

Helping Minority Individuals Navigate Through Successful School and Work Transitions

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As the 21st century nears, three major challenges confront postsecondary education and rehabilitation programs:

1. How to provide the best services possible during a time of diminishing resources, especially financial resources.
2. How to best meet the educational and training needs of a changing population of deaf and hard of hearing individuals.
3. How to best respond to the changing demands of the workplace for workers with the skills to compete in an increasingly diverse and global economy.

We will focus on the last two challenges. The first challenge is more complex and cannot be addressed within the scope of this paper.

We begin with a general overview of some of the significant demographic changes occurring among elementary and secondary students who are deaf or hard of hearing. Some significant implications for postsecondary education and rehabilitation programs are also highlighted. The primary sources of information on demographic changes are the most recently available reports from the Annual Survey of Deaf and Hard of Hearing Children and Youth (Schildroth & Hotto, 1995; Allen, 1994).

Following the overview on demographic changes among elementary and secondary students, we present information from our own research at the University of Arkansas. The data are from two national projects -- one on the post high school transition experiences of a sample of minority deaf and hard of hearing youth -- and the second on the career preparation, entry, and advancement experiences of minority individuals in professional and technical jobs.

DEMOGRAPHIC CHANGES BETWEEN REPORTING PERIODS 1973-74 AND 1993-94

The demographic characteristics of students enrolled in educational programs serving children and youth who are deaf or hard of hearing have changed significantly over the past 20 years. The most dramatic demographic changes noted in the Annual Survey of Deaf and Hard of Hearing Children and Youth are those related to race and/or ethnic background. Two notable trends include:

- a decrease in the percentage of white student enrollments from 76% to 60%, and
- an increase in the percentage of minority student enrollment from 24% to 40% (see Figure 1).

When the demographic changes among minority students were further examined, significant increases were noted among two major groups of students. The most significant changes in percentage of minority student enrollment were found among:

- Hispanic students (enrollments increased from 7% to 16%), and
- Asian/Pacific Islander students (enrollments increased from less than 1% to more than 4%).

Significant Geographical Indicators for 1993-94

The four geographical regions designated by the U.S. Census Bureau are used by the Annual Survey of Deaf and Hard of Hearing Children and Youth to report student geographical distributions (e.g., North, East, South, and West). In this section, data are summarized and reported for students attending educational programs for deaf or hard of hearing students during the 1993-94 school year.

When the data were examined on a region by region basis, the South was the only region that reported more than one-half of all deaf or hard of hearing students enrolled were from racial or ethnic minority backgrounds. Of the minority students attending schools in the South, most were African-American. Furthermore, when data were examined by individual states within each of the four geographical regions, several states, particularly those in the South, Southwest, and West, reported higher enrollments of minority students compared to white students.

The implications are that in many states, especially those in the South, Southwest, and West, minority students are becoming the "new majority" in educational programs serving deaf or hard of hearing students. Listed below is a summary of some of the significant demographic trends indicated by regional and state geographical distributions.

Black students:

- 57% of Black students were enrolled in educational programs in the South.

Hispanic students:

- 18 states reported higher enrollments of Hispanic than Black students in their educational programs.
- Two-thirds of all Hispanic students reported to the Annual Survey were attending educational programs in three states, California, Texas, and New York.

Asian/Pacific Islander students:

- One-third of Asian/Pacific Islander students were enrolled in educational programs in California.
- In five states, Asian/Pacific Islander students outnumbered both Black and Hispanic students.

Enrollment by Type of Educational Program for 1993-94

Four major types of educational settings are reported by the Annual Survey. They include residential schools, day schools, local non-integrated classrooms, and local integrated classrooms. Significant

demographic trends can also be noted in the extent of minority student enrollment within these four educational settings. Most white students are enrolled in residential schools and local integrated programs. On the other hand, most minority students attend day school programs (see Figure 2). Some reasons for the differences in educational placement are presented below.

Cohen, Fischgrund, and Redding (1990) identified two possible factors for the differences in educational placement between white students and minority students. One factor is that most day school programs, compared to residential schools, are located in large urban centers which tend to have high proportions of minority residents. A second factor is that educational placements in either local, integrated or non-integrated settings are often made on the basis of student academic achievement levels. In general, minority students have not performed as well on standardized achievement tests as their white peers (Allen, 1994). Thus, when academic achievement levels are considered for educational placements, minority students are more likely to be placed in local, non-integrated classes than their white peers.

