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## Trends and Changes in the National Association for Gifted Children's Special Populations Network Annual Convention Presentations, 2001-2010

Kaleb Farnham

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by

Kaleb Farnham

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements  
for graduation with Honors in the Education

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MacGillivray, Leonard  
Thesis Mentor

Fall 2019

All requirements for graduation with Honors in the  
Education have been completed.

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Laurie J. Croft, Ph.D.  
Honors Thesis Mentor

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Trends and Changes in the National Association for Gifted Children's  
Special Populations Network Annual Convention Presentations, 2001-2010

Kaleb Farnham

University of Iowa

### **Abstract**

This qualitative study examines the trends and changes in the National Association for Gifted Children's (NAGC) Special Populations Network annual convention presentations from the years 2001-2010. Factors examined include demographic information about the presenters, including gender, geographic location, and workplace represented, as well as the number of presentations and their topics. This content analysis is especially important when considering talented and gifted education in public schools across the United States, and what educators learn from these convention presentations that might impact priorities regarding special populations. After analyzing ten years of Special Populations Network presentations, it becomes apparent that while there have been changes in issues of importance related to special populations in gifted education, two main subjects appear throughout: minority student integration into talented and gifted classrooms, and twice-exceptional learners.

The National Association for Gifted Children (NAGC) hosts an annual convention, providing a venue where leading gifted education researchers give presentations about important topics in the field, and where NAGC Networks recommend proposals and sponsor presentations of interest to the members of their own strands. This research project looks specifically at the 2001-2010 NAGC presentations selected by the Special Populations Network. The Special Populations Network exists to “increase the recognition of special populations of gifted children and promote equitable services to address their diverse needs” (Networks – Special Populations, n.d. para. 1) By analyzing the presentations given over the first decade in the new millennium, trends and changes in special populations topics become clearer, giving insights into what issues have been and continue to be of concern related to special populations.

This research is of particular interest to those currently teaching or planning to teach gifted students, because it encourages analysis of topics of significance related to special populations in gifted education, as well for actions that can better support equity in gifted education programs. This research project systematically analyzes the Special Populations Network presentations and short descriptions that appear in annual NAGC convention programs over the first decade of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century. The goal of this project is to facilitate a better understanding of the trends in issues of importance related to special populations in gifted education.

### **Literature Review**

The literature review for this project focused on special populations within gifted education. Articles from 2001-2010, as well as current literature from 2019, the year this project is being completed, were reviewed. The goal from this section is to evaluate how the NAGC presentations correlate with published research from the same timeframe, and to evaluate

similarities or differences between the first decade of the new millennium and the current year's publications.

### **Diversity**

Diversity is at the forefront of the 2001-2010 NAGC Special Populations Network presentations. The Network states that “the term ‘special populations’ refers to gifted children who have additional circumstances or characteristics that can interfere with academic achievement, social/emotional growth, and optimal development of their potential” (Network – Special Populations, n.d., para. 1). For this research, the literature review is guided by some of the diversity embraced by the Special Populations Network, including diverse children who are from Cultural/Linguistic/Ethnically diverse backgrounds, who are twice exceptional (2e), who are from lower socio-economic status (SES) backgrounds, who are impacted by geographic issues, such as rural settings, who experience the impact of gender issues, or who are Gay/Lesbian/Bisexual/Transgendered/Questioning (GLBTQ) (Networks – Special Populations, n.d.). The literature review confirms that diversity was a significant issue in gifted education from 2001-2010, as well as in current research publications.

### ***Identification and Programming***

One of the main themes in the literature is the identification of diverse learners for gifted programs. Ford and Harmon (2001) summarized many of the issues that challenge the identification of special populations, including a lack of motivation, conflict between achievement and affiliation, and social injustices, all of which can contribute to underachievement of these students. An educational focus on deficit thinking was another issue in the failure to identify more diverse students in gifted education. Many articles touched on this

as a major concern in the underrepresentation of diverse students in gifted programs. According to Ford and Grantham (2003), school culture and willingness to change and move beyond deficit thinking are key to a school's success in retaining diverse gifted students. Misperceptions about what cultural diversity should be also influence definitions, practices, and policies in gifted identification, and Ford and Harmon (2001) argue that differences are all too often associated with deficits.

Racial biases are another core component of the diversity concerns in gifted education. Educators misunderstanding cultural traits of their students can become a communication problem, with students attempting to communicate their needs in a gifted program, but educators often perceiving these cries for help as misbehavior. Ouyang and Conoley (2007) perhaps describe it best: "The educational and democratic principles of GATE [Gifted and Talented Education] programming are undermined if children are overlooked or rejected for appropriate educational experiences based on the effect of the socioeconomic or language experiences of their families" (p. 300).

### ***Twice-Exceptionality***

Twice-exceptional students (sometimes labeled 2e) were the second major topic in the NAGC Special Populations Network presentations during the decade under review, and they remain relevant today. Students who are twice-exceptional face unique challenges in schools. Their needs must be effectively met in order to ensure the students thrives and reach their full potential. The identification of twice-exceptional students can be a challenge, as standardized tests and measures for identifying gifted students can miss these student's unique abilities, and thus, are not receiving the resources they need (Bianco, 2005).



Current literature confirms that research on twice-exceptional students is still vitally needed in the special populations field. In 2019, twice-exceptional students are still prevalent in the research. As Ritchotte and Zaghlawan (2019) explain, twice-exceptional students are often being assisted through deficit-remediation, rather than the programs that they need to thrive. The procedures and standards for working with twice-exceptional students still need a lot of work to be successful, and today, parents still may need to help these students succeed (Ritchotte and Zaghlawan, 2019).

### *Socioeconomic Status*

Socio-economic status is another prevalent issue in gifted education literature, though it was not prominently featured in the Special Populations Network presentations from 2001-2010. The focus of the research about socioeconomic status was on identification. “Identifying gifted students from middle-class homes, regardless of their racial or cultural group, is easier than identifying giftedness in poverty. It is under-representation of gifted children from poverty that crosses all racial and cultural groups and that presents the greatest challenge,” (Swanson, 2006, p. 12, citing Slocumb, 2001). The equitable practices of identification are still challenging, with questions in understanding and finding giftedness in students that are not of a middle-class socioeconomic status..

### *Rural Settings*

One special populations group that is often overlooked is the rural community. Another small number of the presentations from 2001-2010, the literature about this group mainly focused on economic resources needed for gifted education in rural school districts. A lack of funding and resources can make tailoring gifted education programs to their students quite difficult. “Rural schools are challenged to meet the needs of gifted learners by providing

appropriate programs. Limited numbers of gifted students may inhibit the program options available to rural gifted students. Limited economic and human resources may also be problematic for small community school. At the same time, small school and class size make individuation possible..." (Milligan, 2004, p. 20). These schools face challenges; while they have to provide differentiation to their gifted students to better meet their needs, their budgets do not always allow for best practices.

