

**MICHIGAN STATE**  
**UNIVERSITY**

College of Education  
Department of Counseling,  
Educational Psychology and Special Education

# **Policies and Procedures of the Special Education Doctoral Program**

## **2015-16 Edition**

## PREFACE

The Special Education doctoral program at Michigan State University is designed to prepare students for a leadership position in the field of special education. As a participant in our program, a student can expect to:

- learn to conduct rigorous and relevant research that impacts policy, practice, and student success;
- develop a strong commitment to excellence in teacher preparation and professional development; and
- serve with integrity and leadership the families, institutions, and professional communities concerned about children and youth with special needs.

The Special Education doctoral program helps students attain these goals through an individualized program that is grounded in research across a variety of methodological traditions and theoretical orientations. Students are mentored by renowned faculty members, each a former special education teacher or service provider, who possess a deep understanding of educational challenges in real-world contexts. Faculty members are widely recognized for their commitment to and expertise in classroom-based interventions that translate state-of-the-art learning and developmental theories into effective instructional practices. They work in partnership with teachers, locally and throughout the state, country, and world, to investigate challenging and important problems in the areas of deaf education, literacy instruction, special education technology, policy, behavior disorders, and autism spectrum disorders.

Students find that our program is unique for the research and teaching opportunities we offer. Students conduct research in their first year as part of a research team, and conduct independent research, in preparation for the dissertation, by their third year. Students have opportunities to teach undergraduate and masters classes in face-to-face and online contexts. With support from federal grants and other external funding sources, financial support is available to most of our students as they develop their expertise as instructional leaders and scholars. Students are closely mentored by faculty in all these experiences. We expect that students will leave our program with publications, conference presentations, and teaching experiences that will prepare them for a bright future in the field of special education.

Not only do students work with an outstanding and supportive special education faculty, they take courses from and interact with outstanding scholars throughout Michigan State University's renowned College of Education. They are stimulated by the quality of intellectual life and challenged by the diversity and richness of experiences that we have to offer.

We hope that this Handbook will answer most questions about our doctoral program, including the courses students take, the experiences they have, and the expectations they face as they complete the program. If not, any of us can answer further questions about doctoral study in special education at Michigan State University.

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## TABLE OF CONTENTS

I. Program Overview	4
II. Admissions Policies	6
III. Coursework	8
IV. Program Milestones	11
----Preliminary Exam	12
----Research Practicum/Apprenticeship	13
----Comprehensive Examination	14
----Annual Review	15
----Dissertation	17
V. Advising and Mentoring	21
----Temporary Advisor	21
----Guidance Committee and Chair	21
----Dissertation Committee and Director	23
VI. Annual Evaluation of Student Progress	24
VII. Student Conduct and Conflict Resolution	25
---Student Conduct	25
---Conflict Resolution	25
---Grievance	25
---Professional Ethics in Research and Practice	26
VIII. Retention and Dismissal Policies	27
---University Timelines for Completion of Degree	27
---Retention and Dismissal Policies	27
---Retention and Dismissal Procedures	27
---Dismissal from the Program	28
IX. Records Policies	30
X. Responsible Conduct of Research	31
Appendices	
---Appendix A: Ethics in Regard To Preliminary and Comprehensive Examination	32
---Appendix B: Preliminary Examination: Frequently Asked Questions	34
---Appendix C: CEPSE Preliminary Examination Guidelines	38
---Appendix D: Scoring Guidelines for Research Practicum/Apprenticeship	40
---Appendix E: Special Education Program Doctoral Comprehensive Examination	44
---Appendix F: Annual Review Materials Evaluation Rubric	51
---Appendix G: Special Education PhD Annual Review Form	52

## I. PROGRAM OVERVIEW

### Program Requirements for the PhD in Special Education

Note: Students who are admitted to the doctoral program in Special Education with little or no background in the discipline may be required to take additional core coursework to adequately prepare them for research and teaching or to participate in field-based activities. International students who are admitted to the program must meet English language proficiency requirements and, depending on status, may be required to enroll in English Language courses either before enrolling in regular coursework or concurrently with enrollment in regular coursework (see <http://grad.msu.edu/apply/docs/international.pdf>).

**1. Foundations Coursework (at least 6 credits/2 courses designed to help build students' academic skills, introduce them to big questions about education, provide them with a preliminary look at the field's major areas of emphasis, and help them establish a professional learning community)**

CEP 900: Proseminar in Learning, Technology, and Culture

CEP 949: Critical Issues in Special Education (students are encouraged to take this course in their second or third year in the program because preparing a grant application is the capstone project for this course and this requires working knowledge of research methods)

**2. Special Education Core Coursework (9 credits/3 courses designed to, as a set, provide you with broad knowledge of the history, legislation, policies, trends, research, and issues in the field of special education)**

CEP 941: Academic Issues in Special Education

CEP 943: Multicultural Issues in Special Education

CEP 982: Special Topics in CEPSE—Applied Research in Special Education (students are encouraged to take this course in their second or third year in the program because it involves the conduct of statistical analyses based on more advanced statistical knowledge)

**3. Research Methodology Coursework (at least 19 credits/7 courses)**

CEP 930: Educational Inquiry

CEP 932: Quantitative Methods in Educational Research I

CEP 933: Quantitative Methods in Educational Research II

CEP 942: Single-Case Experimental Design for Intervention Research

CEP 995: Research Practicum (this course is accompanied by supervised research with a faculty and student Apprenticeship Committee; at least one credit of CEP 995 must be taken during the semester in which the student submits the practicum proposal)

PLUS At Least One Course in Qualitative Research Methods From Below:

CEP 931: Qualitative Methods in Educational Research

TE 939: Special Topics in Advanced Qualitative Methodology

PLUS At Least One Additional Course in Research Methods

**4. Cognate Area Coursework (at least 9 credits/3 courses that reflect a broad and diverse perspective on education that extends beyond special education and form a cohesive study strand)**

For example, students who wish to pursue a cognate in language and literacy might take:

CEP 912: Psychological and Cognitive Aspects of Literacy Learning

TE 959: Acquisition and Development of Language and Literacy

TE 946: Current Issues in Literacy Research and Instruction

### ***5. Dissertation Completion (at least 24 credits, but no more than 30)***

CEP 999: Dissertation Research

### ***6. Preliminary Exam***

The preliminary exam is taken at the beginning of the second year of doctoral study after the completion of basic research methods (CEP 930, CEP 932) and the CEPSE department foundations course (CEP 900). The exam involves a written critique of a research article in the field of special education. Further information is presented later in this Program Handbook.

### ***7. Comprehensive Exam***

All students take an on-site comprehensive examination, usually during their third year or beginning of their fourth year in the program, administered according to CEPSE department policy. This exam covers special education policy and law, assessment and intervention principles, current issues facing the field, research methodology and design, and the student's area(s) of specialization. Further information is provided later in this Program Handbook.

### ***8. Residency Requirements***

Students must complete the residency requirement of enrollment in at least 6 credits each semester (full-time study) for two consecutive semesters (summer semester can be counted) after the first registration for doctoral credit (this will typically be the first year in the program) to permit the student to work with and under the direction of the faculty, and to engage in independent and cooperative research utilizing university facilities. All program requirements (except in some circumstances the dissertation) must be completed within five calendar years from the time that a student first enrolls. Once students advance to doctoral candidacy (i.e., pass their comprehensive examinations), they must enroll for at least one credit (usually CEP 999) per regular semester (excluding summers) until the degree is completed. Credit will not be permitted for courses taken more than eight years prior to the granting of the degree.

