Special Education Doctoral Program
at the University of Florida

The mission of the Special Education program area is to promote the successful inclusion of individuals with disabilities and their families in society through excellence in the education of teachers and leaders, the generation of new knowledge, and the application of existing knowledge.

The University of Florida doctoral program in Special Education is consistently ranked among the top five programs in the nation. The high quality of the program provides a wealth of opportunities for graduate students. Mentoring in research, work on grants, teaching undergraduate courses, writing for publication, and presenting at national conferences are just a few of the experiences our students enjoy.

This handbook is designed to provide a ready reference for students and their advisors on the requirements and policies associated with the special education doctoral program. For information about University of Florida requirements, please consult the Graduate Student Handbook (http://graduateschool.ufl.edu/media/graduate-school/pdf-files/handbook.pdf). In the case of any discrepancy, the Graduate School Handbook supersedes this handbook.

Program Philosophy

Doctor of Philosophy (Ph.D.) and Doctor of Education (Ed.D.) programs in the Special Education program area are designed to prepare graduates for teaching, research, and administrative positions in colleges and universities, as well as for leadership positions in other educational agencies. All doctoral students are expected to demonstrate competence in reading of research and independently designing and conducting research in special education.

Admission to Ph.D. and Ed.D. Programs

The Special Education program is committed to recruiting graduate students that reflect the diversity of the field of special education and the country. We want to further develop a research community whose work will contribute to the advancement and betterment of students with disabilities along with their parents and teachers. To identify such persons capable of and committed to transforming and improving the field of special education, a number of criteria are used.
Successful applicants must meet minimum requirements related to grade point average (GPA) and applicable test scores (e.g., GRE, TOEFL). Applicants must also provide additional documentation, including letters of recommendation, curriculum vitae, a statement of professional goals, and an academic writing sample. Finally, applicants must participate in an admission interview, which may be held in person or via teleconference. An admissions committee reviews all application materials to determine whether the applicant is a good match for the program.

**Doctoral Program Overview**

Upon admission to the Special Education doctoral program applicants are given the status of doctoral student. The main responsibility of a doctoral student is to complete course work while developing competencies in research, teaching, and service to the field. Following the completion of coursework, doctoral students must complete written and oral exams to qualify for doctoral candidacy. A doctoral candidate completes a dissertation to demonstrate the capacity to conduct high quality independent research. Each of these program elements is described in detail in subsequent sections of this handbook.

**Doctoral Competencies**

The faculty in the Special Education program have developed a set of competencies that doctoral students are expected to meet prior to program completion (see the Appendix for a list of these competencies). These competencies are addressed during required courses and other experiences (e.g., dissertation, graduate assistantships) during the doctoral program. It is the responsibility of the student’s advisor and supervisory committee to ensure that all competencies are met prior to graduation.

**Advisor and Supervisory Committee**

After being admitted to the doctoral program a temporary advisor will be assigned to provide assistance in planning the first semester of study and guidance in preparing for subsequent terms. The advisor serves as the student’s primary mentor through the program.

During the first year in the program, students work with their advisors to form a supervisory committee. The permanent committee should be formed as soon as possible after the student has begun doctoral work. Generally, the committee should be finalized no later than the end of the second semester of equivalent full-time study.
The supervisory committee consists of at least four members. At least two of the members, including the committee chair, must be from the special education program area and hold graduate faculty status in SESPECS (see Appendix for a list of special education faculty members with graduate faculty status). At least one member must be selected from outside the Special Education program area. This external committee member may be from another school within the College of Education or from another college within the university. Once the committee has been established, the student must request that the Graduate Coordinator record the committee members on the Graduate School Information Management System (GIMS). More information regarding the duties and responsibilities of supervisory committees is available in the Graduate Catalog.