### ***Women in Gifted Education Programs***

Another topic that was included rarely in the presentations but more so in the literature was women in gifted education; both the difference between the ratio of women to men in gifted education classes and the female student's self-perceptions of themselves as academics were topics of interest in the literature. "Also, gender-ratio in gifted classes was found to have a negative effect on gifted girls' academic self-concept, whereas gender-ratio had no influence on boys' academic self-concept. It is plausible that with increasing minority status (i.e., smaller percentage of girls in class), gender stereotypes might be increasingly influential in the formation of negative academic self-perceptions, evidenced in the lower academic self-concept scores in female students" (Preckel, Zeidner, Goetz, Schleyer, 2008, p. 93).

### **Other Topics Covered in NAGC Special Populations Presentations**

Changes in focus from the 2001-2010 years to the present research in special populations in gifted education is significant. Topics such as GLBTQ and students who demonstrate needs for effective Social Emotional Learning were hardly represented in either the presentations or literature from 2001-2010 but are clearly topics of importance in the field today. These two

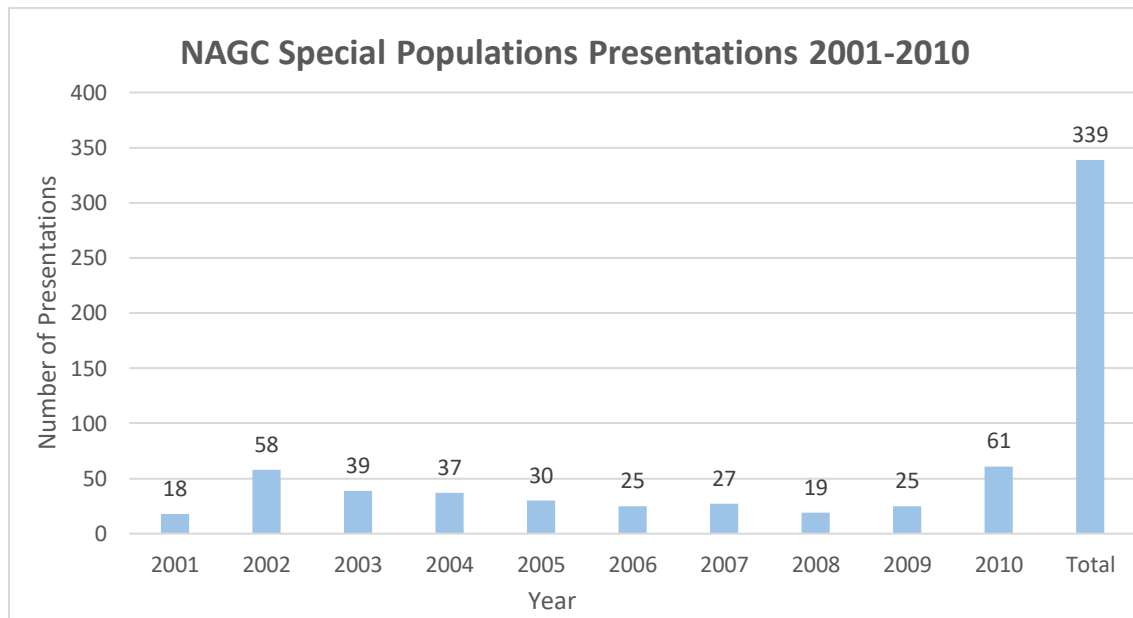
populations have grown in recognition across the country and as such, as gifted education moves into the 2020s, need more effective attention than they received previously.

### **Methodology**

Content analysis facilitated an analysis of the NAGC Special Populations Network convention presentations from 2001 – 2010. “Content analysis is a research tool used to determine the presence of certain words or concepts within texts or sets of texts. Researchers quantify and analyze the presence, meanings and relationships of such words and concepts, then make inferences about the messages within the texts, the writer(s), the audience, and even the culture and time of which these are a part” (Writing@CSU Guide: Content Analysis, n.d. para. 1 of An Introduction to Content Analysis). To research the topics and the presenter demographics associated with the presentations, data from annual convention programs was entered in an Excel spreadsheet, where the topic and gender, region, and affiliation of each presenter was compiled and organized. When the title of a topic did not clearly explain the content of the presentation, the NAGC programs from each year’s convention allowed further reading. The data was compiled by year, and the data by the relevance of each topic and the changes that occurred over the decade. The results of this study will show the trends of presentations about special populations in gifted education from 2001-2010 and will allow gifted educators to see which content areas remain relevant, as well as to consider which areas have research foundations to better support diverse gifted students. By better understanding where special populations research has focused, gifted educators and researchers alike can continue to move the field forward in the classroom, utilizing best practices.

### **Results**

From the years 2001-2010, NAGC hosted 339 presentations that fell into the category of special populations. Figure 1 shows how many Special Populations Network presentations were given each year. With an average of slightly fewer than 34 presentations given per year, the Special Populations Network shared a variety of topics with teachers and others attending the Convention. As the literature review showed, a wide variety of topics is included within special populations in gifted education, and each year, presentations reflected the variety of options.



*Figure 1*

Of the 339 presentations from the Special Populations Network from 2001-2010, 14 thematic categories emerged. Figure 2 shows that 44.8% of all presentations were about diversity and/or bilingual students (English Language Learners), 21.2% focused on twice-exceptional students, and 14.4% of the presentations introduced curriculum issues for special populations. These three topics represent 70.2% of all presentations given from 2001-2010, and while some other topics, such as socioeconomic status and differentiation received attention in multiple

years, special populations presentations were dominated by three themes. Data from all 10 years is included in the Appendix.

