

# FOCUS on Research

Newsletter of the



## In This Issue

- CEC-DR Diversity Committee Spotlight
- CEC-DR Public Policy News
- Student Spotlight: Academic Job Search Advice
- Call for Nominations! 2024–2025 CEC-DR Doctoral Student Scholars

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## President's Message

### Midnight Musings: Advancing Educational Equity and Evidence-based Practice

Audrey Sorrells, PhD, *Texas Christian University*

Midnight musings. First, about penning riveting, evoking, provocative messages to the Division members, only to come to terms with my midnight realities: more questions than answers, more problems than solutions, more student needs than student evidence. One thing that I have been thinking more about these days are the reflections of several of my graduate students who attended the recent 2024 CEC Convention and Expo in San Antonio, Texas. They were excited to board flights or drive their own vehicles to the conference, check into a fancy hotel, tour the amazing sites, visit the Expo and exhibits, take pictures with keynote speakers, and hang out at the various receptions and social events. But what was most impressive was their recognition and pleasant surprise that this was a conference for education researchers, administrators, policy makers, and most of all, teachers! Every day, they shared sessions they had attended and their major takeaways. They learned a lot in the sessions about teaching and student learning, and they pondered how it would all work in their classrooms after they graduate in May and accept positions in private and public schools, working with students with and without disabilities. Shortly after we returned to campus from the conference, I received the following

email from “Megan.”

Attending CEC was one of the best decisions I’ve made in my career as a preservice special education teacher. There were many sessions to choose from ranging from many different areas of studies. Some that particularly stood out to me that I attended were transition intervention for students with IEPs, using visuals in class for students, sign-language, parent communication before Admission, Review, and Dismissal (ARD), etc. Most importantly, each session provided hard copy resources of different things we could use in the classroom, during IEPs, during parent-teacher conferences, etc. How will I use these when I start teaching? Will they work with the students I am going to teach? Are they culturally and linguistically relevant for my CLD (Culturally Linguistically Diverse) students?” (Megan)

After forty years in the profession, these questions are as pertinent to effective teaching and learning today as they were when I began my career in the classroom, teaching on the third floor of the rural Louisiana high school I’d attended in my youth. Before I graduated in 1978 and upon returning to teach in 1983, I supposed

*(continues on page 6)*

## CEC-DR Diversity Committee Spotlight



Federico Waitoller, PhD  
University of Illinois  
Diversity Committee Chair

Have you thought about what special education research looks like outside the United States? Have you ever heard of the term “the Global South?”

In the latest episode of *DiveIn*, host Federico Waitoller interviews Dr. Maya Kalyanpur about the term “the Global South” and its importance for understanding inclusive education. Dr. Kalyanpur shares insights from her experiences teaching and conducting research in South Asia and translating her work into lessons for conducting education research in the United States that foregrounds equity and inclusion for students with disabilities and beyond. Listen to the episode [here](#).

The Diversity Committee is looking for new members! If you are interested in joining the team, contact me at [fwaitoll@uic.edu](mailto:fwaitoll@uic.edu). ■



## CEC-DR Public Policy News

Betsy Talbott, PhD  
William & Mary University  
Chair of Public Policy Committee  
and CEC-DR CAN coordinator

- Do you want to increase funding for special education research?
- Do you want to make a difference for children and youth with disabilities?
- Do you want to share your special education expertise with policymakers—members of Congress who represent you?
- Do you like meeting with fellow researchers, administrators, and teachers from across the country, and learning from education advocates in Washington, D.C.?

CEC legislative summit is right for you! This year’s summit will be held in Washington, D.C., July 29–August 1, 2024. [Registration information will be coming soon.](#)

In the meantime, you can learn more about the summit by reading this story about one team’s experience (featuring several DR members) in 2022: [Voices for Children in Washington](#). ■

## Student Spotlight:

### Advice on the Academic Job Search Process from a Doctoral Candidate’s Perspective



Cassidi L. Richmond, ABD  
University of Virginia  
Student Representative

The academic job search process can be complicated and intimidating, especially for first-generation graduate students who may not be familiar with

the unwritten rules of academia. My name is Cassidi Richmond, a student representative on the CEC’s Division for Research (DR) executive board and a first-generation, low-income college student. I am from rural, southern West Virginia, I identify as white, and use she/her pronouns. I have recently successfully defended my dissertation and am graduating this spring with a PhD in special education. This last year has been spent completing my dissertation while being heavily active in the academic job search process. Fortunately, I have felt thoroughly supported during this process by the network of faculty (including my advisor), post-doctoral researchers, and doctoral students at my university. I thought it might be helpful to use the experiences and knowledge I have accumulated over the last year to help demystify the faculty job search process for others who will soon be beginning a similar journey.