Listed below is a summary of some of the key demographic trends by racial or ethnic background and type of educational setting.

Residential schools

- The racial/ethnic backgrounds of students attending residential schools were predominately white (65%) compared to minority students (35%); and
- Significantly more Black students (20%) than Hispanic students (10%) were attending residential schools.

Local, integrated programs and local, non-integrated programs

- The racial/ethnic backgrounds of students attending local, integrated (e.g., mainstream) educational programs were predominately white (62%) compared to minority students (38%); and
- Minority and white students were equally represented (e.g., 50-50) in local, non-integrated or self-contained educational programs.

Day schools

- The racial/ethnic backgrounds of students attending day schools were predominately minority (57%) compared to white students (43%).

Exit Outcomes for School Leavers Age 14 and Over by Race/Ethnic Background for 1993-94

Overall, 66% of the school leavers reported to the Annual Survey during 1993-94 completed high school with a diploma while 22% completed high school with a certificate. Twelve percent (12%) dropped out (see Figure 3). When graduation with a diploma or certificate were examined on the basis of selected student demographic characteristics (e.g., race or ethnic background, gender, and having one or more additional disabilities), the following trends were noted:

- students who graduated with a diploma were predominately white (65%) compared to minority students (35%);
- more males received diplomas than females; and

- more deaf students without additional disabilities received diplomas than those who had additional disabilities.

On the other hand, students who graduated with a certificate were predominately minority (55%) compared to white students (45%). Graduation with a certificate was more prevalent in the South than any other region (e.g., East, West, and North). Sixty-six percent (66%) of those graduating with a certificate were from educational programs in the South.

Since a high school diploma is generally required for enrollment in most postsecondary programs, this trend has important implications for students from the South who wish to enroll in 2-year or 4-year colleges. Also, in today's job market, high school diplomas and, often, post high school vocational training certificates have become the minimum required to qualify for many entry-level jobs.

For example, Crane (1994) reported that the Department of Labor has projected that by the year 2000 and beyond, almost all jobs will require at least one year of college training. Crane (1994) also cites other reports which project at least two years of college training will be needed. Regardless of how many years of education beyond high school are needed, it is clear that post high school education and training have become the minimum credentials necessary for anyone who wants to get a good job, earn good pay, and have opportunities for promotions and job advancement. Furthermore, as the demands of the workplace continue to change, more workers are expected to pursue both ongoing training to upgrade their skills and retraining to learn new skills to stay competitive in the workplace.

In the next section, we provide a summary of some of the key findings from our research on the post high school transition experiences of minority deaf and hard of hearing youth.

RESEARCH ON THE POST HIGH SCHOOL ASPIRATIONS AND TRANSITION EXPERIENCES OF MINORITY DEAF AND HARD OF HEARING HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS

Purpose and Method

Although there have been significant increases in the enrollment of minority students who are deaf or hard of hearing in educational programs, research on their school to postsecondary training and/or work experiences has yet to be reported in professional literature. In an effort to respond to this need, our research was organized around the following questions:

- What are their post high school goals?
- Who are their role models and who did they perceive were their key supporters?
- What postsecondary activity were they involved in one to two years after leaving high school, and what further goals did they hope to attain?

The initial method of data collection for this study varied significantly from previous research on the school to work transition of students who were deaf or hard of hearing (e.g., Allen, Schildroth, & Rawlings, 1989; El-Khiami, 1989; Bullis *et al*, 1990; Wagner, 1991). In contrast to earlier research on school to work transition, this study focused primarily on respondents who were members of racial or

ethnic minority groups. A second difference was associated with the methods of data collection. During the first phase of the study, the data were not collected with a written survey or through proxies such as parents of program personnel. Instead, the data were collected through face to face interviews with students on their school campuses. The researcher who conducted the interviews is both deaf and a member of a racial/ethnic minority group. One hundred and one (101) students were initially interviewed on six different school campuses in six different states.

At the time of the interview, the participating students supplied the researcher with phone numbers and addresses where they could be reached for follow-up data collection. Using these addresses and help from the schools, 74 students were traced. Of these 74 students who received follow-up questionnaires, 46 respondents (62%) returned completed usable questionnaires. Several students had warm personal comments for the researcher who had interviewed them, indicating the importance of the initial face-to-face contact.