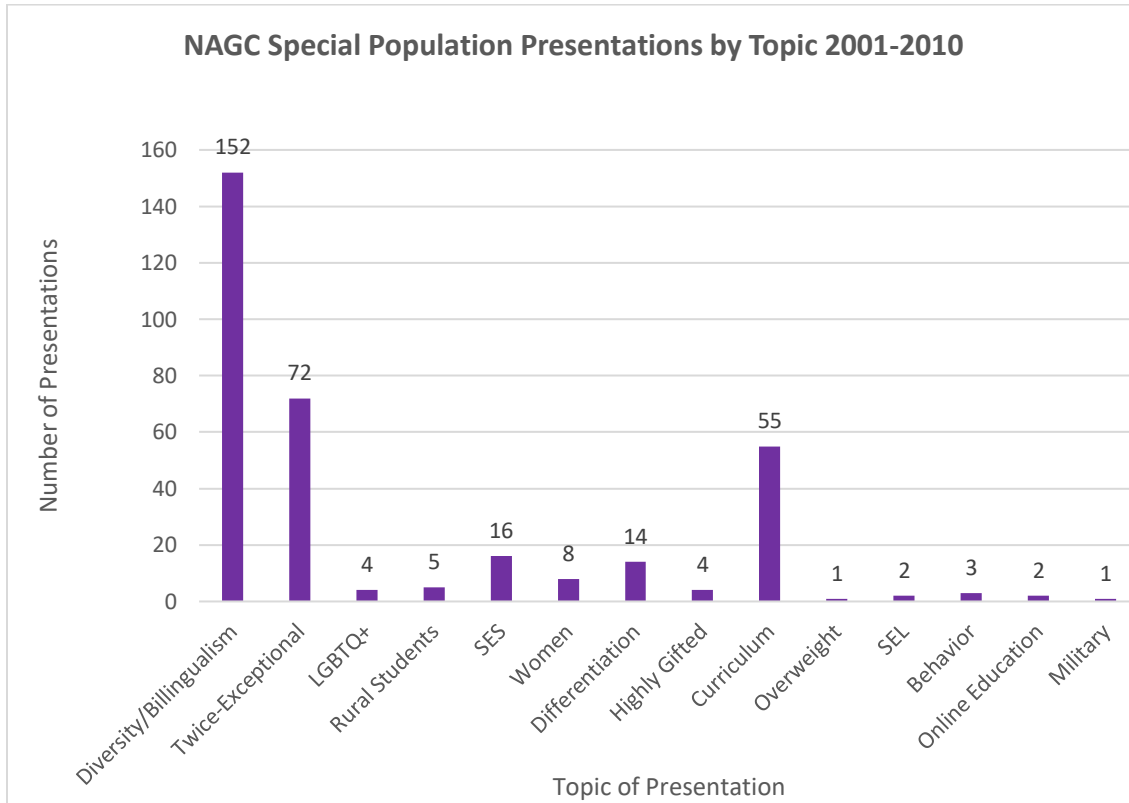


Figure 2

Figure 3 details the gender of presenters for Special Populations Network sessions. As the chart shows, there were more than twice the number of women presenters (69.82%) as there were men (29.15%), with 0.01% preferring not to specify gender. This is slightly different than the ratio of public-school teachers, where there are 77% female teachers (US Department of Education). However, Figure 5 shows that not all of the presenters come from schools, with some representing private education companies, and others coming from universities.

The regional reference comes from the United States census and is the basis for the information shown in Figure 4. The majority of the presenters were from southern states and made up 43.7% of presenters. The Midwest had 25.7% of presenters, the west presenters made

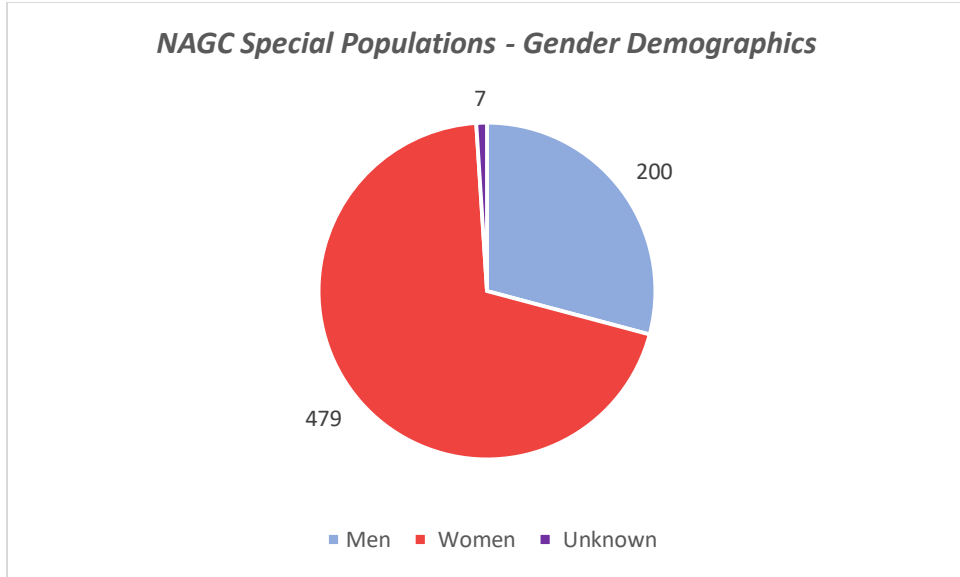


Figure 3

up 17.2% of the total, and the northeast represented 10.3% of the presentations. Finally, international presenters made up just 0.07%, and .1% of presenters did not share their regional demographics.

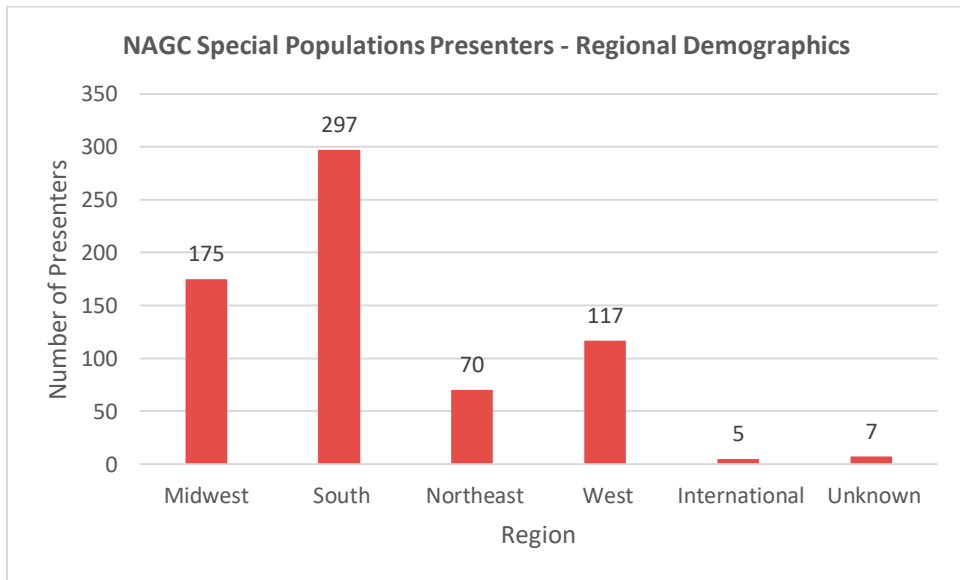


Figure 4

Figure 5 reveals the type of organization or institution each presenter represented. This is an important demographic because it suggests who is studying special populations in gifted education, as well as new or innovative ideas to better serve more students. The largest number of presenters came from various universities across the United States. This group represented over half of all presenters, at 52.7%. This is not surprising, as universities generally spearhead research as professors, graduate students, and even some undergraduate students participate in research. The next largest number came from the variety of types of pre-K through Grade 12 schools, with presenters mainly being teachers, gifted education program coordinators, and some administrators. At 27.3% of the total, this group provided important insights because they were mainly the people in the classroom every day, working with students, and seeing the landscape of gifted education in real time; as well, research conducted in classrooms could represent a collaboration with college or university faculty. The final group represented come from private institutions, totaling 20.0% of the presenters. This group is generally made up of individuals who develop curriculum, psychologists, and others from private companies who focus on education.