### ***9. Annual Review***

All students are expected to engage in supervised scholarly activities and mentored teaching experiences that will prepare them for leadership positions in higher education or other public or private institutions. In an effort to ensure that students are making adequate progress towards meeting all of the program requirements and milestones, students submit each spring semester a packet of materials for review. Eligibility for supplemental funding such as the College's Summer Research Fellowship or Dissertation Completion Fellowship or program travel funds is contingent on completion of the annual review. Students who do not meet program benchmarks or who do not complete their annual review will be placed on probationary status in the program. Such status prohibits a student from proposing or defending a research practicum project or dissertation project and taking preliminary or

comprehensive examinations until the terms of probation have been met. Further information is provided later in this Program Handbook.

## **II. ADMISSIONS POLICIES**

The special education faculty is aware of the need to prepare a diverse group of leadership personnel and scholars. We seek to bring to our program women and men of varied cultural, racial, and ethnic backgrounds, diverse life experiences and lifestyles, and diverse physical abilities and challenges. As an equal opportunity institution, Michigan State University encourages applications from individuals of racial/ethnic minority groups and/or people with disabilities.

All applicants must first meet requirements of the University, College of Education, and Department. Tenure-stream faculty in the special education program make admissions recommendations to the Chair of the Department, and offers of admission originate from our Department office.

Applicants are asked to complete a Department and a University application. With their application, applicants must submit: (a) official transcripts from all previously attended postsecondary institutions; (b) Graduate Record Examinations (GRE) General Test scores for Verbal Reasoning, Quantitative Reasoning, and Analytical Writing; (c) at least three letters of recommendation; (d) a goal statement; (e) a resume or other record of previous experiences; and (f) a sample of scholarly writing.

We strongly recommend that applicants seek letters from those who can speak directly to their ability and motivation for successful doctoral study. Thus, letters from former professors or other supervisors of graduate or undergraduate work are often more helpful than letters from teaching colleagues. The sample of scholarly writing should show the applicant's ability to think critically about an issue, review relevant information about that issue, and draw reasonable and creative conclusions or implications. The goal statement should focus not so much on the origins of the applicant's interests in pursuing a doctorate in special education, but more so on what the applicant hopes to accomplish in the doctoral program, her or his professional aspirations and, most importantly, why the applicant believes MSU's program is a good match for these interests and aspirations. In addition, the applicant should explain how she or he can make contributions to the program and the field of special education.

When reviewing applications, faculty look for indicators of probable success in doctoral study and indicators that there is a good match between an applicant's goals and the expertise of program faculty. Potential indicators include a high level of academic performance, high scores (scores above the 50<sup>th</sup> percentile the Verbal Reasoning, Quantitative Reasoning, and Analytical Writing sections are typically considered competitive) on the GRE, a statement of professional goals that is consistent with the objectives of the program, evidence of leadership initiatives and positions in special education, excellent writing and analytic abilities, and strong and detailed letters of recommendation. Students seeking to transfer to the special education program from other graduate programs at MSU or elsewhere will be considered on the same basis as all other applicants seeking admission to the program.

Applications for admission from persons who have previously been denied admission to the program should include updated materials documenting any changes in qualifications since the original application. Applicants who have previously declined an offer of admission to the program, or who have accepted an offer of admission but failed to matriculate, should

document the reasons for their reapplication and any extenuating circumstances they wish the program faculty to consider.

The admissions process is competitive and typically the special education program has had more good applicants than we can accept. Therefore, we strongly encourage applicants to submit all their materials by December 1 of the year prior to the year in which they will be admitted. If space is available in the program, late applications will be accepted, however, it is highly unlikely that late applicants will receive financial assistance (the deadline for fellowship and graduate assistantship applications is December 1).

### III. COURSEWORK

Special education doctoral coursework at Michigan State University can be viewed as consisting of five instructional components: (a) at least 6 credits of coursework in education, cognitive and developmental psychology, teacher education, and related interdisciplinary fields (Foundations); (b) coursework in research methodologies and early and sustained involvement in research (Research Methods); (c) at least 9 credit hours of advanced special education content knowledge (Special Education Core), (d) at least 9 credits of coursework in an area of specialization (Cognate); and (e) at least 24, but no more than 30 credits of CEP 999—dissertation credit. Students typically complete and file an approved *Program Plan* with the Students Affairs Office (134 Erickson Hall) at the beginning of their second year in the program. This plan is part of the *Report of the Guidance Committee* form that students must initiate and route through the Grad Plan web site at <https://login.msu.edu/?App=J3205>.

If you receive funding from one of the leadership preparation grants, additional coursework may be required. The director of your leadership training program will explain any additional requirements or expectations.

#### **Foundations (minimum 6 credits)**

*CEP 900: Proseminar in Learning, Technology, and Culture.* Historical, theoretical, empirical, technological, and philosophical issues. Research literature on learning, teaching subject matter, and social-cultural contexts.

*CEP 949: Critical Issues in Special Education (SPRING, EVEN YEARS).* History of field of special education and its relevance to contemporary research. Conceptualization of scholarship and hypothesis development in the field, participation in research communities. Use of technology to advance scholarship. Grant writing.

#### **Research Methods (minimum 19 credits)**

The required course sequence in research methodology consists of 7 courses, although we recommend that you take additional research methods courses in other topics that are relevant to your research interests. There are 5 courses required of all students in the program (2 more courses are selective, though one must be in qualitative research):

*CEP 930: Educational Inquiry.* Varied approaches to educational research: quantitative, interpretive, and customized. Theoretical assumptions, sources of questions, data collection and analysis, and rhetoric.

*CEP 932: Quantitative Methods in Educational Research I.* Techniques in data collection and data analysis used in educational and psychological research. Graphical and tabular representation of data. Concepts of statistical inference in educational contexts.

*CEP 933: Quantitative Methods in Educational Research II.* Techniques of data analysis and statistical inference used in educational and psychological research. Multiple regression, analysis of variance, and basic principles of experimental design in educational applications.

*CEP 942: Single-Case Experimental Design for Intervention Research (SPRING, EVEN YEARS).* Designing, conducting, and critically evaluating research involving applications of the experimental analysis of behavior to problems and needs of individuals with disabilities in educational, clinical, and community settings.



*CEP 995: Practicum in Research Design and Data Analysis.* Supervised research practicum. Design, execution, analysis, presentation, critique, and revision of research projects.

***Core Courses in Special Education (minimum 9 credits)***

The special education core consists of 3 courses that every student in the program is required to take. These courses are designed to, as a set, provide you with a broad knowledge of the history, legislation, policies, trends, research, and issues in the field of special education. As you complete the core, you also will obtain the professional skills and experiences that are expected of leaders and scholars in the field of special education. We have described these courses in detail below, listing their content and objectives and the professional skills they are designed to promote.

*CEP 941: Academic Issues: At-Risk and Special Education Students (FALL, EVEN YEARS)*

Content/Objectives:

- Influence of models and theories on special education intervention research
- Methodological issues in intervention research
- Qualitative research processes
- Examination of intervention research in special education
- Identification of research questions and extensions of academic research
- Discussion and elaboration of critical variables for conducting intervention research, including the social contexts of learning
- Assessment in special education, including issues related to the function, value, and development of assessment measures for academic research
- Collaboration and professional development-teachers as researchers, teacher education as a field of study
- Effects of inclusion efforts on research

Professional Skills:

- Developing and implementing an intervention research study
- Developing skills in writing a research article
- Giving an oral presentation of research findings

*CEP 943: Multicultural Issues in Special Education (FALL, ODD YEARS)*

Content/Objectives:

- Identification of major disparities in the education of children of diverse backgrounds
- Describe causes of educational disparities in each area of special education as they relate to ethnic, gender, and socioeconomic inequities
- Describe best practices and potential solutions to such disparities
- Identify knowledge that special educators need to provide contextually, linguistically, and gender appropriate education
- Identify criteria to support special educators in the selection of nonbiased/nonsexist approaches to instruction and classroom management

Professional Skills:

- Preparing a literature review
- Giving professional presentations and facilitating class discussions
- Writing a professional article discussing multiculturalism in the student's area of specialization

*CEP 982: Special Topics in Special Education—Applied Research Methods (SPRING, ODD YEARS)*

Content/Objectives:

- Critically evaluate special education research
- Develop important and relevant research questions and matching methodologies with questions
- Examine study design issues such as reliability, validity, transfer, and scalability
- Understand various ways to synthesize a body of literature, including meta-analytic techniques and methodological syntheses

Professional Skills:

- Conducting appropriate statistical analyses in laboratory and field research
- Performing secondary data analyses
- Giving professional presentations and facilitating class discussions

***Cognate (minimum 9 credits)***

The cognate is a series of courses that will help broaden the focus of your doctoral study and permit you to gain specialized knowledge in an area that is related to your research interests. You should plan your cognate in consultation with your advisor and Guidance Committee. Previous students in the special education doctoral program have pursued cognates in areas such as literacy, teacher education, educational policy, technology, sociology, and psychology.

