

## Determining Interest in a JMU Program for Post-graduate Special Education Students

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### **Purpose and Objectives**

The purpose of this study was to determine the interest of post-graduate special education students, their parents and teachers, and members of the JMU community – faculty, staff, and students – in the development of a program at JMU for students with developmental disabilities in their last three years of special education eligibility, ages 18 through 21 years. Anonymous survey data were collected from volunteer stakeholders to determine the interest across parties for expansion of a weekly morning program currently offered to post-graduate special education students from Shenandoah County Public Schools. A Google Forms questionnaire was used to collect data from stakeholder participants.

### **Procedures/Research Design/Methodology/Timeframe**

Participants were identified through email requests sent out to special education teachers, post-graduate special education students, parents of post-graduate special education students, JMU faculty, staff, and students. The email contained in a link to a Google Forms survey that will be the source for the survey to collect their responses. One set of post-grad school data were collected through paper copies and entered into a spreadsheet for reporting.

Identified stakeholder groups were:

- 1) Teachers of post-graduate special education student participants in local education authorities (LEAs) within a 60-minute drive of James Madison University. Specifically, Harrisonburg City Public Schools (HCPS), Rockingham County Public Schools (RCPS), Augusta County Public Schools (ACPS), Page County Public Schools (PCPS), Shenandoah County Public Schools (SCPS), Staunton City Public Schools (SPS), and Waynesboro City Public Schools (WCPS) will be contacted through email and asked to participate. If they agree, they will be asked to forward email invitations to their students ages 18 through 21, and to the parents of those students.
- 2) Parents of post-graduate special education student participants (same LEAs)
- 3) Post-graduate special education students (same LEAs)
- 4) Students at James Madison University will be invited to participate through a bulk email request
- 5) Faculty and staff of James Madison University will be invited to participate through a bulk email request

Google Forms surveys were tailored to specific participant groups to determine interest and resources in a prospective program. Simple frequencies were calculated to determine the degree of interest in different types of programs for post-graduate special education students, e.g. – a full day/ partial day program versus a residential program, program length and duration, program focus – social skills, independent living, vocational skills, academic skills.

The emails containing the link to the Google Forms questionnaire were disseminated in January after approval from the JMU IRB in December. There were 216 responses from the JMU community and to date 13 teacher responses, 6 parent responses, and 16 post-grad SPED student responses. Results were presented by the principal investigator and the teachers and students of the Shenandoah County Post-graduate Special Education program that has been coming to JMU every Friday morning since the fall of 2014 to participate in community activities with JMU students enrolled in EXED 309 Supporting Community Access for Young Adults with Developmental Disabilities.

As a result of the low response rate from LEA stakeholders, the PI has been visiting local post-graduate SPED programs and talking with teachers and administrators about their interest in a program such as the one with have with Shenandoah County. Attendance by members of the JMU community at the Diversity conference has resulted in conversations with faculty in Health Sciences and IIHHS about how we might expand this program, providing opportunities for community inclusion for young adults with developmental disabilities while providing valuable experience with this population for JMU health sciences, nursing, and other preclinical programs.