For context about my experience, I am completing my doctoral studies at an R1 institution, and I have applied to full time, tenure-track faculty positions at institutions representing a variety of research activity (i.e., R1, R2, D/PU; see <https://carnegieclassifications.acenet.edu/> for more information on university classifications). Before I get to the advice, I would like to thank my colleague Dr. Isabel Vargas for providing me feedback on this column. She has also heavily supported me during this entire process while completing her own dissertation and academic job search. Now I will share my advice on the academic job search process that represents my personal experiences only.

### Take Every Opportunity to Network and Make Connections

Way before you are at the point in your doctoral program to begin the job search process, you can begin

(continues on page 3)

*Student Spotlight (continued from page 2)*

networking and making connections that could potentially be helpful to you later. Faculty at your institution can be a great place to start making connections. Reach out to faculty in your department or school, and ask to schedule a time to get to know one another. There is a chance the faculty member may know a researcher at another institution that shares your research interests, and you can ask if they would be willing to introduce the two of you. Another way to make connections is through membership in professional organizations and specialized divisions or interest groups within those organizations. Similarly, attending and presenting at conferences is also a great way to find opportunities to introduce yourself to researchers, faculty, and even doctoral students from various universities. This can help you find scholars with similar research interests and uncover possibilities for future collaborative partnerships. It is highly likely that you will be able to find faculty members at conferences and through professional organizations that share your research interests. It is also likely that some of these same faculty members may be on the search committee, or know someone on the search committee, for academic positions for which you would like to apply.

### **Look for Job Postings Early and Often**

When entering the last year of your doctoral program, it may seem like graduation and employment are goals in the distant future. However, you will likely need to begin preparing for the job search process in the summer leading up to your final year of doctoral studies. This is because some faculty positions may be posted with application deadlines as early as mid-August. The majority of faculty jobs are typically posted between August and December, with a smaller number posting in January or very early in February. Ideally, you will want to begin drafting a very general copy of your cover letter, research statement, teaching statement, and diversity statement before August. It is common to ask others who recently went through the job search process, such as post-docs or recent graduates, if they are willing to share copies of their application materials that you can use as exemplars. This will allow you plenty of time to tailor your materials to specific job postings and have them reviewed by your advisor or another faculty member who may be assisting you with your search.

Another good practice is to send your cover letter to a trusted faculty member other than your advisor. Ask

them to spend just three minutes reading it, which is about the time a search committee member might spend, and then ask them to tell you the top three things they remember from your letter. This helps you ensure that the things you want the search committee to remember you for are prominent in your letter. Beginning in August, you will also want to approach the individuals you plan to ask to serve as references on your applications. For most applications, you will likely only need to provide contact information for three to four references, but some applications may ask for as many as five. In the event that the application requires letters of recommendation to be submitted, you will want to give those individuals at least a two-week notice. I provided a copy of my CV, a link to the job posting, and notes about my work I wished to have emphasized when asking for a letter of recommendation.

When it comes to locating faculty job advertisements, common places to search are [HigherEdJobs](#), [Inside Higher Ed Careers](#), and [The Chronicle of Higher Education Jobs](#). Many of these websites allow you to sign up for email alerts when jobs are posted in your specific area of interest. For special education faculty positions specifically, I heavily relied on the Special Education Faculty Jobs Paired Open Database (POD). This database, maintained by researchers at the University of Missouri, is part of a preregistered study whose goal is to provide a descriptive overview of the demand for special education faculty. The database is updated weekly, and I personally keep it bookmarked in my internet browser so that I can quickly and easily access it.