***Dissertation Credit (minimum 24 credits; maximum 30 credits)***

You may take a maximum of 30 dissertation credits (CEP 999) during your PhD program. If you will be disadvantaged by the 30 credit limit (such as for Visa purposes or assistantship requirements), you may request a waiver to the maximum by preparing a waiver request (<http://education.msu.edu/academics/graduate-forms.asp>) and submitting it to your academic advisor and the associate dean for academic affairs. At any rate, a minimum of 24 dissertation credits is required and most of these should be taken after you advance to candidacy (i.e., pass your comprehensive examination). Occasionally it makes sense to enroll in 999s prior to candidacy. For example, there are times when a student's graduate assistantship or fellowship will pay for more credits than he or she is either willing or able to take during a semester. In that case it is worthwhile to use that support for dissertation credits rather than losing it, because students will need to buy a minimum of 24 credits at some point in order to graduate. It is not a good idea, however, to accumulate a large number of 999 credits before taking comprehensive exam. A student can gain approval for a dissertation proposal only after passing the examination. In general, the university expects that students will purchase dissertation credits at the time they are consuming faculty and facility resources to complete the dissertation. A student must be enrolled in at least one credit, many times CEP 999, during the semester they take and pass their comprehensive exam and orally defend their dissertation. Additionally, students must enroll in at least one credit each regular semester (excluding summers). Failure to enroll for longer than a period of one year will require re-admission to the program, which may or may not be granted.

#### IV. PROGRAM MILESTONES

The special education PhD program requires all students to achieve a series of program milestones. These milestones are consistent with many requirements students encounter in their courses; however, they typically go beyond course expectations. Program milestones are designed to make sure that students acquire the skills and experiences they will need to succeed in an academic position in higher education or in another leadership position. Program milestones test students' knowledge and skills at critical points in the program, and give students experience in the types of activities, particularly research, that will enable them to successfully complete the dissertation and to get a strong start on their career as a scholar. Program milestones include:

**Preliminary Examination:** Each program in the CEPSE Department has some form of preliminary examination; it is a departmental requirement of all doctoral students. The SPED preliminary exam assesses students' abilities to analyze and evaluate empirical research from both conceptual and methodological perspectives and to communicate their analysis in clear written text. The examination is administered during the *9<sup>th</sup> week of classes in the fall semester of the second year of coursework*. The preliminary examination requires students to integrate knowledge of research methodology and substantive theoretical and empirical issues, and serves as an early assessment of competencies that are relevant to the development of the research apprenticeship, the dissertation, and other scholarly products.

**Research Practicum:** The purpose of the research practicum requirement is to develop capabilities for pursuing a line of research. As stated in the Graduate Educational Policy Committee document outlining practicum requirements: "It is assumed that participation in the practicum will provide you with a range of opportunities relevant to conducting educational research." The research practicum will support students in learning to:

1. pose significant questions grounded in existing theory and inquiry
2. select and use methods appropriate to the question and research context
3. gather appropriate evidence
4. subject the evidence to careful analysis
5. reassess prior assumptions and conceptualizations in relation to evidence gathered and ongoing analysis
6. respond to input and critiques from other scholars and provide advice and comments for others' research
7. organize oral and written presentations
8. revise presentations in response to fair and open critiques

**Comprehensive Examination:** The purpose of the comprehensive examination is to provide an occasion that allows students to review and integrate into a meaningful perspective a large fund of educational and psychological knowledge from the field. This integrative experience is designed to overcome the fragmentation of knowledge that may occur as students take specific courses over the course of different semesters. *The comprehensive exam is typically taken during the third or fourth year of doctoral study as an on-site exam.*

**Annual Review:** The annual review is intended to document a student's abilities as a researcher, scholar, educator, and leader. It includes an annual review letter, a current cumulative vitae, research papers, conference presentations, evidence of teaching effectiveness, and evidence of service (e.g., leadership activities, editorial work, conference coordination). These materials are evaluated annually as a component of the doctoral

student annual review. Not all materials are submitted in a given review cycle, and some materials are submitted more than once during the program.

***Dissertation:*** The dissertation is the culminating product of the PhD program and as such should represent original research that makes a meaningful and substantial addition to the extant literature in the student's chosen area of expertise in special education. It is a bridge between mentored research activity and independent scholarship. The dissertation project entails the development of a proposal, which must be approved, the conduct of the research (which may require approval by the Institutional Review Board at MSU, known as the University Committee on Research Involving Human Subjects or UCRIHS), the completion of the written dissertation, and the successful oral defense of the dissertation.

Each of these program milestones is described in more detail below, and documents relevant to each milestone can be located in the appendices of this Program Handbook.

### **Preliminary Examination**

The preliminary examination asks students to develop a careful analysis of a published article that is representative of research in special education. This kind of analysis is a central skill that all professionals in our respective fields master, and regularly practice, in their professional lives. At the conclusion of doctoral study, students should be able to read and make independent judgments of the validity and importance of published research. Critiques should be informed and well argued on both methodological and substantive grounds. It is NOT expected that students will have completely mastered this skill by the end of the first year of coursework. Mastery will take time and will develop throughout the doctoral program.

For the preliminary examination, students are given a published research article and asked to prepare a written analysis of that research, guided by a set of questions provided by the SPED program. The preliminary exam is a take-home exam. Below is a list of skills and competencies that are assessed:

- Understanding of theoretical perspectives appropriate to the student's field of study
- Knowledge of basic research design and data analysis procedures
- Ability to integrate knowledge of research methods and conceptual knowledge, and to apply them to address a substantive issue in the field of study
- Ability to assess and communicate the importance or significance of a study and its results
- Ability to re-conceptualize research, leading to the advance of inquiry or knowledge in a field of study
- Proficiency in the skills of scholarly writing

The preliminary exam is offered during the 9<sup>th</sup> week of the fall semester of each year (and during the 9<sup>th</sup> week of the spring semester of each year for students who do not pass the first administration). Notices of dates for administration will be e-mailed to all SPED program doctoral students. See your advisor if you need assistance in developing specific examination preparation strategies. All students must read and sign a commitment to Academic Honesty and Ethical Principles and Practices before taking the preliminary examination (see Appendix A)—this form serves as your official application for taking the preliminary exam. Appendix B answers some of the most frequently asked questions about the preliminary examination.

Standards for evaluating the preliminary exam are described in Appendix C, which provides the guidelines that faculty are asked to use when selecting articles, scoring exams, and providing feedback to students. As described in Appendix C, students receive a Pass, Conditional Pass, or Fail. If a student receives a Fail, s/he must develop a remediation plan with her/his advisor and retake the exam in the spring semester of the same academic year. If a student receives a Conditional Pass, s/he must develop a remedial plan with her/his advisor, but a retake is not required. Students who fail are permitted *one* retake of the preliminary exam. See Appendix C for more information on retaking the preliminary exam.

