed that courses addressed two elements of special education: population and setting. Some courses only included one or the other in their title, while others included both. Only two courses specifically addressed working with exceptional learners in the library: "LIS 627 Special Needs Students in K-12 Libraries" at Long Island University and "IST 564 Library and Information Services to Students with Disabilities" at Syracuse University.

Topics addressed in course descriptions



A number of topics appeared in multiple course descriptions; these topics are depicted in the word cloud above, with size representing frequency of occurrence. These topics are not mutually exclusive; several courses addressed more than one topic.

Discussion

These results suggest that most school librarians graduate from their preparation programs unprepared to meet the unique information needs of special education students. Only two of the courses recommended or required address the library as a unique setting. While an education course will certainly help school librarians understand the need for accommodations in their instructional practices, these courses are unlikely to address the environment of the school library, where librarians must consider physical accessibility in the library space, the implementation of assistive technology, and the unique information needs of special education students.

Future Research

The current study only looks at program requirements, course titles, and course descriptions. Future research might compare course syllabi, looking for models for providing special education training as well as determining if this topic is covered in courses with titles and descriptions that might not make this content readily apparent. Project ENABLE (Expanding Non-discriminatory Access By Librarians Everywhere) offers free, online training in serving students with disabilities. Implementation of this program in a preservice context has yet to be studied; future research might examine the impact of Project ENABLE on preservice school librarians' readiness for working with special education students.