Sample

The 46 respondents were compared with the original 101 interviewees. No significant differences were found between the groups in the areas of race or ethnicity, school attended, gender, or future goals. There were slightly more male students (52%) in the follow-up sample than female students (48%). They were also predominately African American (44%) or Hispanic (46%) with a small percentage of Asian students (4%) and Others (6%).

Included in the sample were a significant number of students who had moved to the United States from other countries. Thirty-five percent (35%) of the students were foreign-born, which does not vary significantly by race or ethnicity. The youngest arrived in the United States at the age of 2, the most recent arrived at 19. The mean age of arrival for the students who were born outside of the United States was 11 years old.

The first interview was conducted during the Spring of 1993 or 1994. Students, who were all seniors in high school, ranged in age from 17-21, with a mean age of 19. This is consistent with Allen's findings (1994) that school leavers who are deaf and members of racial or ethnic minority groups tend to be older than those who are white. The follow-up survey was conducted 1 to 2 years after the initial face to face interviews. Students were 19-24 years of age, with a mean age of 21. These students were in the initial phases (e.g., first one or two years) of their postsecondary activities.

Students' Key Supporters During High School When Planning For Their Futures

As students plan and make decisions about their future goals, the quality of help and encouragement they receive from significant others in their home and school environments helps shape the kinds of decisions they make (Anderson & Grace, 1991). More students indicated they received "a lot" of encouragement from their high school counselors than from any other individual. When the categories of "a lot" and "some" encouragement were combined, Mother was the most often cited as encouragement

provider. Father was indicated most often as providing no encouragement at all, and that is for those students who had discussed their future goals with their father. Finally, after fathers, vocational rehabilitation (VR) counselors were second leading category of significant others identified by the students as least likely to provide them with a lot of encouragement regarding their future goals or plans.

Initial Contacts with Vocational Rehabilitation

For most students who are deaf or hard of hearing, early contact with vocational rehabilitation (VR) counselors during their high school years is essential for developing plans for post high school transitions to postsecondary training and/or work (Allen, Schildroth, & Rawlings, 1989). It was apparent, however, that a significant number of the minority students participating in this study did not have either early or extensive contact with a local VR counselor.

Seventy-six percent of the students who participated in this study had been in contact with VR at the time of their initial interviews. Of those who had contact with VR, 82 percent had their initial contact during 12th grade, 12 percent in 11th grade, and less than six percent of the students had had any contact with VR prior to 11th grade. Many of the students contacted in 12th grade had yet to initiate any actual working relationship to discuss future goals or post high school plans.

Of the students who had actually worked with a VR counselor, 49 percent discussed their Individualized Written Rehabilitation Plan (IWRP). Thirty-three percent received help planning for postsecondary training, and 21 percent received assistance related to planning for and seeking employment after high school.

Respondents' Role Models

In addition to the help received from VR counselors and perceptions of encouragement or support received from significant others in their home and school environments, students were asked in their initial interviews to identify their role models. Popular figures or celebrities such as singers, actors, or sports figures were identified most frequently by the students as their role models. These were people outside of their everyday lives and experiences that the students, like most adolescents in general, are exposed to on a regular basis through the media or other related communications mediums.

The second category the students identified as their role models were one or both parents. School personnel were the third most frequently identified sources of role models. They ranged from teachers, both deaf and hearing, to school support staff such as dormitory counselors, janitors, and coaches. The fourth group included former schoolmates who had gone on to postsecondary institutions or other admirable pursuits after leaving high school. It was also noted that a significant number of students were not able to identify individuals that they admired or considered to be their role models.

Students' Post High School Goals at Initial Interview

When asked what their plans were once they completed high school, 80% of the students indicated they planned to pursue postsecondary education. Fifteen percent (15%) indicated they would look for work, and 4% either didn't know or were planning to pursue both school and work activities. Some of the specific jobs or careers the students aspired to included:

- Director of a Social Service Agency,
- Lawyer,
- Teacher of the Deaf,
- Actor,
- Entrepreneur - own a business,
- Lab Technician (medical), and
- Career in the Medical Profession (medical research).

These types of jobs are also indicative that many of the students have high aspirations for themselves. Furthermore, employment in many of these jobs necessitate that the students attend and complete postsecondary education programs.

Factors That Influence Student Selection of a Postsecondary Program

Students indicated a variety of reasons for choosing a particular postsecondary program to attend. The largest percentage of students (39%) indicated they chose a particular postsecondary program because it offered the field of study or major of interest to them. Secondly, 36% of the students indicated they chose a program because they felt it was the type of program and school environment in which they would feel comfortable and accepted by teachers and students. Many of the students who indicated this as a reason chose to attend programs with large enrollments of students who are deaf or hard of hearing.