### **Research Practicum**

The College of Education requires that every doctoral student complete a research practicum. The practicum is designed as an early research experience that involves students in identifying a question or issue of interest, designing and conducting a study, and analyzing and reporting the findings. The practicum should occur after completing the majority of courses in the research methodology sequence, and it *must* occur prior to the comprehensive examination.

The goal of the research practicum is to promote a close link between coursework and research experiences by introducing students to the process of conducting research early in the graduate program. In general, the student designs and completes a small research project with the support of her or his practicum advisor and a “community of scholars.” The end product will be a written document that is structured much like a publishable paper—with an introduction, brief review of literature, description of the author’s research method, findings, and conclusions.

The research practicum must be developed and conducted within a community of scholars, or group of people (i.e., students and faculty) with whom a student can share ideas, obtain feedback, and receive support. It is not designed to be an independent study in which a student works with a single faculty member without the support of additional members of a research community.

To achieve this goal, students must form an *Apprenticeship Committee* to support them during the research practicum. The student has primary responsibility for forming this committee, although the student’s advisor must approve the committee’s composition. The Apprenticeship Committee should be composed of a faculty member who agrees to chair the committee, another faculty member, and a student. The chair can be a student’s advisor, but this is not required. When considering the composition of the Apprenticeship Committee, it is vital to ask, “Will this community of scholars be able to advance my learning as a researcher?” The answer to this question will help guide final decisions in identifying a community of scholars.

The Apprenticeship Committee will evaluate the student’s final paper and presentation according to the standards described in Appendix D. Based on these guidelines, the project may be rated: (a) pass, (b) pass with revisions, or (c) revise and resubmit, with ratings based on a majority vote. The Apprenticeship Committee will offer specific guidance, in writing, for any revisions that are required. The student then will work closely with his/her Apprenticeship Committee chair to make the requested revisions. If resubmission is required, the full Apprenticeship Committee will reconvene to read and rate the revised paper. Multiple revisions will be permitted; however, all revisions must be completed in a timely manner if students are to stay on track for finishing the PhD within prescribed timelines.

The practicum proposal must be presented to and approved by the Apprenticeship Committee. The student must also present the final paper to the Apprenticeship Committee, in an open forum to which those interested in the student's scholarship may be invited. The approval of the proposed practicum and the acceptance of the completed practicum by the committee are documented with the Research Practicum Form found at <http://education.msu.edu/academics/graduate-forms.asp>.

The research practicum receives 1 to 3 credits under course number CEP 995.

In summary, the Research Practicum requires students to:

1. Register for and successfully complete CEP 995 (Practicum in Research Design and Data Analysis) or an approved alternative.
2. Meet regularly with an advisor to discuss plans and ideas for the practicum project and to determine if the advisor (or some other faculty member) will serve as the chair of the Apprenticeship Committee.
3. Form an Apprenticeship Committee composed of at least two faculty members and one student member. The student member must have already completed his or her research practicum in order to serve on the committee. This committee must approve the apprenticeship plan, including: (a) the topic and (b) the overall plan for conducting the research.
4. If the practicum will involve human subjects, the student must also complete a separate application with the University Committee for Research Involving Human Subjects (UCRIHS). The application form is available on the UCRIHS website at <http://www.humanresearch.msu.edu>. Data collection cannot commence prior to the written approval of this committee. This process can take several months, so plan ahead!
5. Participate in a community of scholars as described above.
6. Conduct the study and develop a final paper describing and interpreting the results.
7. Present the final apprenticeship paper in an open forum to members of the Apprenticeship Committee and others.
8. Obtain the signatures of your Apprenticeship Committee members on the Research Practicum Form (see <http://education.msu.edu/academics/graduate-forms.asp>). This form will certify that the requirements of the apprenticeship project have been satisfied.

### **Comprehensive Examination**

The comprehensive examination is designed to provide the student with an integrative learning experience—an opportunity to engage in reading, thinking, and writing that allows the student to synthesize information gleaned from multiple sources, including both formal and informal opportunities to learn. It also provides an opportunity to encourage learning activities (individual and collaborative) prior to the examination that are unlikely to take place otherwise (i.e., preparing for the examination should be an occasion for productive reading and thinking with others). The exam helps ensure that the student is adequately

conversant with and knowledgeable about issues deemed essential for being a special education leader and scholar.

Students register for the comprehensive examination at the beginning of the semester (Fall or Spring) prior to the semester in which they intend to take the exam. Students should consult with their advisor before applying to take the exam. Application is made with Dr. Gary Troia, Director of Doctoral Studies, by submitting a signed copy of the Academic Honesty and Ethical Principles and Practices form (see Appendix A) to him. Students cannot register for the Comprehensive Examination until they have completed their Research Practicum and their apprenticeship paper has been approved and a signed copy of the Research Practicum Form must be on file with the program prior to taking the exam.

The comprehensive examination occurs at the beginning of the semester for which a student registers to take the exam. There are two questions on the exam, each randomly selected from a pool of potential questions that are provided to students 8 weeks prior to the actual exam. Each question, administered on consecutive days, will be delivered electronically to each student by the Director of Doctoral Studies. Students have an entire day to complete each question (8am–4pm), unless accommodations for extended time have been approved by the Resource Center for Persons with Disabilities (<http://www.rcpd.msu.edu/>). The members of the special education faculty evaluate responses to the examination using the standards outlined in Appendix E.

The Committee notifies students and advisors about the results of the evaluation. If a student fails an examination question, then s/he must retake that question. Prior to the retake, the student and his/her advisor must develop and implement a formal study plan that will help the student attain the desired knowledge or skills. This plan must be approved by the student's Guidance Committee. A student is permitted *two* retakes of the comprehensive examination. Students who fail the examination on the third attempt will not be allowed to continue in the special education program.

More details about the comprehensive examination policies and procedures are contained in Appendix E. All students must read and sign a commitment to Academic Honesty and Ethical Principles and Practices before taking the comprehensive exam (see Appendix A).

### **Annual Review**

The annual review in special education is designed to (a) allow students to demonstrate their mastery of an area of *specialization* that is of personal importance to them (e.g., assessment, policy, literacy) and (b) enable students to have first-hand experience with the activities in which they will be expected to engage as a scholar and/or teacher educator in special education. We recognize, too, that the ability to communicate is essential to all professionals in special education. Graduates of the program will need to communicate information to a broad array of audiences (e.g., teacher interns, teachers, researchers, teacher educators) and in a number of contexts (e.g., college classes, state conferences, national meetings, scholarly journals, professional trade journals). Accordingly, we recognize the importance of both oral and written language competencies in our review requirements. At each year's annual review, students are asked to report on their progress during the previous calendar year using the following elements described below. Annual review materials are due April 15.

