

# Doctoral Degree Programs in Special Education



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## **Department of Special Education**

*The mission of the Department of Special Education 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.*

Being ranked in the top 15 graduate departments of special education in the country allows for a wealth of opportunities for graduate students. From teaching to research grants to speaking at national conferences, students enjoy the possibilities offered to them.

The quality of our program is verified by our graduates through their satisfaction with their doctoral experiences as well as their professional success after graduation. In a 2001 survey, University of Florida graduates reflect upon how their doctoral work at the University of Florida prepared them for their current positions:

“...my experiences in the doctoral program prepared me to succeed in academia.”

“Based on speaking with others who graduated from other programs during the same time period, my training prepared me to a far greater degree than others. I felt prepared.”

“...new projects have come as a result of the doc work.”

“...the emphasis of the program on learning about resources, key stakeholders, etc. prepared me for a position in a consulting company...”

### **Program Philosophy**

Doctor of Philosophy (Ph.D.) & Doctor of Education (Ed.D.) programs in the Department of Special Education are designed to educate personnel for teaching, research, and administrative positions in colleges & 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 Ed.D. and Ph.D. Programs**

The Department of Special Education is committed to fostering a graduate student body that reflects the diversity within special education and within 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 transforming and improving the field of special education, a number of criteria are used. The application process including minimum requirements, additional documentation to be provided, and admission interview are described below.

#### **Minimum Requirements**

- Grade point average of at least 3.0 on a 4.0 scale
- Combined score of at least 1000 on the verbal and quantitative portions of the Graduate Records Exam.

### **Additional Documentation**

In addition to the minimum GPA and GRE requirements, the following must be provided:

- At least three letters of recommendation from individuals in a position to evaluate your graduate study potential and/or field related work experience.
- Documentation of a minimum of two years of appropriate professional experience suitable for admission into the Special Education Department.
- A written statement of professional goals including:
  - Professional settings and specialized interest areas.
  - Skills and/or characteristics that will facilitate the applicant's pursuit of the goals cited.
- A writing sample. The writing sample is a 6-10 page scholarly paper following APA guidelines about a current issue in special education.

### **Admission Interview**

When documentation of the minimum requirements and all of the additional items are received, you will participate in an interview conducted by the admissions committee. You should be prepared to respond to questions similar to the following:

- What was the nature of your academic preparation and interests during your baccalaureate / master's program?
- What factors influenced your decision to pursue special education as a career?
- What factors influenced your decision to pursue a doctoral degree?
- In what setting would you be most inclined to work following the completion of your degree? What factors, events, or experiences have led to this selection?
- Tell us about your experiences working with children and youth with disabilities.
- What are the major changes you believe will occur in the field of special education?
- What do you believe your strengths are when it comes to being a doctoral student? What skills would you need to work on?
- What else do you wish to have the selection committee know about you?

Note: A personal interview is highly preferred, but the following substitutions may be accepted under extenuating circumstances: (1) audio/videotape of candidate responding to specific questions; (2) formal interview with an individual faculty member; (3) conference call with candidate.

## **Doctoral Program Overview**

Upon admission to the Special Education doctoral program you are given the status of doctoral student. Your main responsibility as a doctoral student is to complete course work while expanding your research and selecting your supervisory committee. During this period you will be interacting and collaborating with several professors regarding their research as well as your own research interests. These interactions are opportunities for multiple apprenticeships to learn how they began their work and how you will begin your work. You may start the program with a specific list of courses you wish to take but further understanding and knowledge of new topics may lead you to taking other courses in and out of the department.

### **Minimum Requirements for the Ph.D.**

Students in the Ph.D. program must take course work leading to the development of knowledge and skills in areas identified by the department, college, and university as minimal Ph.D. requirements. (Specific courses required by the Department of Special Education are described in the next section.)