The third factor, indicated by 22% of the respondents, was recommendations from friends and/or former classmate attending the program of interest. A fourth factor, indicated by 19 percent of the respondents, was recommendations from one or both parents. The final factor was recommendations from the high school counselor.

Respondents' Post High School Activities One to Two Years After the Initial Interviews

One to two years after their initial interviews, activities of respondents fell into four categories;

- 61 percent of the respondents were attending school exclusively;
- 13 percent of the respondents were working exclusively;
- 13 percent of the respondents were both working and enrolled in a postsecondary program; and
- 11 percent were job hunting and not enrolled in a postsecondary program.

More than three-fourths of the students who planned to attend a postsecondary program at the initial interview were attending the type of postsecondary program (vocational, 2 or 4 year college) they had indicated they would attend. Over 80 percent of those who intended to enter the job market directly after high school were either working or both working and attending a postsecondary program.

In sum, the implications of the follow-up contacts are that a majority of the students were able to implement their goals and enroll in a postsecondary program or enter the job market.

In the next section, we provide a brief summary of some of the key findings from our national study of minority individuals in professional and technical jobs.

RESEARCH ON FACTORS THAT CONTRIBUTE TO THE SUCCESSFUL ENTRY AND ADVANCEMENT OF MINORITY INDIVIDUALS IN PROFESSIONAL AND TECHNICAL JOBS

As indicated earlier, minority student enrollments in educational programs serving deaf or hard of hearing students have increased significantly during the past 20 years. Furthermore, in some states, minority students are becoming the "new majority" in educational programs serving deaf or hard of hearing students. On the other hand, however, several studies in the literature indicate that significant numbers of minority students have not experienced high rates of success completing postsecondary education programs, entering and advancing in professional and technical jobs compared to their white deaf peers (Andrews & Jordan, 1993; Nash, 1992). Nash (1992) indicated that academic ability was not the dominant factor influencing minority student retention and graduation from a postsecondary program. He suggested that other factors such as those related to environmental supports and those related to one's personal qualities are as important as academic ability.

Through our research on minority individuals in professional and technical jobs, one of our goals was to obtain the respondents' perceptions of the most important factors underlying their success with regard to their education and their jobs. We asked the respondents the following questions:

- What factors contributed to their success in completing their postsecondary education?
- What factors contributed to their successful entry and advancement in a professional or technical job?

Two main groups of respondents were targeted through our research:

- minority persons who were deaf or hard of hearing and employed in professional or technical jobs; and
- minority persons who were hearing and employed in professional or technical jobs serving deaf or hard of hearing persons.

Sample

Before discussing the responses to these questions, a brief demographic profile of the 153 respondents who participated in the study is summarized below:

Hearing status

- 51% were deaf and 49% were hearing

Gender

- 59% were female and 41% were male

Race or ethnic background

- 52% of deaf respondents were African-American
- 64% of hearing respondents were African-American
- 13% of deaf respondents were Hispanic
- 24% of the hearing respondents were Hispanic
- 32% of the deaf respondents were Asian/Pacific Islanders
- 11% of the hearing respondents were Asian/Pacific Islanders

Educational attainments

- 10% had Doctoral degrees
- 40% had Master's degrees
- 34% had Bachelor's degrees
- 16% had Associate degrees or less

Types of Jobs Held by the Respondents

The respondents' job titles can be categorized into five general occupational groups. These occupational groups include service providers, administrators, educators, and those working in a variety of technical jobs (see Figure 4). As indicated in Figure 4, a higher percentage of the hearing respondents compared to deaf respondents were employed as professional service providers (e.g., school counselors, VR counselors, and interpreters) and as educators (e.g., teachers in schools or as college/university faculty). On the other hand, significantly more deaf respondents were employed in technical jobs (e.g., CAD drafters and mechanical engineers).

Respondents' Perceptions of the Most Important Factors Contributing to Success

The top qualities identified by the respondents were as follows:

- positive self-image, attitude, and expression of pride in oneself;
- ability to be persistent and not give up easily;
- skills in self-advocacy and problem-solving;
- adequate educational preparation;
- good communication skills and flexibility in handling oneself in diverse situations;
- motivation--strong desire to succeed;
- ability to establish clear, attainable goals for oneself; and
- access to positive role models.