There are seven elements that students will need to submit as part of their annual review materials, though not all will be submitted in a given review cycle, and some will be submitted in more than one review cycle:

1. *Annual Review Letter (each year)*. Students are required to summarize their accomplishments in the areas of research, teaching, and service/leadership from the previous calendar year (January 1 through December 31) using a review form provided for this purpose (see Appendix G) prior to the annual review deadline.
2. *Current Cumulative Vitae (each year)*. Students are required to present a professional curriculum vitae (CV) that documents their scholarly endeavors and accomplishments in the areas of research, teaching, and service/leadership. Samples of CVs may be obtained from any program faculty or from faculty web sites.
3. *Publishable Research Papers (at least 3 prior to defense of the dissertation)*. Students are required to submit at least 3 research papers during their tenure as doctoral students at MSU related to an area of specialization that has been developed in their doctoral program. The papers should each contain a report of a research study conducted by the student and be in a form suitable for submission to a scholarly journal (in press or published articles, book chapters, and monographs also are acceptable). The papers should demonstrate the student's: (a) understanding of theoretical perspectives appropriate to the student's specialization; (b) knowledge of research methodology, design, and data analysis procedures; (c) ability to interpret and communicate research results; and (d) ability to draw appropriate conclusions, inferences, and generalizations. Each paper should represent a substantial and leading role in the conduct of the research and authoring of the paper by the student, though it is not necessary for the student to be the sole or lead author. Students should consult with their advisor and/or Guidance Committee members in making their plans to fulfill the research paper requirement.
4. *Conference Proposal Paper/Presentations (at least 3 prior to defense of the dissertation)*. Students are expected to display knowledge of the processes related to the communication and dissemination of their research findings to a broader audience of educators. To demonstrate this ability, students are expected to develop and submit a conference paper/presentation proposal to present their research papers at state, regional, national, or international conferences. A copy of the confirmation letter from the conference organizers and/or feedback from the reviewers of the proposal (e.g., acceptance, rejection) also should be included. Students should consult with their advisor and/or Guidance Committee members in making their plans to fulfill the conference proposal requirement.
5. *Demonstration of Teaching Expertise (one-time)*. We believe that graduates of our program should be competent instructors. To accomplish this, students must demonstrate a thorough understanding of content, display an awareness of how to present that content to a particular audience, and exhibit an understanding of the teaching-learning process. The format chosen for documenting this provides for an authentic assessment of students' communication abilities in a way that mirrors the real world of university faculty and teacher educators. To demonstrate proficiency in teaching, we require students to submit (a) at least one *teaching artifact* that demonstrates the depth of the student's understanding of the topic s/he taught, such as a syllabus or outline of a single course lecture AND (b) faculty and/or student *evaluative data*. The special education faculty will assist doctoral students by providing access to undergraduate or master's courses when necessary. Students who have never taught at MSU are required to participate in a 3-day teaching assistant (TA) training program sponsored by the University, and international students are required to participate in a 5-day TA training program. More information about TA training can be found at <http://tap.msu.edu/>.
6. *Evidence of Scholarly Service/Leadership (at least two prior to defense of dissertation)*. Students are required to submit evidence of service to the field and leadership activities (e.g., serving as a conference organizer or reviewer for conference proposals, serving as



a reviewer—with or without faculty supervision—of papers submitted for publication in a journal, serving in the capacity of an elected or appointed official in an education professional organization).

7. *Evidence of Completion of Responsible Conduct of Research (RCR) Training (5 hours of training are required in the first year of the PhD program and 3 hours are required in each subsequent year)*. Training is available through a number of venues, including some coursework, involvement on research projects, RCR workshops convened by the Graduate School (<http://grad.msu.edu/rcr/syllabus.pdf>) or College, and tutorials for Human Subjects Research Protection available at <http://www.humanresearch.msu.edu/requiredtraining.html> and <https://www.citiprogram.org> (note that both of these are required). This training is student-initiated and requires you to note your hours in a central database: you should view the instructional video on the College of Education IRTL web site (<http://education.msu.edu/irtl/training>) to find out how to record your training hours in the Research Training Tracking System (and more information is provided in section X of this Handbook).

The student should submit completed required elements listed above with that year's annual review materials, which are due April 15. Materials should be submitted, whenever possible, in digital format. The program faculty read and evaluate the annual review materials, using the criteria described in Appendix F. Students must receive an average rating (based on a simple majority of the faculty) of ADEQUATE on all scoring dimensions, which are derived from various elements, to be considered a student in good standing. If a student receives an average rating below ADEQUATE on any dimension, the student will be considered not to be in good standing and may be subject to sanctions (e.g., loss of opportunities for supplemental funding such as summer scholarships, placement on probationary status, suspension of dissertation defense, referral for formal disciplinary action, dismissal) depending on the nature and degree of inadequate progress. When limited or marginal progress is noted, the student may be required to take immediate action, with assistance from the faculty, to ameliorate specific problems in order to continue in the program. Typically, a plan of action to remedy problems is developed and implemented by the student and his/her advisor. Students should take special note that, although the Graduate School only requires a cumulative GPA of 3.0 to be considered in good standing, our program requires a grade of no less than 3.0 in every course applied to the doctoral degree to be considered in good standing academically.

## **The Dissertation**

After the student has passed the comprehensive examination, he or she draws upon prior and ongoing work to formulate a dissertation proposal. The dissertation requirement is designed to enable the student to enhance and demonstrate his or her competence in research and scholarly endeavors and make an original contribution to the body of knowledge within the field of special education. The dissertation marks the occasion for deeper investigation of research questions evolving from the student's graduate study. Students customarily work with their advisors and other faculty in drafting and revising their proposals before submitting a formal version to their Dissertation Committee for review and recommendations.

Before completing the dissertation, students must register for at least 24 credits of CEP 999 (Dissertation Research). However, no more than 30 credits of CEP 999 should be taken, so plan when you take your dissertation credits wisely. Note that students are expected to enroll for at least one dissertation credit each regular semester (excluding summers) after advancement to doctoral candidacy (i.e., the comprehensive examination is passed) to

reflect the ongoing support provided by the university, program, and faculty. Failure to enroll for longer than a period of one year will require re-admission to the program, which may or may not be granted. Note that the University requires students to be enrolled for at least one credit of CEP 999 during the semester they defend a dissertation.

The following information pertains to the nature and format of the dissertation proposal, document, and defense for the Special Education program:

1. A dissertation shall consist of a written report of original research. The format of the dissertation is prescribed by the Graduate School (<http://grad.msu.edu/format.htm>).
2. The dissertation committee shall consist of at least four regular faculty members. At least one member of the committee must be a regular special education program faculty member with an appointment in the Department of Counseling, Educational Psychology and Special Education.
  - a) Additional voting or non-voting members may be selected in addition to the four regular faculty members required by University policy. Additional members could include, for example, a faculty member from another university or research center or an off-campus professional involved in the planning and/or execution of the project.
  - b) The membership of the dissertation committee may be different from the membership of the student's guidance committee, and the dissertation director may be a different person than the student's advisor.
  - c) The paperwork for appointing faculty to the Dissertation Committee is entitled *Dissertation Director Approval and Dissertation Committee Approval*. This paperwork must be initiated and routed for approval by the student through the Grad Plan web site at <https://login.msu.edu/?App=J3205>.
3. The student shall prepare, present, and defend a dissertation proposal prior to beginning any data collection (unless approved otherwise by the dissertation committee, a proposal includes the title page and introduction, literature review, and method chapters of the proposed dissertation research). The completed written proposal must be provided to all committee members at least two weeks in advance of the scheduled proposal defense date. Approval of the proposal by the committee is required before data collection begins.
4. Generally, the dissertation proposal presentation should consist of a 20-30 minute talk in which the student briefly outlines the rationale and proposed methods for the study. After the presentation, questions may be addressed to the student by the audience. The student then will be asked to leave the room while the committee deliberates on the outcome of the defense. The committee shall decide on one of four outcomes: approved with no changes, approved with changes (student's dissertation director to be the final arbiter of the revised proposal), approved with changes (revision to be resubmitted to all committee members for re-evaluation), or rejected. Following these deliberations, the student will be apprised of the committee's decision. Three committee members must be in attendance for the proposal meeting to be valid.
5. If the project will involve research using human subjects, an application must be submitted to the appropriate university review board (e.g., UCRIHS). Approval by the appropriate university review board is required before any data collection begins. In most cases, the student should list all members of the dissertation committee as co-investigators. The application form is available at <http://www.humanresearch.msu.edu>. This process can take several months, so plan ahead!