**Program Milestones**

Most special education doctoral students complete their degree in approximately four years, although programs of shorter or longer duration are not uncommon. The following is a typical program progression, with the key milestones that occur each year:

**Year 1:**
- Begin coursework
- Select program chair
- Form supervisory committee
- Develop program plan for committee approval
- Undergo first-year review

**Years 2/3:**
- Complete coursework
- Complete qualifying examination
- Apply for admission to candidacy
- Undergo annual evaluations

**Years 3/4:**
- Develop dissertation proposal
- Conduct dissertation study
- Defend dissertation (final examination)
- Graduate

*The UF Special Education Department is the reason I have been able to pursue my career goals. I am most appreciative of the nationally and internationally renowned faculty and staff who care deeply about the success of all graduate students in the program. I loved the balance of foundational courses in special education and research methods with individualized mentoring in my specific areas of interest. I also had multiple opportunities to engage in teaching, research, and service, all of which prepared me for the expectations of a faculty member in higher education!*

Melinda Leko, Ph.D.
Assistant Professor
University of Kansas
Program Plan

Program plans are developed collaboratively by the doctoral student and advisor and must be approved by the supervisory committee. The program of study consists of a minimum of 90 semester hours beyond the baccalaureate degree. The program plan must include the five required special education courses, the required research methodology courses (minimum of 12 credit hours), and coursework in the student’s area(s) of specialization and, if applicable, the student’s minor.

All Ed.D. and Ph.D. program plans must contain the following sections when presented to the supervisory committee for approval.

• Biographical Sketch and Career Goals
• Professional Preparation and Experience (i.e., CV)
• Proposed Course of Study and Timeline
• Proposed Competency Experiences

The supervisory committee may add or alter components of the program plan to ensure that the planned coursework and experiences will be sufficient for the student to master the program competencies and achieve the outlined career goals.

Academic Major and Minor

All students admitted to the doctoral program will major in special education. The major includes completion of all required special education coursework (i.e., five seminars), required research coursework, and at least 20 credits of dissertation work.

With the approval of the supervisory committee, one or more minor fields may be chosen and included in the program of study (a minor is not required). Minor work may be completed in any UF school or department other than special education that is approved for master's or doctoral degree programs as listed in the Graduate Catalog. If a minor is chosen, the supervisory committee must include at least one person from the school or department representing the minor field.

Students typically also select at least one area of specialization. A specialization may be built on courses within the special education program area (e.g., autism, learning disabilities), in combination with courses from other departments (e.g., teacher education, reading disabilities), or fully composed of courses outside the special education program area (e.g., neuroscience, poverty). Although it is not a requirement, most students select supervisory committee members whose research interests align with their selected area(s) of specialization.

When developing the program plan, students should clearly indicate the area(s) of specialization and the minor, if any.
Required Special Education Courses

Completion of a sequence of five doctoral seminars is required of all doctoral students in the Special Education program area. These courses are designed to provide the foundational knowledge required of leaders in the field. The course description for each required seminar is listed below.

• **Historical and Theoretical Foundations of Disability in Education (EEX 6936*; Trends 1):** This course addresses the evolution of public policy, theoretical perspectives, and professional practice in the education of individuals with disabilities. Topics include influential individuals, historical events, social systems, and political movements.

• **Trends in Special Education (EEX 7934; Trends 2):** This course addresses current trends and issues in special education, including research, policy, and practice priorities at local, state, and federal levels.

• **Introduction to Field of Inquiry in Special Education (EEX 7304; Research 1):** This course provides an introduction to research methods commonly used in the field of special education, the conditions under which particular designs are employed, and approaches to the interpretation of data.

• **Inquiry in Special Education: Analysis of the Literature (EEX 7303; Research 2):** This course addresses methods for reviewing and critiquing special education research literature using rigorous systematic review methods. Topics include developing and refining a research question, search resources and techniques, screening and selecting primary studies using explicit and reproducible criteria, information management, choosing a synthesis approach, and interpreting and communicating findings.

• **Inquiry in Special Education: Proposal Development (EEX 6936*; Research 3):** This course prepares the student to develop a sound research proposal. Topics include use of research literature and theoretical frameworks to generate research questions and hypotheses, development of a conceptual framework, and design of the study.

  * EEX 6936 is a temporary course number assigned to these courses.

The required special education courses are offered on a regular rotation. The following is the typical sequence in which these courses are taken:

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<td>Year 2</td>
<td>Research 2</td>
<td>Research 3*</td>
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* may be taken in Spring of Year 3
A grade of B or higher must be earned in all required coursework. An overall GPA of 3.0 or higher in all work attempted must also be maintained. See the Graduate Student Handbook for more information about these requirements.