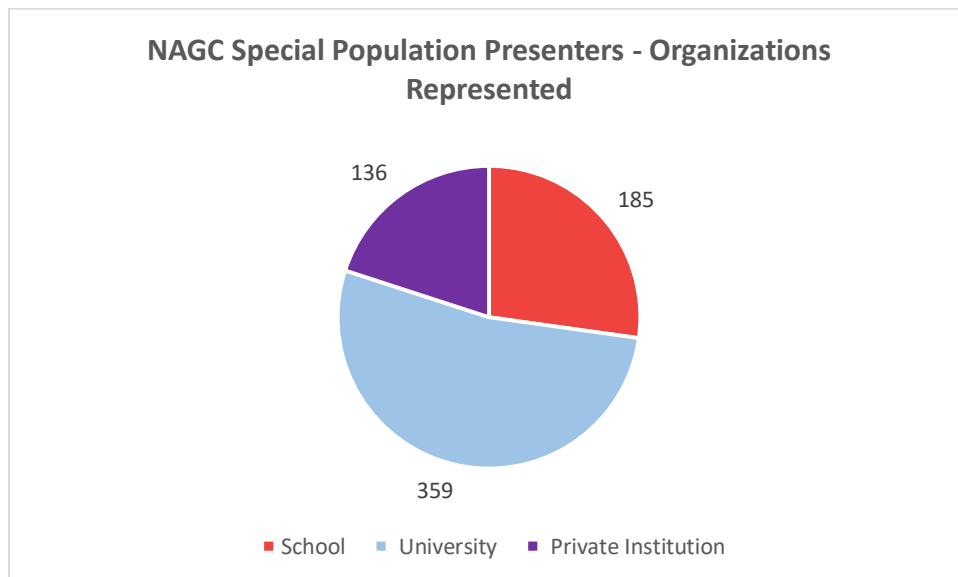


Figure 5

### **Discussion**

After analyzing the data collected on Special Populations Network presentations from 2001-2010, the main priorities became clear. Issues related to diversity in gifted education, including English Language Learners (Diversity/Bilingualism), to the unique needs of Twice-Exceptional students, and to Curriculum that addressed the needs of diverse populations were the three most presented topics in the decade. The prevalence of these topics shows a focus on incorporating traditionally underrepresented students and English Language Learners into gifted programs, and many specifically focused on the identification of these students as gifted. While some argue that participation in gifted classes is based entirely on merit, research suggests that the identification process is not identifying all the various gifted students who would benefit from gifted programming, hence the significant number of articles focused on identification processes. Moving away from traditional assessments for admission to gifted programs was a commonly suggested solution because they often do not reveal the student's skills and/or aptitudes. Twice-Exceptional topics ranged from inclusion in and identification for gifted programs to strengths-based accommodations for twice-exceptional students. This is a crucial topic in gifted education, as these students require the services of a high-quality gifted education program in order to demonstrate their abilities. The last major topic, the specifics of appropriate curriculum, varied widely across presentations. The importance of this topic is clear, however, because curriculum is at the heart of appropriate services for all students.

Far fewer presentations focused on topics such as GLBTQ (LGBTQ+ in Figure 2), women in gifted education, and socio-economic status (SES), yet these topics are prevalent in gifted education literature in 2019. The recent emphasis on these topics will continue to improve the quality of gifted education programs for a variety of gifted students from special populations.



### **Limitations**

The study is limited by the fact that the data analyzed are from the first decade of this millennium. While the information from the 2001-2010 data is useful, a more systematic comparison with current data would be helpful. Some of the demographic data was incomplete, including some regional or gender data. Some of the presentations could have arguably fit into two or more categories, but instead were sorted into what the author deemed the primary topic for clarity.