One more important thing to note is that if the posting says that application review starts on August 15th, you want to have all your materials submitted by 11:59 pm on August 14th. This ensures that if the committee decides to pull all submitted applications on the morning of August 15th, yours is already in the pool. To help me keep track of this, I created tasks in my email calendar with the deadline being the day before the application was due. I also created calendar reminders roughly two weeks before the deadline to allow time for me to send my application materials to my advisor for review. If, by chance, you end up submitting your application materials after the deadline, you can email the chair of the search committee to notify them of your application. This is important

*(continues on page 4)*

*Student Spotlight (continued from page 3)*

because the search committee may not return to the pool of applications once review has begun, and you want to increase the chances of your application receiving consideration even if it was submitted late.

### **Prepare, Prepare, Prepare**

As with any high-stakes situation, you want to make sure that you've prepared the best that you can. While you will not know the exact questions the search committee will ask, there are several things you can do to prepare ahead of your interview. An excellent resource I utilized in preparing for this process is the webinar series, *The Academic Job Search*, created by the Division for Research in October and November of 2020. There are six installments in the series including: "What is the Job Search Process?," "How Do I Prepare My Application Materials?," "What Should I Expect in an Initial Interview?," "What Happens During an On-Campus Interview?," "What About the Job Talk?," and "I Have an Offer...Now What?" Recordings of these webinars are available on the [Division for Research-CEC YouTube channel](#). Not only did I watch each of the recordings, but I also recommended them to my colleagues outside the field of special education.

To prepare for screening interviews, you should research information about the program and department on the university's website. If you know who will be interviewing you as part of the search committee, you can also skim their CVs or faculty biographies on the university website. When preparing for potential on-campus interviews, there are a variety of things you may be asked to provide. Common examples include a job/research talk (typically 30–45 minutes in length), a teaching demonstration (typically 45–60 minutes), an example syllabus, and/or an example lesson plan. The job talk is arguably the most important of these if you are interviewing at an R1 or R2 institution, so you will want to practice your job talk several times before your on-campus interview. Ideally, you should practice at least once in front of a small group of people including your advisor, and/or other faculty member(s), and colleagues. The more you practice, the more comfortable you will be when the on-campus interview arrives. Additionally, once you are provided your on-campus interview itinerary, you will want to do some research on the individuals you will be meeting with during the interview. I also began to compile the list of

questions I wanted to ask each of the individuals I met with as part of my preparation process.

### **Have Confidence and Ask Questions**

Completing a PhD is a major accomplishment that few people attain. According to the U.S. Census Bureau, only 1.2% of the U.S. population has a PhD. This undoubtedly makes you extremely valuable, but it is up to you to communicate that value to potential employers. It is most certainly easier to convince others of your value if you believe in yourself first. This was very helpful for me to think about when I was feeling nervous before an interview. Remind yourself that if you are offered a screening interview, the search committee views you as qualified for the position. Reflecting on this definitely gave my self-confidence a little boost. Also, if you are offered an on-campus interview, the search committee not only thinks you are qualified but also considers you as a potential good fit for the position. This can certainly bolster your confidence as well. Approach the interview knowing your worth and make it clear that you have confidence in your skills and knowledge.

In addition, remember that you are interviewing them just as much as they are interviewing you. You want to gauge whether you think you will fit in and could see yourself working at the given university. Everyone you meet with, especially during an on-campus interview, is going to expect you to have questions, so come prepared with several. This will include different types of questions for the different types of people you will be interviewing with, which the fourth installment in the DR webinar episode covers thoroughly. Consulting with faculty members, including your advisor, at your current institution can also provide you with quality questions to ask. Ultimately, asking questions helps to show that you are interested in the position.

### **Do Not Take Rejection Personally**

I realize this last bit of advice is easier said than done, but it is really important. In my opinion, academic jobs are different from other types of jobs because the "fit" is extremely important. For example, the type of institution must be a fit for your career goals, the content or specialization area of the position must be a fit for your expertise, the structure and team within the department need to be a fit for your personality, and in some cases the geographic location must also be a fit for you and your family. You will likely be viewing faculty job advertisements with these things in mind and may

*Student Spotlight (continued from page 4)*

identify several positions that you may consider to be a “good fit.” It is common to apply to numerous jobs that have the potential to be a good fit for you.