**College of Education Ph.D. and Ed.D. Research Requirements**

All doctoral students in the College of Education must complete a minimum of 12 credit hours of research methodology coursework to meet the college-wide requirement for preparation in research methodology. The courses will be selected from the two lists of courses below, with the proviso that the Associate Dean for Graduate Studies has the authority to approve substitute and alternative courses.

Programs and supervisory committees have the discretion to require more than 12 hours of research methodology courses. The courses used to meet these additional requirements are not subject to review by the Associate Dean for Graduate Studies. Generally, students in the special education doctoral program take far more than the 12-hour minimum.

Any student who wishes to minor in research methodology must have a member of the REM faculty serve on his or her supervisory committee. The student should consult this faculty member to select an appropriate set and sequence of courses.

**Qualitative methods.** The following courses in qualitative research methodologies are available on a regular basis. Occasionally, additional special topics courses are also offered.

- EDF 6475—Qualitative Foundations of Educational Research (4)
- EDF 6938—Qualitative data collection (3) Prereq: EDF 6475
- EDF 6938—Qualitative data analysis (3) Prereq: EDF 6475
- EDF 7639—Research in Educational Sociology (3) Prereq: EDF 6475

**Quantitative methods.** The following courses in quantitative research methodologies are available on a regular basis. Occasionally, additional special topics courses are offered, as well. Consult the published sequence of courses ([http://education.ufl.edu/research-evaluation-methods/files/2013/10/Sequence_of_Quantitative_classes.pdf](http://education.ufl.edu/research-evaluation-methods/files/2013/10/Sequence_of_Quantitative_classes.pdf)) to determine when to take each course.

- EDF 6403—Quantitative Foundations of Educational Research (6) OR EDF 6400 (3) & EDF 6402 (3) Prereq: A course that includes descriptive statistics including measures of location, dispersion, and correlation and inferential statistics through t tests on means (e.g., EDF 6401).
- EDF 6436—Theory of Measurement (4) Prereq: EDF 6403
- EDF 6471—Survey Design and Analysis in Educational Research (3) Prereq: EDF 6403
- EDF 6481—Quantitative Research Methods in Education (4) Prereq: EDF 6403
- EDF 7405—Advanced Quantitative Foundations of Educational Research (4) Prereq: EDF 6403
- EDF 7412—Structural Equation Models (3) Prereq: EDF 7405
- EDF 7432—Advanced Psychometric Theory (3) Prereq: EDF 6436
• EDF 7435—Rating Scale Design and Analysis in Educational Research (3) Prereq: EDF 6403 and 6434 or 6436
• EDF 7439—Item Response Theory (3) Prereq: EDF 6436
• EDF 7474—Multilevel Models (3) Prereq: EDF 6403 or 6481 and 7405
• EDF 7491—Evaluation of Educational Products and Systems (3) Prereq: EDF 6403
• EDF 7932—Multivariate Analysis in Educational Research (3) Prereq: EDF 6403 or 6481 and 7405

**Alternative and Substitute Research Courses**

A substitute course is a course that covers the same methodologies as are covered in a listed course and covers the methodologies at the same level of difficulty as in the listed course. Courses that cover the material at a lower level of difficulty are not appropriate substitute courses.

An alternative course is a course that covers different methodologies than are covered in any of the listed courses. Proposing an alternative course presumes that the methodology covered in the alternative course is not covered in any of the listed courses. An example of an alternative quantitative methods course is STA 5507—Applied Nonparametric Methods. None of the listed quantitative methods courses cover nonparametric methods. An example of an alternative qualitative methods course is HIS 6060—Historical Method. None of the listed qualitative methods courses cover methods of historical research.

**Procedures**

To request a substitute or alternative course(s) submit a completed “Substitute and/or Alternative Course Form” (available in the departmental offices and the Office of Graduate Education) to the College of Education Office of Graduate Education. The chair of the student’s supervisory committee, on behalf of the supervisory committee, shall transmit the request. Approval of the Request by the Associate Dean for Graduate Studies and Technology authorizes the substitute and/or alternative course(s). Requests for substitute or alternative courses should be submitted by the second semester of graduate study or as soon thereafter as possible.