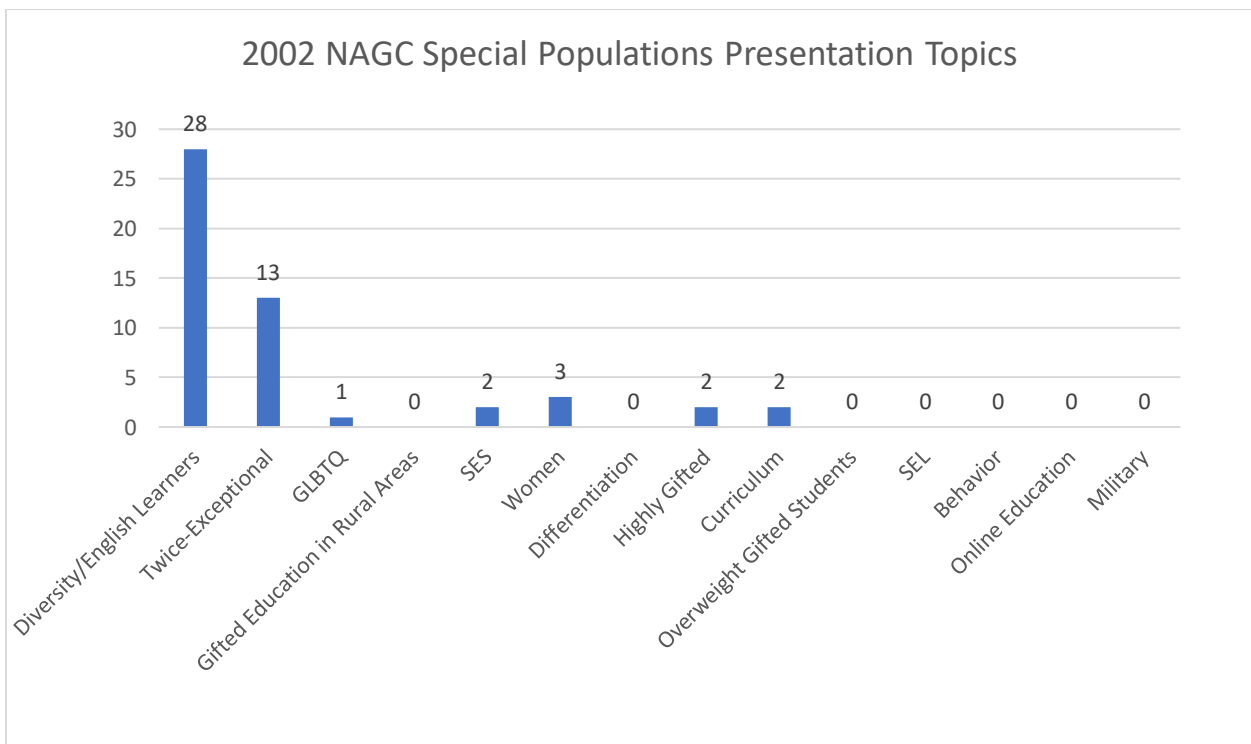
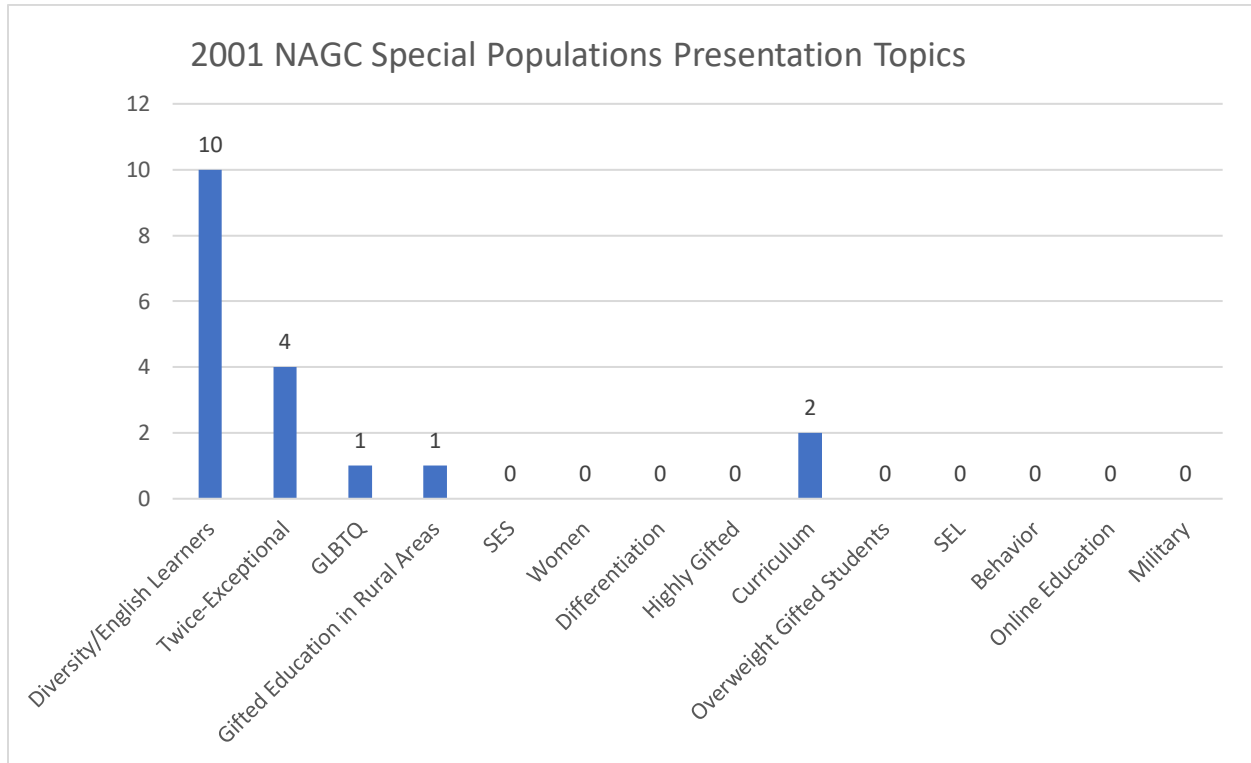
### **Relation to my Experiences in Gifted Education Coursework**