- Analytical and Writing Skills
  - Demonstrate general and applied knowledge of the different conceptual approaches to practices and research that are used in special education including (a) global knowledge of different approaches and the history and background of each approach and (b) ability to critically analyze research using different conceptual frameworks.
  - Demonstrate the ability to analyze, synthesize, and critique the literature in Special Education according to the different conceptual approaches included in #1.
  - Demonstrate the ability to critically analyze research literature in an area of Special Education and identify the weaknesses in methodology as well as gaps in the literature.
  - Write a succinct, coherent, well-conceived synthesis of the literature on a selected topic.
- Content Knowledge
  - Demonstrate knowledge of the critical issues and trends in Special Education through oral and written communication skills. (This objective is integrated with the objectives listed in I. Analytical and Writing Skills.) Topics may include: school change, law, history of special education, inclusive practices, assessment and identification, cultural diversity, families, and research to practice.
  - Demonstrate knowledge of leaders in Special Education as they relate to different critical issues and trends.
- Professional Skills
  - Develop doctoral level professional skills including: (1) an understanding of teaching and research skills that are developed through doctoral study; (2) an understanding of the roles and responsibilities of faculty and of students in the doctoral training process.
  - Develop an area of expertise in the field of special education.
  - Develop a portfolio documenting areas of expertise, professional skill and experiences. Tasks included in the portfolio are determined by the doctoral student and the supervisory committee.

### **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 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 person, must be from the Department of Special Education. At least one member must be selected from outside the Department of Special Education. This external committee member may be from another department 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.

Information regarding the duties and responsibilities of supervisory committees is available in the Graduate Catalog.

## **Program Development**

Students admitted to doctoral programs in the Department of Special Education will complete programs with majoring in special education. Programs of study are developed collaboratively by the doctoral student and must be approved by the supervisory committee. The program of study consists of a minimum of 90 semester hours beyond the baccalaureate degree and must include required courses as described below.

### **Academic Major and Minor**

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 department other than the major department 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 department representing the minor field.

### **Required Courses in the Department of Special Education**

Four seminars are required of all doctoral students in the Department of Special Education. Each seminar is briefly described below.

- **Professional Seminar in Special Education EEX 6936** (1 credit hour per semester; taken during the first year of doctoral study). This seminar will serve to:
  - Orient students to the doctoral program and doctoral work (selecting a committee, preparing a program plan, preparing for qualifying exams, and similar topics)
  - Help students get to know faculty (Faculty will present on their current research or topics of interest.)
  - Familiarize students to professional development at the doctoral level (developing a line of research, publishing, service opportunities, funding/grants)
  - Prepare students for work after graduation

The usual expectation of 2 hours of outside class preparation for each credit hour does not apply to this course. Rather, students spend about 2 hours every other week in this class (16 hours per semester), and receive one credit hour for the academic year. It is assumed that doctoral students will actively contribute to the determination of topics, guest speakers, and so forth for this seminar. Two faculty members will team-teach this seminar.

- **Trends in Special Education EEX 7934** (3 credit hours; offered during each fall semester)  
Students will be introduced to scholarship in special education by exploring current trends and issues and their relationship to practice, policy, and research. At the end of the course, students should be able to develop position statements about the trends and issues and justify them orally and written with support of the current literature.
- **Introduction to Field of Inquiry in Special Education EEX 7304** (3 credit hours; offered during each spring semester)  
This seminar is designed to assist doctoral students in the acquisition, organization, and interpretation of information about research in special education. The seminar introduces students to the nature of inquiry and the process of generating questions about a broad array of disability-related research topics. Students will gain knowledge in critically analyzing the outcomes of research in special education.

- **Inquiry in Special Education: Analysis of the Literature EEX 7303** (3 credit hours; offered during each spring semester)

This class is designed to help students understand how views of knowledge evolve and influence special education research and practice. In this course, students will become familiar with how different views of knowledge affect special education research and practice. At the conclusion of the course, students should be able to identify research questions and methodology emanating from the different knowledge paradigms. Moreover, they should be able to critique special education research and practice from these various knowledge paradigms.

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

All doctoral students in the College of Education are required to complete course work resulting in expertise in designing and conducting research. To meet this requirement, doctoral students must complete a minimum of 12 semester hours of coursework in research methodology. The courses will be selected from the two lists below. Substitutions and alternative courses must be approved by the Associate Dean for Graduate Studies and Technology.