Concluding Comments

In our study of the post high school transition experiences of deaf students from racial/ethnic minority backgrounds, we noted that over three-fourths of the respondents indicated their post high school goals were to pursue postsecondary education. Most of the jobs and careers that a majority the respondents

were seeking require postsecondary training. The extent of postsecondary training required can range from a minimum of a two-year associate degree to an advanced graduate degree, depending on the type of job and the knowledge and skills required. Also, for many minority students, planning and making decisions about post high school plans, successfully navigating through several years of postsecondary training, and making transitions to a career, requires unique types of personal qualities and support systems.

What types of personal qualities and support systems should minority students be aware of that can help make a difference in their efforts to make successful post high school transitions and be prepared for the changing demands of the workplace? Through our study of minority individuals in professional and technical jobs, we sought to identify some of these personal qualities and support systems. These were individuals who had successfully completed undergraduate and/or graduate degrees and were involved in a professional career. The key personal qualities identified by the respondents were those related to adequate educational preparation, persistence in achieving goals, a strong sense of self-pride, and skill in self-advocacy and problem-solving. The main sources of support were the respondents' family members (e.g., parents and siblings) and access to positive models in their educational programs and on the job. In conclusion, while this paper summarizes our preliminary findings, our goal is to provide more detailed summaries of our research in future publications.

Figure 1

Demographic Characteristics of Students who are Deaf or Hard or Hearing Enrolled in Educational Programs



Figure 2

Enrollment of Students who are Deaf or Hard or Hearing by Race/Ethnicity and Type of Program