6. Upon conclusion of the research, the student shall prepare, present, and defend the written dissertation. Students should submit final versions of their dissertations to the Committee members at least two weeks prior to the final oral examination date. The final defense meeting serves as the student's final certifying examination. This final presentation and defense shall follow the same procedures outlined above for the proposal defense, with the addition of a brief oral summary of the results, discussion, and recommendations. After the dissertation has been successfully defended, the student must secure the signatures of all Committee members on the *Record of Completion of Requirements for Advanced Graduate Studies* form (see the Grad Plan web site at <https://login.msu.edu/?App=J3205> for initiating and routing for approval this form). A Committee member who wishes to dissent from the majority decision must submit a statement explaining his or her reasons to the Dean of the College.

- a) A traditional dissertation includes: (a) front matter – title page, acknowledgments, table of contents, list of tables, list of figures, and abstract; (b) introduction; (c) review of literature; (d) method; (e) results; (f) discussion; (g) recommendations; (h) references; and (i) appendices with information such as human subjects approval, copies of instruments, and raw data.
- b) An alternate format may be used for the written dissertation if approved by the dissertation committee at the time of the dissertation proposal defense. This alternate format consists of: (a) front matter; (b) introduction; (c) review of literature; (d) a report of original research (including methodology and results) of a study for a traditional researcher audience (e.g., a scholarly journal article); (e) another report of original research suitable for a practitioner (e.g., a practice brief) or policymaker audience (e.g., a white paper); (f) brief discussion of implications for research, policy, and practice; (g) references; and (h) appendices. The original research and associated reports for diverse audiences should represent the majority intellectual efforts of the student defending the dissertation, but these can be sole or multi-authored reports (with the student listed as first author).

7. The proposal defense and the defense of the completed dissertation shall be open to the public. The student should add the defense date, time, location, and title to the College of Education web calendar for dissemination at least two weeks in advance of the final defense.

8. Remote participation in a dissertation proposal and/or defense via telephone/video conference is permissible so long as the majority of the committee members and the student are physically present for the entire proposal or defense.

9. An electronic copy of the completed dissertation must be filed with the Graduate School via ProQuest (see instructions at <http://grad.msu.edu/etd/>). Electronic copies also should be made available to all of the committee members. Bound paper copies of the completed dissertation should be provided to the dissertation director and any members of the dissertation committee upon request. The *University Calendar* specifies a series of dates each semester that should be consulted when scheduling the examination, completing revisions, and submitting the final copies of the dissertation.

10. The student and dissertation committee must comply with MSU guidelines on *Research Data: Management, Control, and Access* ([http://www.humanresearch.msu.edu/regs/regs\\_index.htm](http://www.humanresearch.msu.edu/regs/regs_index.htm)). According to those guidelines, research data for projects conducted at MSU or under the auspices of MSU are the property of MSU. Therefore, students must insure that dissertation data remain at MSU. The student may take a copy of the data when s/he leaves the university. The *Research Data:*

*Management, Control, and Access* guidelines provide additional information on this topic, including procedures for requesting transfer of data to a different institution.

11. The Special Education program faculty reserve the right to prepare and submit for publication student-initiated research such as theses, practicum projects, and dissertations in the event the student has not submitted for publication the results of his/her thesis, practicum, or dissertation within 18 months following the formal defense of that research. In this case, order of authorship shall be negotiated between the student and faculty mentor(s).

## V. ADVISING AND MENTORING

The advising and mentoring relationships that students form with faculty are key elements of successful and rewarding doctoral study. The special education faculty take seriously their responsibilities as advisors and mentors. The program typically admits only one or two students per faculty each year, so that faculty can work closely with all students. The faculty benefits enormously from the expertise, experience, and contributions of our students—and we make every effort to work with you as colleagues and collaborators. When you enter the doctoral program, you will find yourself assigned to a *Temporary Advisor*, who will help you get started in the program and offer advice about initial coursework and research and teaching opportunities. In the first year of doctoral study (or perhaps in the second year, if studying part-time), you should form a *Guidance Committee* with a *Guidance Committee Chair*, who will offer advice on your coursework and early research experiences. Later in your program, you will choose a *Dissertation director* and a *Dissertation Committee*.

### *The Temporary Advisor*

In the letter of admission, each new student is given the name, university address, and telephone number of his/her temporary advisor and asked to contact the advisor as soon as possible. Shortly after admission, advisors receive their new advisees' application files.

The temporary advisor discusses with the student the nature of the program and attempts to answer questions about opportunities for assistantships, institutional expectations regarding time limits to complete the milestones, the procedures and timing for selecting a Guidance Committee and Dissertation Committee, and other details about the doctoral experience. New students receive some information about faculty associated with the program and their interests, but many advisees could benefit from scheduling meetings with faculty in other programs whose interests and commitments might connect with their own. The temporary advisor can help doctoral students make these connections.

Temporary advisors may become chair of their advisees' Guidance Committees. Whether they assume that eventual role or not, the temporary advisor assumes the chairperson's responsibilities until a Guidance Committee is formally selected, in most cases for a year or more.

Temporary advisory assignments should be treated by both students and faculty as just what the name suggests—temporary arrangements. When a student is admitted to the program, the program coordinator assigns a temporary advisor to that student based on general area of interest and current advising loads. This relationship helps get a student started in his or her studies, but there is no reason for either party to assume that his temporary advising connection should become permanent. Once students start taking courses, meeting faculty, and exploring their interests, it is normal that they begin developing relationships with a variety of faculty members. As soon as students find someone with whom they would like to work in developing their program plan, they should initiate a formal change of advisor. For a student to make such a choice is neither surprising nor insulting to the temporary advisor, because the assumption from the start is that students are likely to associate with a faculty most aligned with their interests once they get started in the program.

### *Guidance Committee and Guidance Committee Chair*

Students can select their temporary advisor as their 'permanent' advisor (i.e., the Guidance Committee chair) if they wish. But the key point is that this is their choice, and faculty

members should encourage them to exercise it in whatever ways best fit their professional and programmatic needs. Despite the name we often use to identify this person, there is nothing permanent about the Guidance Committee chair that a student chooses to help him or her through the process of program planning, comprehensive exams, and completing the dissertation. For instance, it is quite normal for a student to select another person to serve as dissertation director. Temporary advisor, Guidance Committee chair, and Dissertation Committee chair are three different roles and are frequently occupied by different faculty members during the course of a student's career in the doctoral program. It is useful for both faculty and students to consider this the norm.

Temporary advisors and their advisees work together to identify a Guidance Committee chair and additional guidance committee members. Although the temporary advisor will have been assigned to the student, the chairperson of the Guidance Committee is selected by the student and agreed to by both parties, based upon mutual interests and commitments. The guidance committee shall be formed no later than the third semester of doctoral study, or within two semesters beyond the master's degree or its equivalent. Within one semester after the committee has met, the chairperson of the guidance committee shall file a guidance committee report with the dean of the college, listing all degree requirements. A copy of this guidance committee report shall also be given to the graduate student. This guidance committee report, as changed or amended in full consultation between the graduate student and the committee and approved by the appropriate department or school chairperson or director and the dean of the college, shall be regarded as the statement of program requirements. The program will not be considered binding unless signed by the student. Preparation of this guidance committee report should be completed using GradPlan which is the web-interactive system for Ph.D. students to create and store their PhD degree plans and subsequent graduate program activities. The report of the guidance committee is created and approved electronically, and stored in GradPlan along with all other degree requirements. Visit <https://gradplan.msu.edu>.