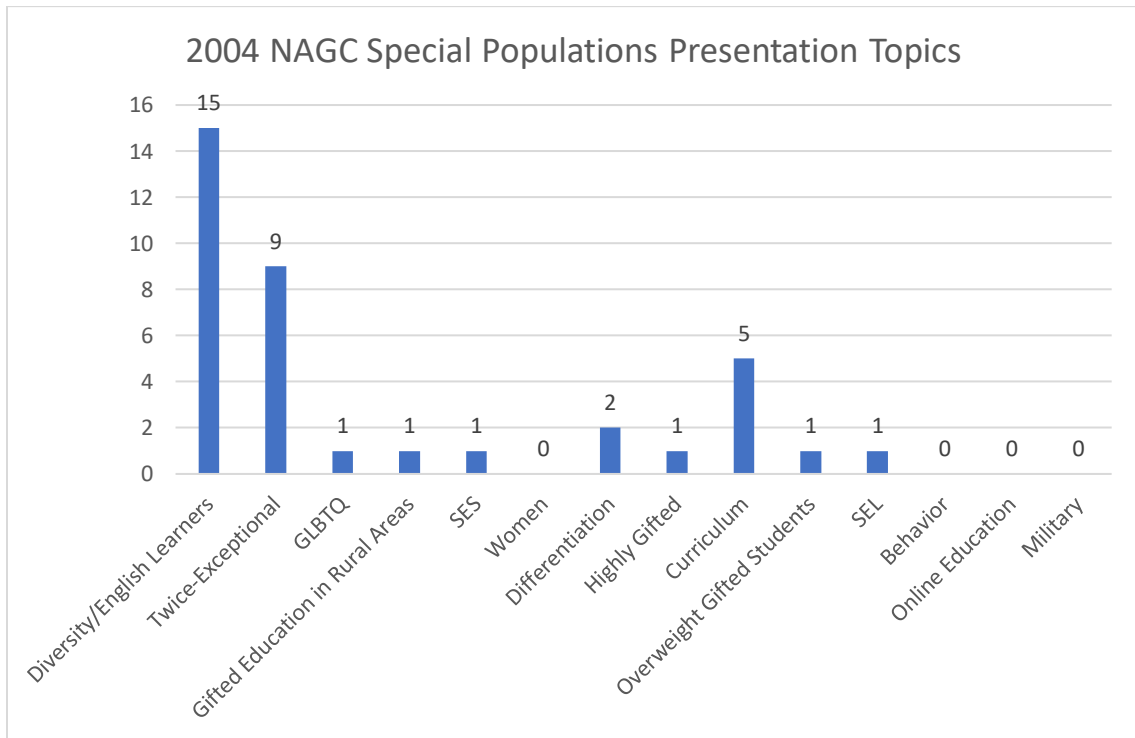
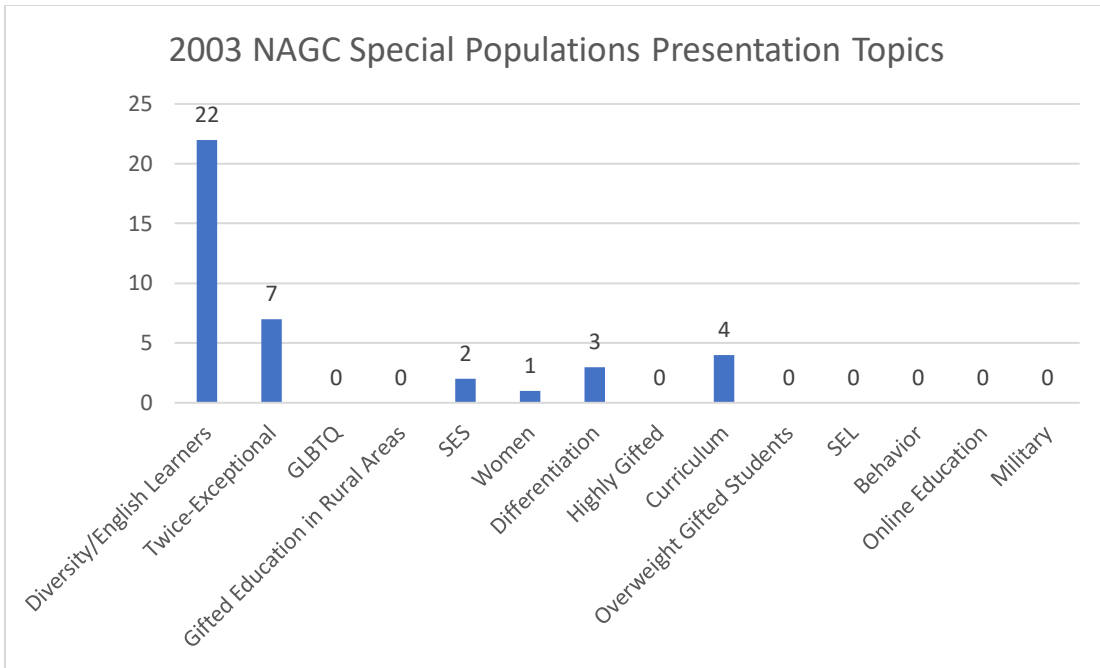
This project was a fulfilling addition to my gifted education coursework because it gave me the opportunity to compare the research I studied throughout my coursework to data from the national convention from the first decade of this millennium. It was a unique experience to review gifted education topics of interest to a NAGC Network and compare it to literature published in overlapping years, as well as to contemporary literature. Most of the presentation topics are still so prevalent in the research and practice of teaching gifted education, although some topics are distinctive, including gifted children from military families, overweight gifted children as a special population, and social-emotional learning (SEL) and special populations. It was also interesting to see who prepares presentations for the NAGC Special Populations Network research and where they work. These Network presentations showed me that there are a variety of people who are working to improve practices for gifted children from special populations.

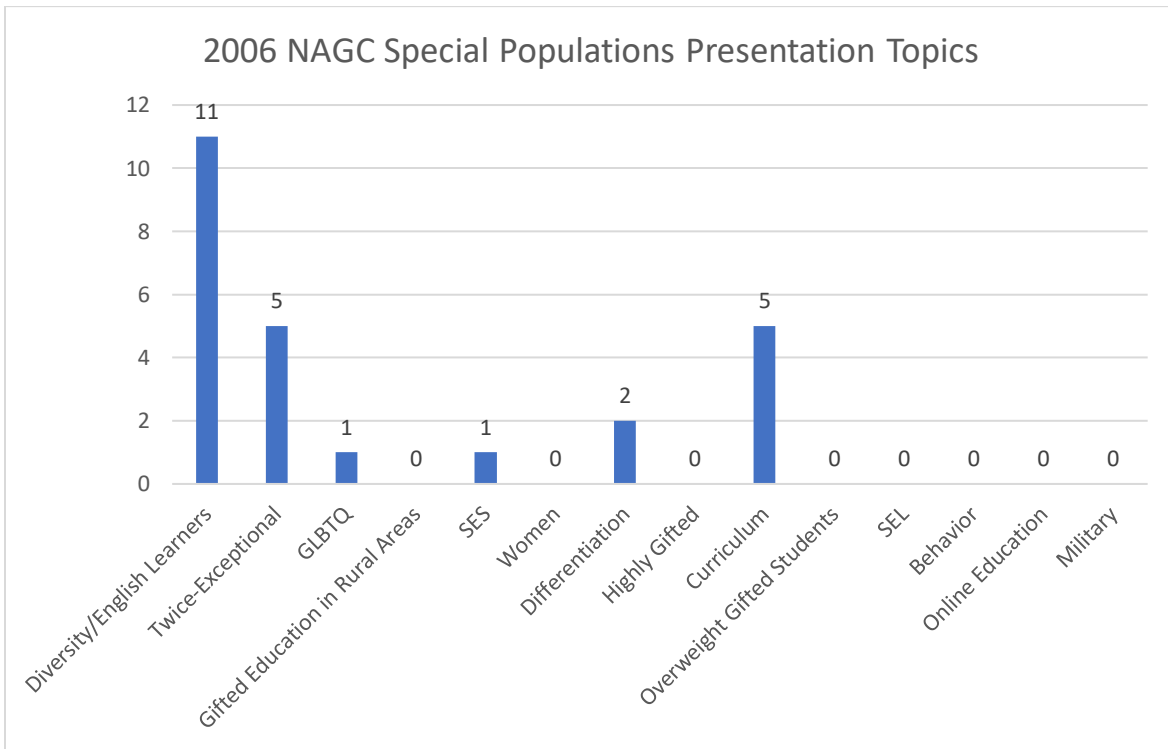
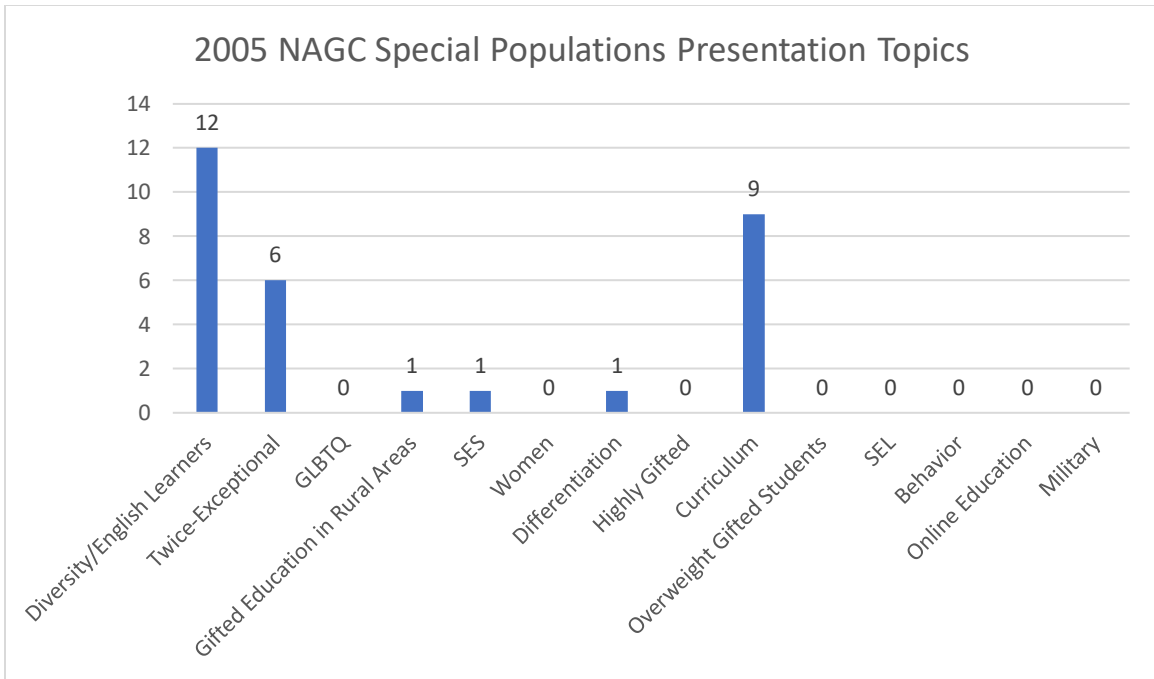
Another benefit of this project was the opportunity to focus on some of the special populations that I neither had the opportunity to work with nor read about during my