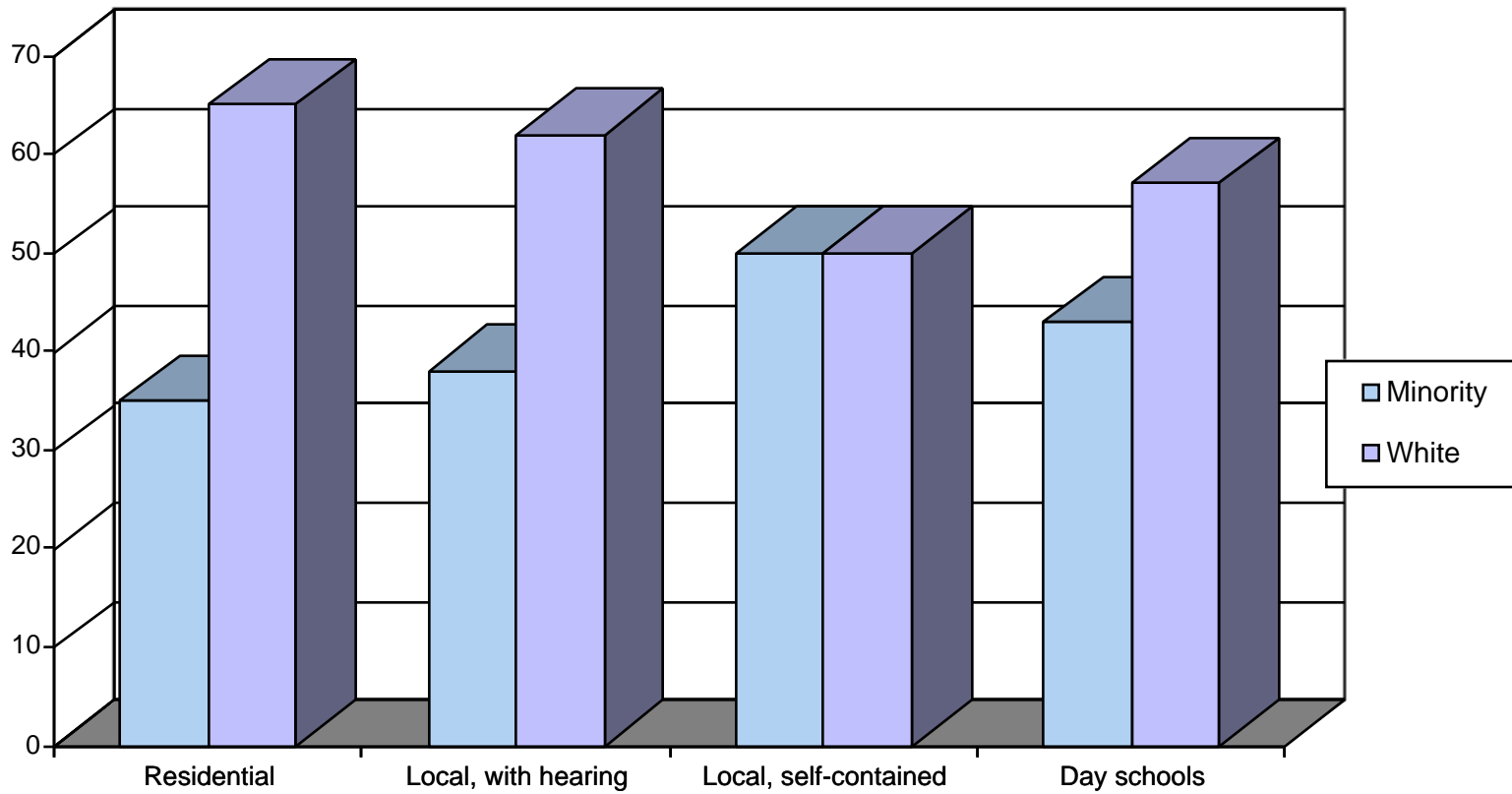
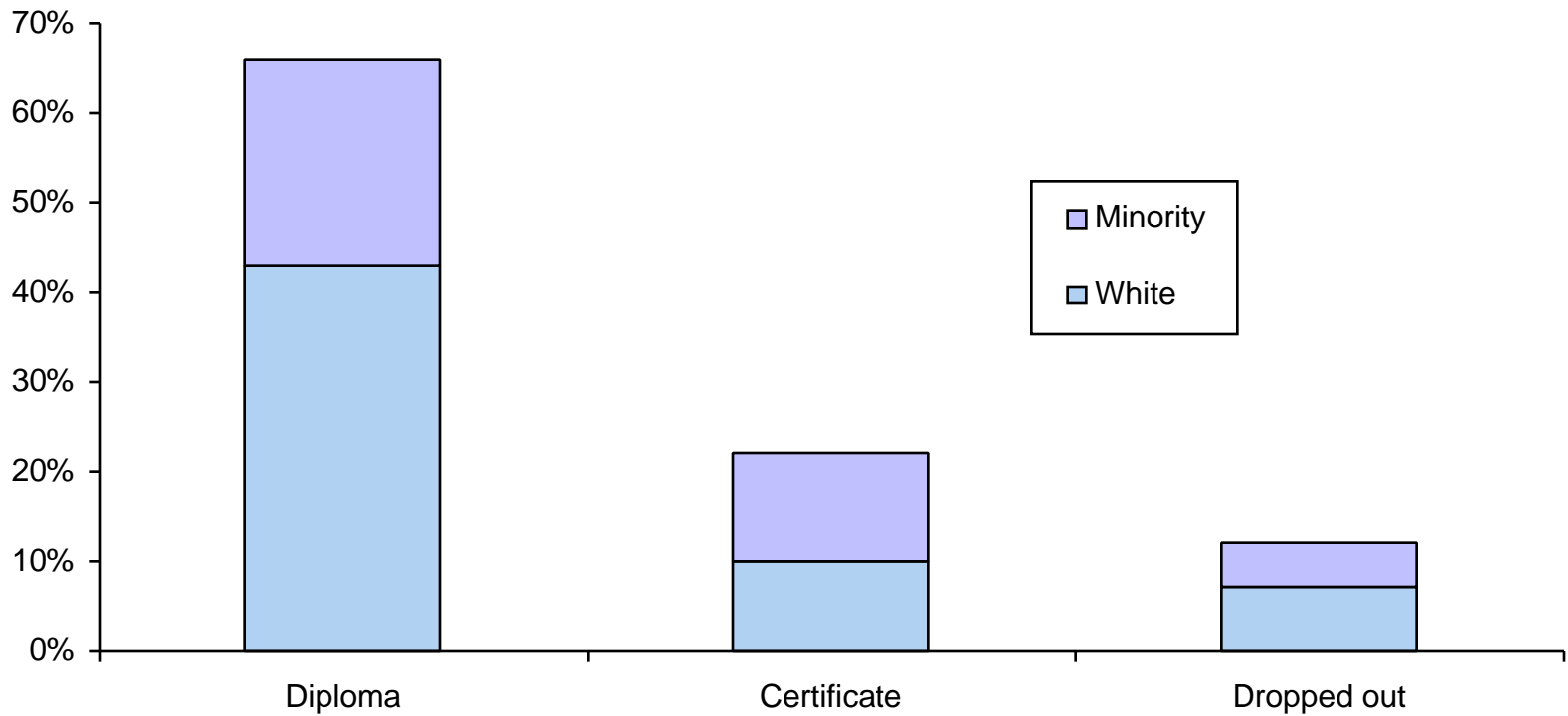