Proposed substitute or alternative courses taken before admission for doctoral study to the UF Graduate School must have been completed within four years of admission. Proposed substitute or alternative courses taken after admission for doctoral study to the UF Graduate School must be approved before enrolling in the requested courses. Prospective requests must include the most recent syllabus for the proposed course. Retrospective requests must include the syllabus for the semester in which the proposed course was taken.

Requests for a substitute course must identify the course for which substitution is requested and include an explanation about why a substitution is necessary. When a course substitution is requested, the Associate Dean will solicit advice from the Director of the Program for Research and Evaluation Methodology about the equivalence of the listed and substituted course. In the event an alternative course, with content similar to that of a
listed course, is proposed, the Associate Dean will solicit advice from the Director of the Program for Research and Evaluation Methodology about the equivalence of the listed. In the event of substantial similarity the Associate Dean will treat the alternative course as a substitute course.

**First Year Review**

The first year review of doctoral students takes place at the end of the second semester of full--time study. For part--time students, the review is conducted after they complete 12 to 18 hours of coursework. The review is designed to assess the student’s strengths, motivation, professionalism, and potential for achieving an in-depth knowledge of special education issues and a high level of competence in conducting research, professional writing, and public speaking. The goal of this review is to assist students in making wise career decisions and to recommend specific courses or experiences, if any, that the student must undertake to continue in the UF special education doctoral program.

The student’s supervisory committee conducts the review. If a committee has not been formalized, the School Director will select an ad hoc committee consisting of a tenured faculty member in the program area to serve as the review committee chair (possibly the student’s temporary advisor) and three additional faculty members.

The student will submit the following items to the review committee:

- An updated statement of career goals
- Curriculum vitae or other documentation of professional accomplishments
- An academic paper of 10 to 20 pages (plus references), typically produced in a doctoral seminar and addressing an area of special education research
- Evaluations by faculty or others who have had contact with the student during coursework or employment

On the basis of its assessment of the student's performance in the first year review, the review committee may indicate one of the following options:

- The student has completed the review successfully, and the student may continue in the doctoral program without special contingencies.
- The student has completed the review successfully, but with special contingencies (which will be specified in writing to the student by the review committee chair), such as successful completion of specific course work other professional experiences deemed necessary to address concerns.

The special education doctoral program at UF prepared me extremely well for my role as a researcher. The coursework and research apprenticeship experiences were exceptional. I also received excellent mentoring from my advisor, from my supervisory committee, and from other faculty in the program. I forged lifelong bonds that will surely serve me well throughout my career.

Tia Barnes, Ph.D
Post-Doctoral Associate
Yale University
• The review committee determines a need for significant contingencies that would require a written course of remediation acknowledged by the student and committee members. The student has another meeting with the committee (or chair) at an agreed upon date to evaluate progress toward completion of the written remediation plan.

• The review committee determines a mismatch between the student's career goals and the program offerings in special education, although the student showed good potential for doctoral study in another field, and the student is encouraged to apply for admission to a different degree program.

• The review committee identifies substantial concerns in the student’s preparation for doctoral study and the committee discontinues the student from the program.

**Annual Evaluation**

Each special education doctoral student participates in an annual evaluation process to measure ongoing progress toward program completion. The first–year review serves as the annual evaluation for Year 1, and an abbreviated evaluation process will occur during each subsequent year of the program.

Toward the end of each spring semester, the student will submit evidence of satisfactory completion of program coursework and experiences. Faculty members who have worked with the student via coursework or employment may also contribute evidence for the evaluation process. The supervisory committee chair evaluates this evidence, with consultation from the student’s committee as needed.

Following this review of evidence, the supervisory committee chair will write a letter of annual evaluation that will be kept in the student’s records. The letter will (a) indicate whether satisfactory progress toward the degree has been made and (b) contain any requirements that the student must meet in order to continue in the program. The student’s signature is required to indicate receipt of the letter. Any student who wishes to contest the annual evaluation letter may submit a written statement outlining any disagreement or concerns. The student’s dissent statement is kept in the student’s records, as well.