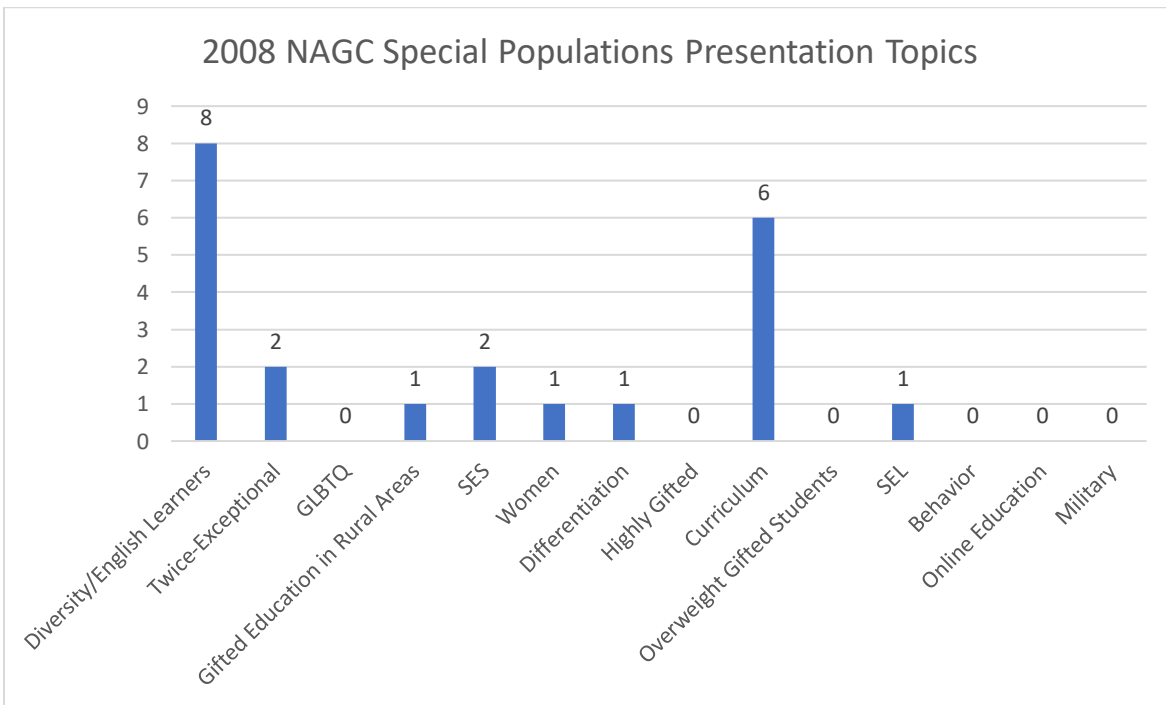
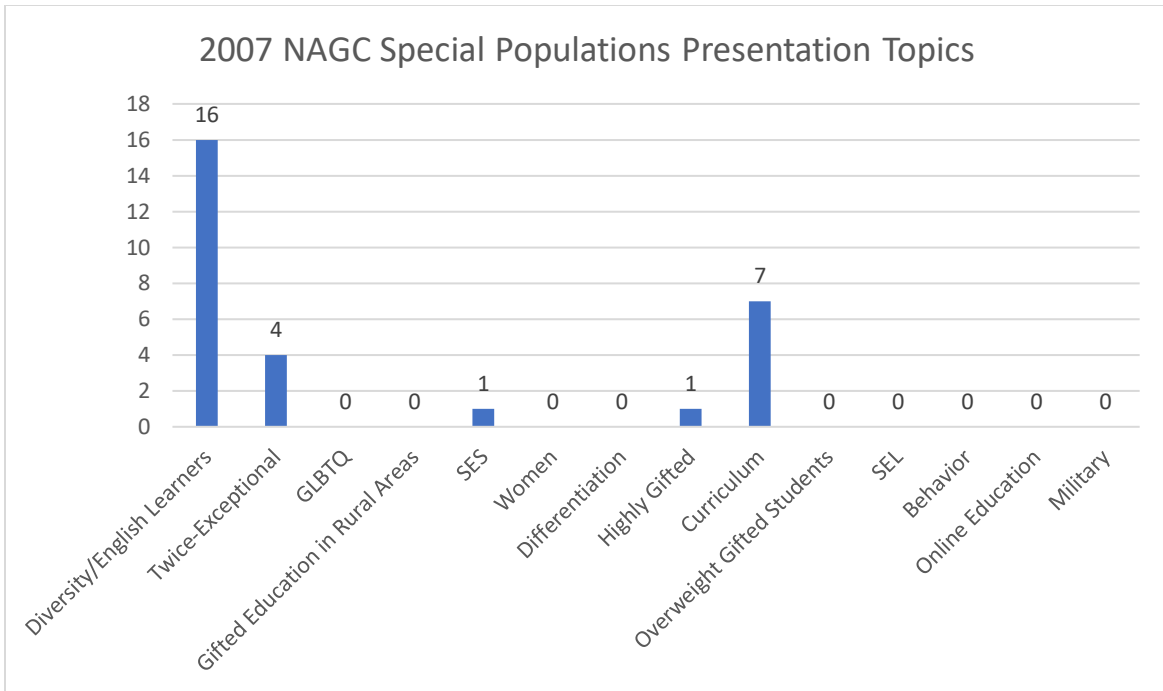
coursework. I really enjoyed taking the time to learn more about various special populations and broaden my horizons before I even step into a gifted classroom. I really appreciated the unique opportunity that this project gave to me, and I feel more confident than ever that I can take this experience into my teaching and better serve all my students.