I personally applied to roughly 25 tenure-track faculty positions just in this academic year. It is also common to not hear back from many of the places to which you apply. A rule of thumb that I have heard is that you can expect to hear back from about 25% of the jobs to which you apply. When you do not hear back from an institution to which you have applied, try your best not to internalize that or take it personally. Ultimately, the search committee is making initial decisions about who to interview based only on the few documents you submit with your application and not on you as a person. Even with an initial screening interview, the committee has only spent 30–45 minutes with you and still do not know that much about you as a person. Finally, try to remember that in the end, the search committee is making decisions based on the applicant they think would be the best fit for the position, which is not a judgment of you as an individual. ■



## Call for Nominations

### 2024–2025 CEC-DR Doctoral Student Scholars

Division for Research, Council for Exceptional Children

**DUE DATE: SEPTEMBER 30, 2024**

The Division for Research invites nominations for outstanding doctoral student scholars to participate in the **2024–2025 Doctoral Seminars in Special Education Research**. Selected student researchers will participate with peers in generative discussions and professional development led by distinguished researchers recognized for making outstanding scientific contributions in special education. Three virtual seminars and forums will be held during this coming academic year along with a colloquium that brings students and researchers together in a session dedicated to graduate student development at the **2025 CEC Convention in Baltimore, Maryland**.

## Nominees

Nominees should be outstanding doctoral students in special education seeking careers in research. *Nominees must have substantially completed their courses and be in the process of formulating a dissertation proposal or conducting dissertation research.* Invitations will be issued to 10 doctoral students, with competition based on the judged quality of the student’s research and capacity to gain from and contribute to the seminars.

## Nomination Process Summary

Students will be chosen to participate in the doctoral seminar series through a rigorous selection process:

1. Advanced doctoral students are nominated as CEC-DR Doctoral Student Scholars by a faculty member who can attest to the quality of their scholarship.
2. Students submit an abstract and a detailed summary research proposal that outlines relevant features of their study to their nominating faculty member.
3. Faculty members submit the student materials with the letter of nomination.
4. The proposals are blind reviewed by members of the DR-DSS planning committee.

## The Nomination Packet

*Directions for Students: Email the following 2 items in separate attachments to your nominating faculty member.*

1. Abstract of student’s research project that is no more than 120 words.
2. Two-page summary statement of student’s proposed research. The summary statement should be no more than two (2) single-spaced pages and should outline the problem you are pursuing or plan to pursue in your research, its intended contribution to theory and practice, specific research questions, and study procedures. Follow APA style throughout your submission. *Use 12-point Times New Roman font, single spacing, and 1-inch margins all around your document, and save as a Word file.* Up to 5 additional pages for References, Tables, and Figures may be included and will not count against the 2-page limit. References

*(continues on page 6)*

Call for Nominations (continued from page 5)

should include only works cited. Remove all information about the nominee’s name and institution. The statement is forwarded to DR-DSS reviewers during the selection process.

**Directions for Faculty Nominators:**

1. Please compile the nomination packet (letter of nomination, abstract of student research, and statement of proposed research) for the nominee.
2. Your letter of nomination should be no more than 2 pages (12-point Times New Roman font, single spaced, 1-inch margins). Please explain why this student was selected, with special reference to academic performance and prospects for a career in research. (You might consider informing the committee about why you think this student would benefit from participating; what the student has to share with peers from other universities; or the research projects, publications, or other scholarly activities the student has engaged in during doctoral study.)
3. **Complete the *Nomination Form* and send the letter, abstract, and research summary to [jcrockett@coe.ufl.edu](mailto:jcrockett@coe.ufl.edu) no later than **September 30, 2024**. Attach**

**all three (3) items to one email (i.e., letter of nomination, abstract of student research, statement of proposed research).** Please save items in a **Word format** to facilitate the handling for reviewers.

4. Nominators are cordially invited to attend the colloquium at CEC, usually scheduled on Friday afternoon, and followed by the DR business meeting and reception.

We expect to extend invitations to 10 doctoral student scholars by the end of October. All nominating faculty members will be notified of the outcome for their students at that time.

For questions, contact Dr. Jean Crockett, University of Florida, at [jcrockett@coe.ufl.edu](mailto:jcrockett@coe.ufl.edu); Dr. Mary Theresa Kiely, Queens College, City University of New York, at [mary.theresa.kiely@qc.cuny.edu](mailto:mary.theresa.kiely@qc.cuny.edu); or Dr. Kristen Merrill O’Brien, George Mason University, at [kmerril2@gmu.edu](mailto:kmerril2@gmu.edu).