- **Qualitative Methods**

- 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**

- EDF 6403--Quantitative Foundations of Educational Research (6) 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

Departments and supervisory committees have the discretion to require more than 12 semester hours. Courses used to meet these additional requirements are not subject to review by the Associate Dean for Graduate Studies and Technology.

## **Writing the Program Plan**

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

- Section I
  - Biographical Sketch
  - Professional Preparation
  - Professional Positions
  - Related Experiences
- Section II: Vocational and Career Goals
- Section III
  - Review of Previous Graduate Studies
  - Proposed Course of Study
  - Proposed Competency Experiences
- Section IV: Timelines
- Section V: Signature Page

## **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 professional writing and 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 should undertake if he or she continues in our special education doctoral program.

The review is conducted by the student's supervisory committee. If a committee has not been formalized, the department chair will select an ad hoc committee consisting of a tenured department faculty member 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:

- A vita or other documentation of professional accomplishments.
- A 10 to 20 page paper (plus references) addressing an area of special education research produced in a doctoral seminar.
- Evaluations by faculty or others who have had contact with the student during coursework or employment through evaluation forms.
- A statement of career goals.

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: (a) successful completion of specific course work to address concerns or (b) successful completion of other professional experiences deemed necessary.
- The review committee determines a need for significant contingencies which 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.

## **Doctoral Candidacy**

Being admitted to doctoral candidacy requires that students successfully complete Qualifying Examinations. A doctoral student may take the qualifying exam after a committee has been selected and formed, all course work set by the committee and student toward the Ph.D. or Ed.D. has been completed, and the doctoral student indicates that he or she is prepared to complete written and oral examinations and write their major paper.

### **Qualifying Examination**

The examination, prepared and evaluated by the full supervisory committee or the major and minor departments, consists of a one day written exam, a major paper, and an oral exam conducted by the student's committee.

### **Written Exam**

A graduate 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 department chairperson, the college dean, and the Dean of the Graduate School. The approval must be based on (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) a qualifying examination as described above. 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 not register for EEX 7980 (Research for Dissertation) until he or she is admitted to candidacy for a doctoral degree.

It is the responsibility of the committee chairperson to develop and administer the qualifying examinations. In doing so, the committee chair will request each member of the supervisory committee to submit questions(s) that relate to the student's program content and goals. In addition, the chair will request other faculty to submit questions provided they have had the student in class or have worked with the student in professionally related research/program endeavors. Once a pool of questions has been accumulated, the committee chairperson will select a representative sample of questions that can be responded to in one, six hour writing session.

A major paper must also be completed reviewing literature in the area of the student's interest. This paper will be developed in collaboration with the committee chairperson and other committee members as indicated.

The following represents typical writing times:

9:00 A.M. - 12:00 P.M. (Morning Session)  
1:30 P.M. - 4:30 P.M. (Afternoon Session)

A department staff member will initiate and close the writing sessions by distributing questions and gathering responses at the end of each session. Once the written qualifying exam has been completed, a department staff member will provide sufficient copies of the responses for dissemination to committee members and other faculty who have submitted questions that were used on the exam.

All readers of the written qualifying examination must have no less than 10 working days to evaluate responses. Written evaluations of the student's responses must be submitted to the committee chairperson.

### **Oral Exam**

After the written exam has been evaluated by the committee members, the oral portion of the qualifying examination takes place. All members of the supervisory committee must be present with the student at the oral portion. However, with the approval of all members of the supervisory committee, one committee member may be off-site at a qualifying oral examination or at the final oral defense of the dissertation or thesis, using modern communication technology to participate rather than being physically present. The supervisory committee has the responsibility at this time of deciding whether the student is qualified to continue work toward a Ph.D. or Ed.D.

### **Admission to 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 department chairperson, the college dean, and the Dean of the Graduate School. The approval must be based on (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) a qualifying examination as described above. **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 not register for EEX 7980 (Research for Dissertation) until he or she is admitted to candidacy for a doctoral degree.