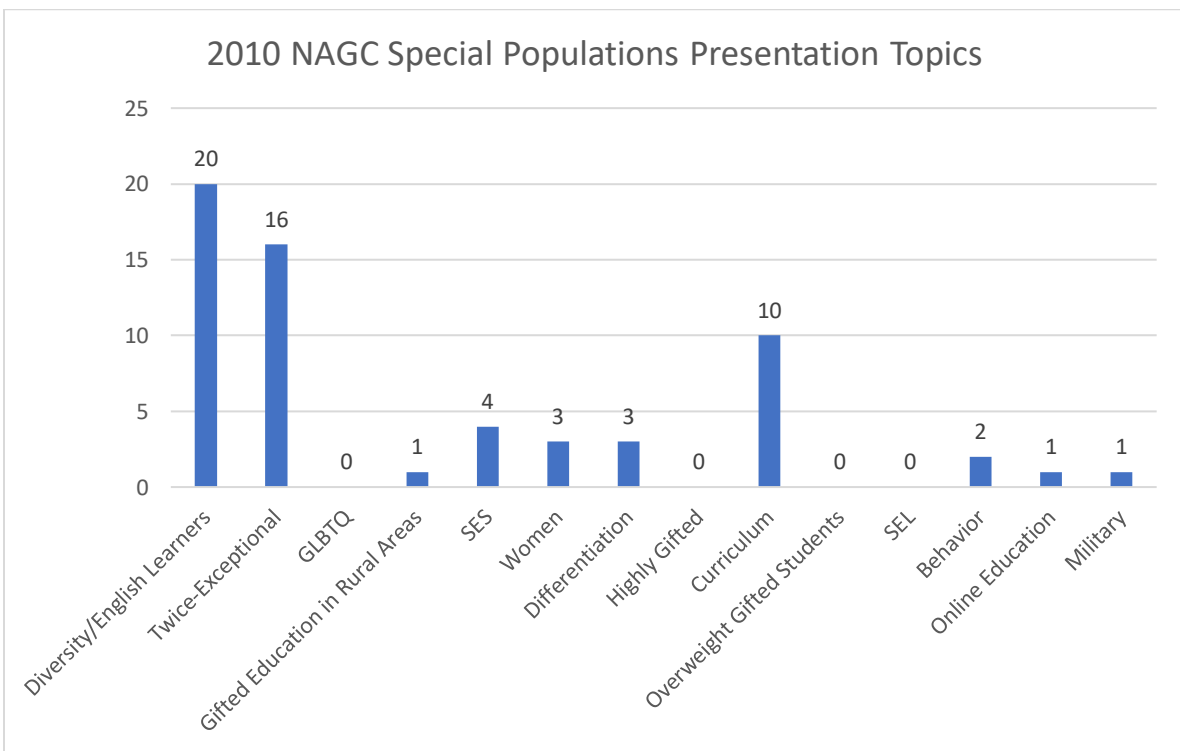
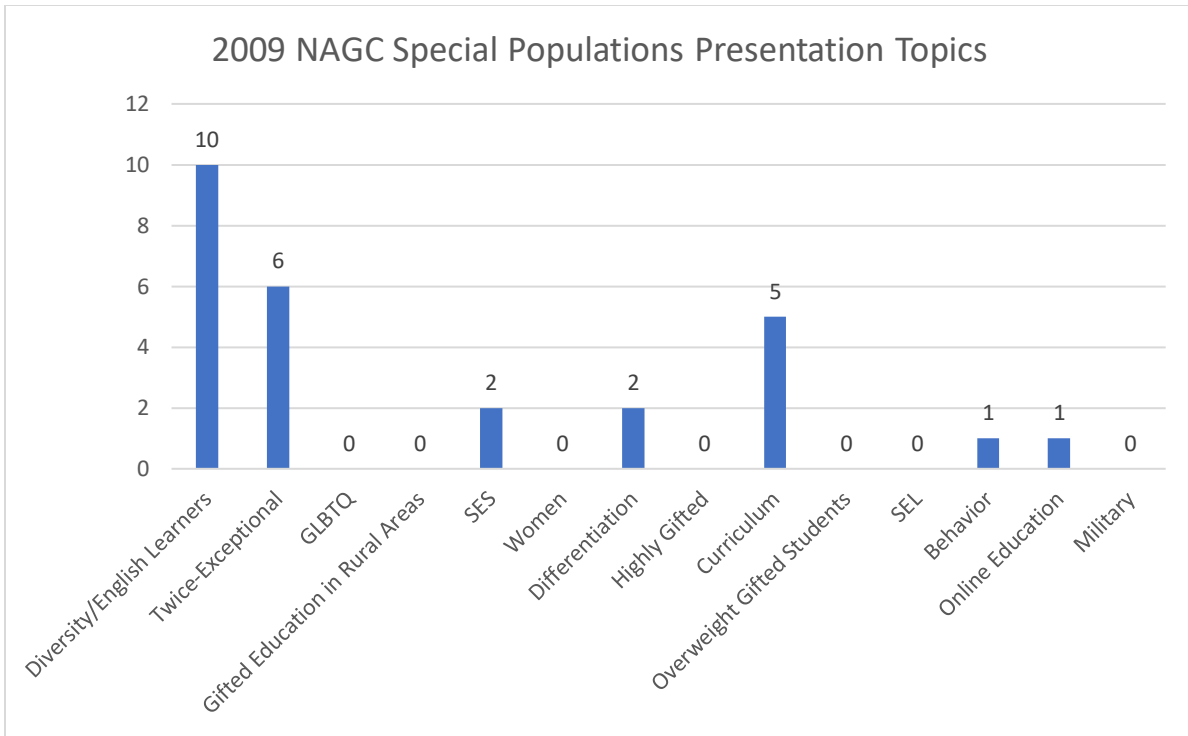
Appendix











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