Figure 3

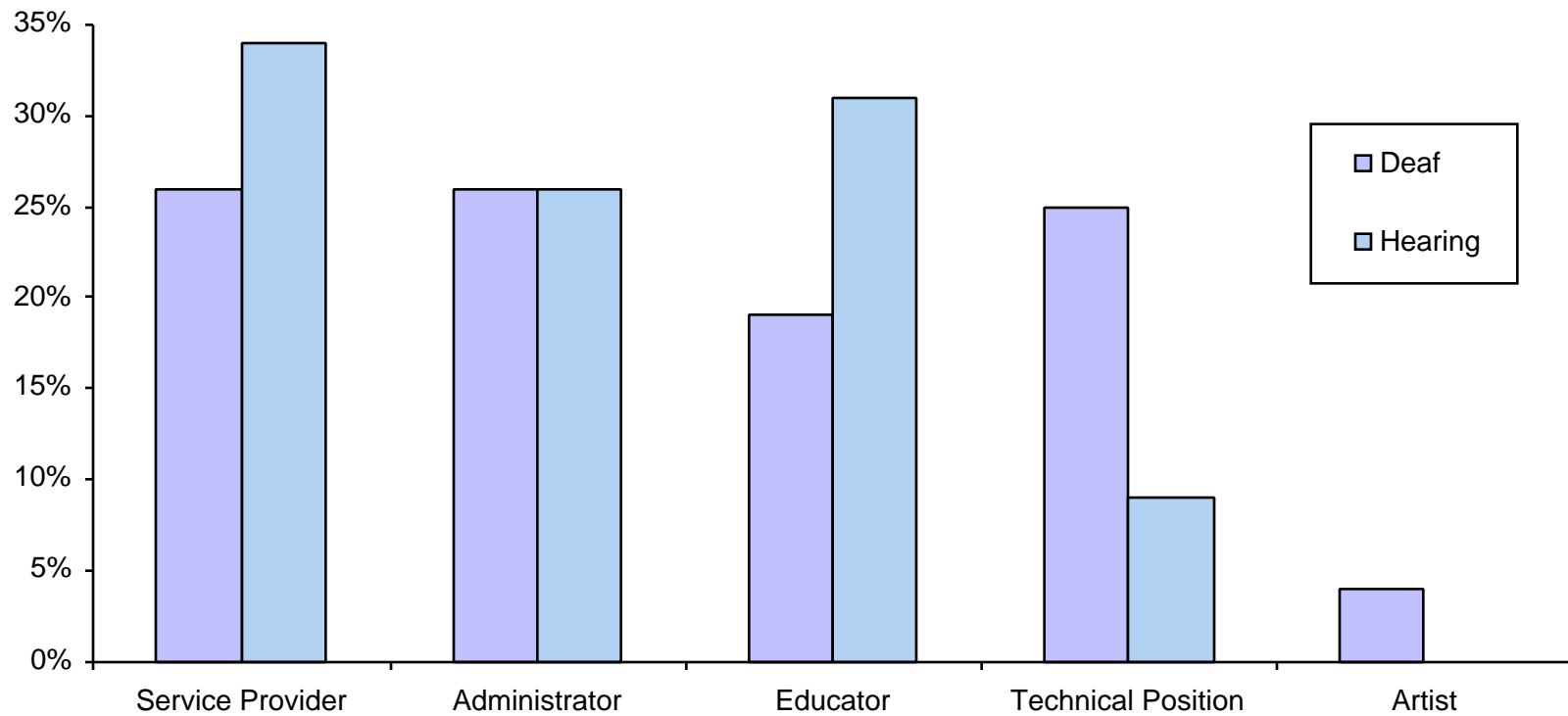
Exit Outcomes for School Leavers Age 14 and Over who are Deaf or Hard or Hearing by Race/Ethnicity for 1993-94



Minority	23%	12%	5%
White	43%	10%	7%

Figure 4

Current Jobs of Study Participants by Hearing Status



Deaf	26%	26%	19%	25%	4%
Hearing	34%	26%	31%	9%	0

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