The Committee and chair are responsible for working with the student on his or her program of study, up through the completion of coursework and the passing of the comprehensive examinations, events that typically occur within three years in the program. If appropriate, a student may wish to change chairpersons after completing the comprehensive examinations in order to reshape the Dissertation Committee responsible for guiding the dissertation. A student might also desire to separate the responsibilities of the chair of the Guidance Committee and the Dissertation Committee chair (in other words, to keep the permanent advisor and enlist another individual to serve as the director of the dissertation).

In order to help maximize the student's academic and professional growth, the Guidance Committee chairperson is at minimum responsible for the following:

- Assisting the student in selecting appropriate faculty members for the guidance committee
- Aiding the student in scheduling and preparing for a meeting of the Guidance Committee to approve the student's program plan (three committee members must be present to constitute an official meeting)
- Coordinating the activities of the student and Guidance Committee as they: plan the program, prepare for the comprehensive examination, develop questions for the examination, and consider and revise dissertation ideas for the development of the proposal

- Resolving conflicting issues or problems that may arise between committee members and the student
- Helping to identify and recruit new or additional Guidance Committee members, if necessary or appropriate
- Helping the student to understand and fulfill all of the requirements and policies of the department, the college, and the university

A Guidance Committee must include at least four regular, tenure-stream Michigan State University faculty members. The four regular faculty members need not all be from the Department of Counseling, Educational Psychology, and Special Education; indeed, faculty from other departments and colleges can provide enormous benefits to our students, and the chairperson should not hesitate to recommend adding faculty from other units to the guidance committee. Additional faculty from other groups, including adjunct, emeritus, and faculty from other universities may augment the four regular members. Representatives from such groups, however, may not substitute for the four regular faculty members.

The Guidance Committee members should possess interests compatible with those of the student, and should have strengths to contribute to the student's academic, professional, and scholarly growth. The student may initiate changes in membership of the committee, with the concurrence of the Guidance Committee chairperson and acknowledgment of the committee members. Similarly, faculty members may be added to or may resign from committees with the concurrence of the department chairperson and acknowledgment of other committee members.

#### *Dissertation Committee and Dissertation Director*

The selection of a Dissertation director and a Dissertation Committee are critical decisions, and students should think carefully about faculty who can lend the best possible expertise and support to their efforts at the dissertation stage of doctoral study. Often, a student's Guidance Committee becomes the Dissertation Committee—and the chair becomes the dissertation director. But, this need *not* be the case. Dissertations benefit from more specific faculty strengths, in certain methodological or substantive areas, for example, and changes in the committee are logical after the program of study and comprehensive examinations are completed. However, once a committee is formed, it is to the student's benefit to maintain the continuity of its membership. Students must have a dissertation proposal approved by their Dissertation Committee before beginning their dissertation research.

Guidance Committee and Dissertation Committee forms are available in the Student Affairs Office (134 Erickson Hall) and are used to record committee membership, including the identification of a chairperson. The form to constitute the Guidance Committee is customarily signed and filed in the Student Affairs Office in the second year of study. Any subsequent change in committee membership, including the chairperson, needs to be acknowledged by the signature of the student, each member of the existing and new committees, and the department chairperson.

## **VI. ANNUAL EVALUATION OF STUDENT PROGRESS**

Each year, the tenure-stream faculty conducts an annual evaluation of all special education doctoral students. The purpose of the evaluation is to ensure that each student is making satisfactory progress toward the completion of his/her program and toward the fulfillment of his/her professional goals.

Early in the spring semester, the special education program secretary sends students a copy of the annual review materials. Students are asked to: (a) write an annual review letter about their progress in research, teaching, service/leadership, and program milestones and coursework, their immediate future goals, their strengths and areas for growth, and ways in which the program faculty can assist their endeavors; (b) construct a cumulative current CV; and (c) compile completed and approved required elements. The due date for annual review materials is April 15 each year.

The purpose of the annual review is to offer constructive feedback to students. The annual evaluation helps assure that all students will graduate in a timely manner, and with the skills and experiences they need to become successful scholars and teacher educators. The tenure-stream faculty meet, as a group, to review each student's materials and overall progress. The review results in a detailed discussion about each student's strengths and areas for growth. Following the faculty meeting and review, the advisor completes a summary evaluation form with comments and recommendations. This evaluation form is entered into the student's file and a copy is retained by the student's advisor and the office of the Associate Dean for Academic Affairs.

The program faculty use the criteria described in Appendix F. Students must receive an average rating of Adequate from a simple majority of the faculty for each criterion. If a student receives an average rating below ADEQUATE on any dimension, the student will be considered not to be in good standing and may be subject to sanctions. These sanctions may include: loss of opportunities for supplemental funding such as summer scholarships and travel funding, placement on probationary status, suspension of dissertation defense, referral for formal disciplinary action, or dismissal. If a student receives an average rating less than Adequate, the student, with assistance from the student's advisor, should take immediate action to rectify the inadequacies noted to avoid sanctions and make acceptable progress. In some cases where there are significant problems with a student's progress, s/he may be required to ameliorate specific problems in order to continue in the program. In these cases, a written plan of action to remedy problems is developed and implemented by the student and his/her advisor. NOTE: It is expected that special education program PhD students not only maintain a cumulative GPA of 3.0 in accordance with Graduate School requirements, but that they also attain a minimum grade of 3.0 in every course for which they plan to apply towards the doctoral degree.



## VII. Student Conduct and Conflict Resolution

The University has established a judicial structure and process for hearing and adjudicating alleged violations of recognized graduate student rights and responsibilities (GSRR, Article 5). The first venue to resolve such conflicts informally or formally rests within the academic unit. Because the faculty advisor-graduate student relationship is deemed so important, special attention should be given to the resolution of conflicts between a graduate student and his or her faculty advisor.

### *Student Conduct*

MSU expectations for acceptable student conduct are specified in the regulations and the rights and responsibilities sections of the [Spartan Life Student Handbook and Resource Guide](#). Students must also abide by the bylaws and policies of the Department of Counseling, Educational Psychology, and Special Education.

### *Conflict Resolution*

Usually the best approach to resolving a problem is through informal discussion and negotiation when the problem first arises. Discussion and negotiation amongst the parties in a conflict may not only help to resolve the original conflict, but can lead to better communication and more positive working relationships in the future. In addition, there usually are more options for solving a problem at the early stages of a conflict than later when working relationships may become seriously compromised or when the problem grows in complexity.

Try to resolve problems through discussions with the people who are immediately involved in the issue. In the special education program, you should consider speaking with the course instructor (if the problem is specific to a course), your supervisor (if the problem is specific to a graduate assistantship position), your advisor, the special education coordinator, and/or the Department chairperson.

If your problem cannot be resolved at the departmental level or if you prefer discussing the matter with someone from outside the department, consider seeking help from the [MSU Ombudsman](#), the [Judicial Affairs Office](#), the [Women's Resource Center](#), the Associate Dean for Student Affairs in the College of Education, or the Dean of the [Graduate School](#). The Graduate School conducts [workshops](#) on Communicating Your Message: Effective Communication Strategies That Work on Setting Expectations and Resolving Conflicts that are designed to help graduate students work effectively with their faculty mentors and to make good progress toward their degrees. Any group of students or faculty may request these programs.

### *Grievance*

If the above strategies for remedying problems have been attempted, without successful results, the student may wish to file a formal complaint with the Department. The Department chair should be contacted by the student, and the chair will decide if the issue can be resolved at the department level, or if it should be brought to the attention of others, such as the Dean of the College or the University Provost's Office. All graduate students should familiarize themselves with the information contained in Graduate Students Rights and Responsibilities at Michigan State University (<http://splife.studentlife.msu.edu/>). The University Ombudsman's office provides guidance for determining the viability of a grievance and discusses the procedure for filing a formal grievance. You can view this

information at <https://www.msu.edu/unit/ombud/>. At any point, students may appeal to the University Ombudsman for assistance or advice.

