

Components of Handbook for Masters Students in Education with A Concentration in Special Education

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Introduction

This handbook is designed to provide you with important information that complements the material in the University's *Graduate Catalog* (<http://catalog.grad.uconn.edu/>). All University of Connecticut graduate students are responsible for knowing and adhering to the Code of Conduct regarding *Academic Integrity in Graduate Education and Research* that is included in the graduate catalog (on-line version, p. 230). Award of the degree attests to your broad mastery of subject matter relating to special education.

Please note that this handbook does not apply to students enrolled in the Teacher Certification Program for College Graduates (TCPCG). Students in TCPCG should contact the Dr. Michael Alfano (michael.alfano@uconn.edu) for the handbook specific to the program.

Mission Statement

With a focus on mild/moderate disabilities, the Master's Program in Special Education is tailored for graduate students with specific professional goals in mind. Our commitment is to inspire and prepare professionals in special education to create and broaden opportunities for individuals with disabilities. Students are encouraged to develop their interests in educating learners at risk across a wide range of disabilities incorporating a lifespan perspective.

Getting Started

Although there are a core of required courses that masters students in special education complete, you will have an opportunity to work closely with your major advisor in developing a plan that is individualized based upon your experiences, professional goals and program focus.

Program Course of Study

There is no fixed requirement regarding number of credits, but the Graduate School requires not fewer than 24 credits of advanced course work. However, the special education concentration will require at least 30 credits, and your advisory committee may require you to take additional courses, depending upon your objectives and experience. You may also be advised to take some courses outside of the Department of Educational Psychology. While the following courses are generally included in a Plan of Study, exceptions can be negotiated between you and your advisory committee.

Course Listings

Required Courses (12-15 credits)

- EPSY 331: Developmental Foundations of Exceptionality
- EPSY 341: Principles and Methods in Educational Research (or equivalent)
- EPSY 369: Policy, Law, and Ethics in Special Education
- EPSY 381: Practicum (3-6 credits)

Additional Courses

- EPSY 300: Investigation of Special Topics in Education (variable credit)
- EPSY 308: Instruction for Students with Special Needs in the Mainstream
- EPSY 329: Transition Planning for Students with Disabilities
- EPSY 330: Issues in Postsecondary Disability Services
- EPSY 333: Instructional Strategies and Adaptations for Students with Special Learning Needs
- EPSY 336: Individual Pupil Assessment
- EPSY 343: Introduction to Educational Technology
- EPSY 349: Procedures for the Education of Individuals with Disordered Behavior
- EPSY 359: Theories of Learning, Cognition, and Instruction
- EPSY 363: Language and Literacy for Students with Cognitive Disabilities
- EPSY 368: Social and Emotional Components of Talent Development
- EPSY 373: Addressing Individual Needs and Talents in the Heterogeneous Classroom

Practicum/Fieldwork Opportunities

As you plan for a practicum that can include grant related and/or field-based activities, there are a number of possibilities to explore within the Department of Educational Psychology, across the University, and in the greater educational community beyond the campus. Your advisor is a source of information, and you are encouraged to network to identify areas of potential fieldwork.

Graduate Assistantships

Opportunities for graduate assistantships include positions with the University of Connecticut

Program for College Students with Learning Disabilities (UPLD), the Integrated Bachelors/Masters Teacher Preparation program, and various grant initiatives coordinated by faculty who are Principal Investigators of national, state, and local projects. You are encouraged to explore options with your major advisor as well as to network with other faculty and graduate students to learn about assistantships.

The A.J. Pappanikou Center for Developmental Disabilities (<http://www.uconnucedd.org/>), located adjacent to the University of Connecticut Health Center in Farmington, is a member of a national network of centers for excellence in research, education, and service in the area of developmental disabilities. This Center is funded by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services to conduct interdisciplinary training, research, and information dissemination related to disabilities in children and adults. Center projects address many areas of interest to students in special education, including assistive technology, transition from school to work, community living for adults with disabilities, early childhood special education, and special education law. The faculty and information resources of the Pappanikou Center are available to all graduate students in the Special Education Program. In addition, a number of Center projects support graduate assistantships for doctoral students with interests related to Center areas of emphasis.

Program Procedures and Timelines

Admission

Masters applicants come from a variety of backgrounds, including regular education, special education, and psychology. Admission to the Masters Program is based on a composite evaluation of an applicant's qualifications including leadership ability, and potential for making a creative contribution to the field. All students seeking the Master of Arts Degree in Special Education must be formally admitted to the Master's Program in Education through the University Graduate School. Deadlines for applications are October 31st for the Spring semester; February 15th for Summer Sessions and/or the Fall semester. Specific criteria used in determining qualified applicants for the Masters Program are as follows: a) experience with and demonstrated commitment to children and/or adults with disabilities; b) undergraduate and graduate grade point average (ordinarily 3.0 or above on a 4-point scale; c) letters of recommendation; and d) a personal statement indicating professional goals related to services for individuals with disabilities. Additional information about the admissions process is available from the Chair of the Special Education Masters Committee (joseph.madaus@uconn.edu) or from the Coordinator of the Special Education Program (stan.shaw@uconn.edu).

Advising

The Graduate School requires the appointment of a major advisor so every graduate student begins a course of study with a designated advisor, based upon your stated preference or a “match” between your research interests and faculty areas of expertise. At times, a change of major advisor may be warranted, particularly if your research interests evolve and incorporate areas of expertise of another faculty. If a change of major advisor is necessary, a Change of Advisor form, available from the Graduate Records Office, must be filed with the signatures of your former advisor and the new advisor.