### **Dissertation**

Every candidate for a doctoral degree is required to prepare and present a dissertation. 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 comprised of five chapters including (1) an introduction, (2) review of literature, (3) methodology, (4) results, and (5) discussion. The doctoral candidate will present the completed dissertation to the committee at the dissertation defense. (Dissertations must be written in English.)

### **Completion**

Students who enter in Fall 2001 and after are required to submit their final theses electronically. Exceptions are considered on a case by case basis when submitted in writing by the department to the graduate school. These exceptions are intended for the student who is off-campus during the semester the thesis is submitted. More information is available from the Graduate School Editorial Office.

### **Time Limitation**

All work for the doctorate must be completed within five calendar years after the qualifying examination, or this examination must be repeated.

## DOCTORAL PROGRAM CHECKLIST

There are many points to follow from admission to graduation. Use this checklist as a basic guide to help you through the process. In addition, you must use the information in your graduate catalog and this packet to keep you informed as to the requirements needed at each step in the doctoral degree adventure.

- \_\_\_\_\_ 1.     **Submit application materials**  
Application form (hard copy or on-line); documentation of GRE score; transcripts; 3 letters of recommendation; documentation of 2 years of experience; writing sample
- \_\_\_\_\_ 2.     **Interview with admissions committee**
- \_\_\_\_\_ 3.     **Admission to the program**
- \_\_\_\_\_ 4.     **Advising**  
Information about program requirements may be obtained from the Graduate School Catalog, the Graduate Student Handbook, and the Graduate Coordinator in the Department of Special Education
- \_\_\_\_\_ 5.     **Select Supervisory Committee (On-Line)**  
The supervisory committee must consist of at least 4 members including the supervisory committee chairperson and one other faculty member from the Department of Special Education and at least one member from outside of the department.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 6.     **Program Plan approval**  
After the supervisory committee has been formed, doctoral students must work with their committee to design a program of study that satisfies the Department of Special Education and the Office of Graduate Studies.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 7.     **Maintain active student status**  
Students who do not enroll in classes for a period of two semesters must apply for readmission to the program.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 8.     **Qualifying examination and Admission to Candidacy (FORM)**  
Students are only admitted to candidacy after satisfactory completion of all course work and qualifying examinations.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 9.     **Dissertation proposal approval**  
A complete dissertation proposal (usually equivalent to the first three chapters of the dissertation: Purpose/rationale; literature review; and method) must be submitted to the committee, and approved in a committee meeting.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 10.    **Review guidelines for Dissertation Documents**  
A Guide to the Preparation of Theses and Dissertations is available from the Office of Graduate Studies (146 NRN).
- \_\_\_\_\_ 11.    **Maintain active student status**  
Students must enroll in at least three hours each fall and spring semester or two hours each summer semester during candidacy. These will ordinarily be EEX 7980 hours. One semester without courses may be permitted.

- \_\_\_\_\_ 12. **Institutional Review Board Approval (FORM)**  
For research using human subjects, an IRB form, available in the Office of Graduate Studies (146 NRN), must be submitted to Bryan Hall, Room 1.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 13. **Carry out dissertation research/complete dissertation manuscript**  
For information about the format of the dissertation manuscript, see the Education Graduate Bulletin and A Guide to the Preparation of Dissertations, available from the Office of Graduate Studies (146 NRN).
- \_\_\_\_\_ 14. **Degree Application (FORM)**  
Early in the semester of graduation, a degree application must be processed. Ed.D. and Ph.D. students should obtain a copy of this form from the Criser Hall or online.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 15. **College of Education/University Graduate School Announcement of Dissertation Defense**  
An announcement of the final defense examination must be submitted one month prior to the oral defense.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 16. **First submission of dissertation**  
Doctoral candidates must submit copies of their completed dissertation with all appendices and a letter of transmittal. See A Guide to the Preparation of Dissertations for details on contents of letter and first submission.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 17. **Oral Defense meeting (FORM)**  
This public examination should be scheduled after all work on the dissertation is complete. All committee members must be present. Upon completion of the dissertation defense, the committee should sign the Final Exam Form.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 18. **Submit Dissertation to Graduate School (Ed.D. and Ph.D.)**