**NOMINATION PACKETS MUST BE SUBMITTED ELECTRONICALLY THROUGH THE NOMINATION FORM (see link above) NO LATER THAN SEPTEMBER 30, 2024.**



**President’s Message** (continued from page 1)

there were no CLD students, and few students with disabilities. That was not the case, of course—these students *were* present—but there was little attention given to how to teach them. I did know about direct instruction and reading mastery, but very little else.

But it’s these midnight musings concerning “evidence” that cause me to consider Megan’s excitement for her upcoming adventures in the classroom, and wonder about what exists in her teacher preparation thinking about how to teach and how her students will learn. Undoubtedly, she will have a plethora of evidence to consider: culturally relevant teaching; cultural capital; funds of knowledge; debunking deficit thinking; diversity, equity and inclusion (DEI); Learning by Scientific Design (LbSD); learning by universal design; bilingualism; ableism; intersectionality; evidence-based

practice (EBP); science of reading; science of math; self-determination; motivational theory; play and movement; school-wide PBIS; mentoring; accommodations; reading interventions; KWL. So much to know and be able to do for evidence-based practice.

Many of us agree that teacher understanding and application of effective EBP is critical for supporting student learning and for closing persistent achievement gaps, particularly for students with disabilities. Evidence-based teaching involves the use of evidence to (1) establish where students are in their learning; (2) decide on appropriate teaching strategies and interventions; and (3) monitor student progress and evaluate teaching effectiveness. Yet the gap between knowledge production and knowledge application is a challenge to evidence-based teaching. Another significant challenge to the implementation of evidence is the value and relevance of

(continues on page 7)

*President's Message (continued from page 6)*

research evidence. Which evidence will meet the smell test and show up in practice, and in our research agendas, proposals, and studies?

There is a wealth of literature on why evidence-based teaching and practice does not work in many classrooms and with diverse students; however those musings are for another day. And although there may be concerns about what constitutes “evidence-based,” teachers are likely to teach more effectively—and students are likely to learn more efficiently—when there is a wider use of reliable evidence in classroom practice available. The essential thought is that decisions by practitioners should be based and enacted on the best available evidence collected through rigorous empirical research in many acceptable forms and contexts. These discussions of what research is likely to result in the strongest and most dependable kinds of evidence to guide practice are underway in the field. As is the case of medical practice, it is as important that special education uses multiple forms of evidence from multiple sources and studies.

Education practitioners should play a central role in the generation of evidence and use relating to their students' presenting needs, histories, ways of knowing and manifesting knowing, communicating, playing, belonging, and learning. As we expand our concepts, definitions, and roles, use of evidence-based practice will undoubtedly be essential to practitioners like Megan for making informed decisions that have a meaningful impact and support teaching effectiveness. Her decision to remain in the profession may hinge on her expertise, experience, and ability to utilize evidence-based practice to make a real difference for her students—her reason for deciding to teach in the first place.

I believe in many ways, the field is doing a better job of getting evidence into the hands of practitioners, and teachers are doing a better job of using that evidence, but there are concerns that we still must address. I invite your musings as we ask tough questions that propel us forward and result in greater student achievement and access to teachers equipped with good, valid, and reliable evidence to reverse severe inequities and overcome the academic, social, emotional, and behavior difficulties of students with disabilities. Here are my colleagues' and my questions. We call on the field to help find answers and solutions to the following questions.

## Questions to Consider Generating and Enhancing the Role of Equitable and Valid Evidence for Practitioners' Use

- How do we build intervention research and theories of learning and development that foster equity and include culturally and linguistically diverse students with disabilities and learning difficulties, especially those with other marginalized identities and intersections (e.g., socioeconomic backgrounds, minoritized racial/ethnic identity, heritage languages, and immigration experiences)?
- How can the field move toward greater inclusion and respect for diversity in inquiry and research methods to investigate racial disparities and intersections of disability?
- How can we bridge knowledge associated with experimental and quasi-experimental designs with knowledge associated with descriptive and small *n* methods, in ways that add to our collective understanding of historical and contemporary inequities?
- A strength of the special education research community is that we are all working to make schools and other contexts more equitable and accessible for and with people with disabilities. How can we also encourage/incentivize/require every member of the community to address problems of racism, classism, linguisticism, and xenophobia with the same commitment made toward debunking and deconstructing ableism?
- How can we establish partnerships and equal distribution of resources to sustain equitable research on and with people who also represent the population's diversity? ■

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