Selection of an Advisory Committee should occur before you have completed 12 credits of coursework and are preparing an official Plan of Study. At least two associate advisors comprise the Committee, one of whom must be a graduate faculty member in your field of study.

The Plan of Study

As stated in the *Graduate Catalog*, in order to graduate with a Masters Degree, a student must have on file with the Graduate School a plan of study that is approved by both the advisory committee and by the Executive Committee of the Graduate Faculty Council. Forms for the plan of study can be obtained through the Graduate School. The plan of study should be developed in conjunction with your major advisor, based upon previous coursework and professional goals. The plan of study should be prepared in triplicate, signed by the student and the advisory committee, and submitted to the Graduate School for approval. The submission of the plan of study must occur before the completion of not more than 12 credits of course work applied to the degree. Courses selected shall be consistent with the student’s objectives and with the area of concentration for the degree. Plans of study shall consist of courses taken at the 300’s level or above, although a limited number of 200’s level credits (not more than six), if not open to sophomores, may be accepted. Course credit by examination is not allowed to meet the requirements of the Master’s degree. Up to six credits of advanced course work taken on a non-degree basis at the University of Connecticut may be included on the plan of study. Up to six credits of advanced course work completed or to be completed at another institution may be approved for transfer to the student’s advisory committee. Students who are considering either option should consult the Graduate Catalog for specific requirements and conditions related to these credits.

Once a plan of study is approved by the Graduate School, the student and the advisory committee should reevaluate it regularly, and modify it, if appropriate. If a plan of study that is approved by the Graduate School must be changed, a request for change must be submitted to the Graduate School. The request must be on the official form and bear the signatures of the advisory committee and the student.

All work for the Master's Degree must be completed within a maximum period of six years from the beginning of the earliest course, wherever taken, listed on the plan of study. Failure to complete work within this period, or to maintain continuous registration may result in termination from the program.

Course Load and Registration

As you plan with your major advisor, the number of credits and course selection you undertake will evolve. Classification as a full-time student can occur in one of three ways: 1) enrollment in 9 or more credits; 2) enrollment in 6 or more credits while holding a graduate assistantship (50% or greater); or 3) enrollment in GRAD 396 (Full-time Master's Research) or GRAD 397 (Master's Level Directed Studies).

Students holding graduate assistantships must register for six or more credits per semester. Instructions for registration are sent to all students by mail, and materials are also available from the Graduate School Web Site (<http://www.grad.uconn.edu>). Two advance registration periods are available for the fall semester, one beginning in early April and the other beginning in mid-August. Similar periods for the Spring semester occur in late October and early January. Depending on course selections, most students can register entirely on the World Wide Web through the Student Access System accessible through the Registrar Home Page (<http://www.registrar.uconn.edu>). Registration can also occur through the College of Continuing Studies (www.continuingstudies.uconn.edu). Payment of fees and registration for courses must be completed on or before the 10th day of the semester.

The Graduate School delineates the requirements for Continuous Registration (GRAD 398; Special Readings at the Master's level or GRAD 399; Master's Thesis Preparation) which you are advised to read in the *Graduate Catalog*.

Plan A and Plan B Master's Degrees

The Master's Degree may be completed under one of two plans. Your advisory committee will determine your plan. Plan A emphasizes research, while Plan B requires comprehensive understanding of a general character. Plan A requires at least 15 credits of advanced course work, at least nine credits of Master's Thesis Research (GRAD 395 or GRAD 396), and the writing of a thesis. Plan B requires at least 30 credits of advanced course work in special education and a final examination. There is no thesis required under Plan B.

The Master's Thesis

As described in the *Graduate Catalog*, the student's advisory committee must approve both the topic and the scope of the thesis. The completed thesis must represent an independent investigation of a significant topic and make an important contribution to the field of special education. Specifications for the preparation, completion, and submission of the thesis can be obtained at the Graduate School or from the Graduate School website.

The Final Examination

Near the end of your plan of study, and not later than one year after the completion of courses, you must pass a final examination that is developed and administered by the advisory committee. The examination shall be comprehensive and designed to assess your mastery of the field of special education and your ability to integrate this knowledge. The final examination may be oral, written, or both, as determined by your advisory committee. The advisory committee may invite any or all members of the faculty to attend the final examination. The decision as to whether or not you pass the examination rests with the advisory committee. The vote must be unanimous, and must take into account the opinions of other participating faculty members.

Immediately following the examination, the major advisor shall report the results to you and send a report to the Graduate School. If you fail the examination, or if the committee believes the results are inconclusive, the committee has the option of requiring you to retake the examination. Such a re-examination must take place within twelve months from the date of the first examination.

Financial Aid

Financial aid comes from a variety of sources. Aid based on academic merit includes graduate assistantships and summer fellowships. Your advisor can provide you with suggestions for exploring these possibilities. Aid based on demonstrated financial need includes Federal Stafford Loans, Federal campus based aid, and University of Connecticut Tuition Remission Grants. Additional information and forms may be obtained from the Student Financial Aid Office, 233 Glenbrook Road Unit 4116, Storrs, CT 06269-4116, by calling (860) 486-2819, or via the Website at: <http://www.ucc.uconn.edu/~wwwfaid>.

APPENDIX A

Faculty

Biographical information for faculty in Special Education can be accessed via the Website for the Department of Educational Psychology at: **<http://www.epsy.uconn.edu>**