**Doctoral Candidacy**

A doctoral student does not become a candidate for the doctoral degree until granted formal admission to candidacy. Such admission requires the approval of the student’s supervisory committee, the school director, the college dean, and the Dean of the Graduate School. The approval must be based on the following: (1) the academic record of the student, (2) the opinion of the supervisory committee concerning overall fitness for candidacy, (3) an approved dissertation topic, and (4) successful completion of a qualifying examination.

A doctoral student is eligible to take the qualifying exam after all required coursework has been completed and all competencies specified by the committee have been met. All grades of
“incomplete” must be removed before the student is eligible to take the exam. The examination consists of a written exam and an oral exam conducted by the student’s committee.

**Written qualifying exam.** The written examination will be designed by the student’s supervisory committee to address the special education program competencies and the student’s professional goals. Generally, the exam consists of four or five written products that demonstrate the student’s qualifications for doctoral candidacy. The following are examples of such products:

- Major area paper (i.e., a comprehensive literature review on a specific topic)
- Paper for publication in a research-oriented journal*
- Paper for publication in a practitioner-oriented journal*
- Open presentation to faculty and doctoral students of a paper on a topic relevant to the student’s area of study
- Plan for teacher professional development on a topic relevant to the student’s area of study
- Responses to time-limited (e.g., 1-2 weeks) take-home exam questions
- Responses to time-limited (e.g., 3 hours) on-campus exam questions

* For publications that are co-authored, the student’s role must be substantive.

**Oral qualifying exam.** The entire written examination is submitted to the supervisory committee for review. At least two weeks after the written exam is submitted to the committee for evaluation, the oral portion of the qualifying examination takes place. Students may be asked to prepare an oral presentation of their written products for the oral examination.

The oral examination may be conducted using video and/or telecommunications. According to UF Graduate Council policy, it is required that the student and chair or co--chair must be in the same physical location. All other members may participate from remote sites via technological means.

The supervisory committee has the responsibility at the time of the oral examination to decide whether the student is qualified to continue work toward the doctoral degree and should be admitted to doctoral candidacy. At the discretion of the supervisory committee, a student who does not pass the qualifying examination may be offered an opportunity to retake all or part of the exam.

Application for admission to candidacy should be made immediately after the doctoral student passes the qualifying examination and has a dissertation topic approved by the student’s supervisory committee. A student may register for EEX 7980 (Research for Dissertation) only after he or she is admitted to candidacy for a doctoral degree.
Dissertation

Every candidate for a doctoral degree in special education is required to prepare and present a dissertation, which is an original, scholarly contribution to the literature in the field. The dissertation requires that the doctoral candidate design and implement a study that is acceptable in form and content to the supervisory committee and to the Graduate School. The final dissertation is typically composed of five chapters, including (1) an introduction, (2) review of literature, (3) methodology, (4) results, and (5) discussion. Dissertations must be written in English.

A dissertation proposal typically consists of the first three chapters of the dissertation and presents a detailed account of the planned study. The proposal must be approved by the supervisory committee before the student begins the study. If the study involves human subjects, the proposal must also be approved by the Institutional Review Board (IRB) before any data collection with human subjects may begin.

The doctoral candidate will present the completed dissertation to the committee at the dissertation defense. The supervisory committee will determine whether the dissertation meets the program’s standards of scholarship. The committee may require revisions to the dissertation before final approval.

Students are required to submit their final dissertations electronically using the official template. More information on submission requirements is available from the Graduate School Editorial Office.

While completing work for the dissertation, the student should be enrolled in EEX 7980. The student must register for a minimum of 3 credit hours of EEX 7080 during the semester in which he or she plans to graduate. All work for the doctorate, including the dissertation, must be completed within five calendar years after the qualifying examination, or this examination must be repeated.

Deadlines

Each semester, the Graduate School publishes the submission deadlines for degree application, first submission of the dissertation, final submission of the dissertation, and final clearance of all requirements. It is the student’s responsibility to ensure that all deadlines are met for the graduation semester.