### *Professional Ethics in Research and Practice*

As teachers and scholars interested in improving outcomes for individuals with disabilities, we hold ourselves to high professional standards in our research, teaching, and other professional practices. One set of standards to which we hold ourselves and, consequently our students, is the Council for Exceptional Children's Code of Ethics for Educators of Persons with Exceptionalities. These professional standards are detailed in Appendix M.

As scholars, we also must be held accountable to a set of standards that guide our research and creative activity. As described in the MSU Graduate Student Handbook, "integrity in research and creative activities is based on sound disciplinary practice as well as on a commitment to basic values such as fairness, equity, honesty, and respect." At your doctoral student orientation, you will be provided with a copy of *Guidelines for Integrity in Research and Creative Activities*. It is extremely important that you read over these guidelines and talk to your advisor or other faculty about any questions you may have about them. You must also become knowledgeable the University's procedures for research involving human subjects. At MSU, the University Committee on Research Involving Human Subjects (UCRIHS) oversees all research involving human subjects. Before you even submit a proposal for conducting research with human subjects, you must complete a tutorial about human subjects policies, available at <http://www.humanresearch.msu.edu/requiredtraining.html>. UCRIHS also offers workshops throughout the year about research ethics and policies. You will receive information about these from the special education program secretary. You are strongly encouraged to attend one of these workshops.

## VIII. RETENTION AND DISMISSAL POLICIES

### *University Timelines for Degree Completion*

The University establishes explicit guidelines for the completion of graduate degrees at Michigan State University. Comprehensive examinations must be passed within *five* years and all remaining requirements for the PhD must be completed within *eight* years from the time a student first enrolled as a doctoral student. Students who do not finish within eight years will be required to retake the comprehensive examination and must fill out a Request for Extension of Time form. Extension of time is not automatically granted. An advisor must approve a student's first request; requests for a second extension require approval of the student's Guidance or Dissertation Committee and the full special education faculty. A student must also specify why the first time extension was not sufficient for completing degree requirements. Each extension is for no more than two semesters, and no more than two extensions can be granted. The Dean of the College of Education must also approve each extension.

### *Retention and Dismissal Overview*

Program faculty annually review each student's performance and progress in the program, as described above. Faculty also may initiate a review of the student's status in the program in the event of any evidence that indicates a violation of the University's regulations (for MSU General Student Regulations see [Spartan Life Student Handbook and Resource Guide](#)), legal statutes, or ethical and professional standards. Examples of violations include but are not limited to criminal misconduct, academic dishonesty, unethical practices, or unprofessional behavior. The review process consists of examining the nature of the problem, violation, or alleged misconduct and the accompanying evidence with the student. The outcome of the review may be (a) to retain the student in good standing, (b) to allow the student to continue in the program on probationary status until specified conditions are met, or (c) to immediately dismiss the student from the program. The faculty reserves the right to restrict a student's participation in coursework, teaching, and research involving human subjects during the review process. The procedures for the review are described below.

### *Retention and Dismissal Review Procedures*

To protect student due process rights as well as the rights of faculty to uphold the academic and professional standards of the doctoral program, the following steps will be taken as part of the review process:

1. The student will be informed in writing by the Special Education Area Coordinator of any charge, event, performance, or circumstance that suggests inadequate progress or performance in the program or violation of University, legal, ethical, or professional codes. Such charges or complaints may emanate from members of the program, College, or University faculty, clinical supervisors, clients, or professionals and agents outside of the University community.
2. As part of the above communication, the Area Coordinator may initially advise the student to seek an informal resolution of the charge or complaint with the accusing party, and to inform the Coordinator of the outcome of this action within 30 days.
3. If, however, informal methods at problem resolution are inappropriate or unsatisfactory, the Area Coordinator will inform in writing the student, the student's advisor,

and other relevant parties that the student's status in the program is being reviewed and that a formal meeting of the program faculty will be necessary to evaluate the nature of the problem and to decide on a course of action. Depending on the nature of the concern, event, performance, or circumstance, a student's status in the program may be in immediate jeopardy and the goal of the review would then be for faculty to decide whether to retain or dismiss the student from the program.

The Area Coordinator may invite any persons judged to have relevant information to submit such information either in person at this meeting or in writing prior to the meeting. The student will be given copies of all written materials under consideration in advance of the meeting. The student and, if desired, his/her counsel would be invited to attend this meeting and to present testimony. In addition, the student may invite other individuals who have relevant testimony to attend the meeting or to present written information. The student will provide the Area Coordinator with a list of these individuals at least 5 days in advance of the scheduled meeting.

4. Following the presentation of testimony and evidence, the program faculty will convene separately to deliberate and to arrive at a decision regarding the student's standing in the program. This decision may result in either (a) retention of the student in the program in good standing, (b) a judgment to allow the student to continue in the program on probationary status until specified conditions are met, or (c) immediate dismissal of the student from the special education program.

5. Following completion of the program faculty's decision-making, the Area Coordinator will inform the student and the student's advisor in writing of the faculty's decision and, if appropriate, clearly specify what, if any, conditions must be satisfied by the student to maintain his or her good standing in the program. The student will also be advised that if he or she wishes to grieve the outcome of the faculty's decision, the grievance procedures specified in [Graduate Student Rights and Responsibilities](#) should be followed.

#### *Dismissal from the Program*

The dismissal of a student from the special education doctoral program is a significant event for both the student and the program faculty. It represents the conclusion of the faculty that the student has not demonstrated an adequate level of competency in academic or research skills or professional conduct. Dismissal action is generally the final outcome of several informal and formal communications with the student regarding his or her unsatisfactory progress through the program and, when appropriate, special efforts at helping the student meet program requirements and training objectives. The final decision regarding whether or not a student should be terminated from the program, or under what conditions a student making unsatisfactory progress will be allowed to continue, rests with the tenure-stream special education faculty.

At any point during the student's matriculation, the faculty retains the right to review any student circumstances or personal performances that may negatively affect the student's competencies for independent professional practice or that may threaten the welfare of others. The following are offered as examples of circumstances or performances that may be the basis for dismissal action:

- A. Failure to maintain minimum academic standards
- B. Unsatisfactory performance in practice courses (e.g., practica, research apprenticeship)
- C. Failure to remediate deficiencies identified in annual student evaluations

- D. Failure to enroll in at least one credit each regular semester (excluding summers) for over a year (this automatically requires re-admission to the program, which may or may not be granted)
- E. Academic dishonesty
- F. Criminal misconduct
- G. Failure to comply with established University or program timetables and requirements
- H. Unethical practices and/or unprofessional conduct as specified in the Council for Exceptional Children's Code of Ethics for Educators of Persons with Disabilities ([http://www.cec.sped.org/Standards/Ethical-Principles-and-Practice-Standards?sc\\_lang=en](http://www.cec.sped.org/Standards/Ethical-Principles-and-Practice-Standards?sc_lang=en))
- I. Failure to make satisfactory progress in completing program requirements
- J. Failure to maintain regular contact with the program and one's advisor

## **IX. RECORDS POLICIES**

The special education program maintains records documenting each student's progress through the doctoral program. These records, which are maintained in the program secretary's files, include the program plan, guidance committee form, preliminary exam completion form, research apprenticeship completion form, comprehensive exam completion form, teaching and assistantship evaluations, dissertation paperwork, portions of the original application to the program, and other materials that are deemed necessary. Additionally, to facilitate student advising, advisors may keep files containing such items as their advisees' grade transcripts, comprehensive exam responses, and dissertation drafts. All student records are kept in secure filing cabinets or private offices to protect students' privacy and confidentiality; only program faculty and staff will have access to this material. Students are strongly advised to maintain copies of forms for their personal records.

Students may request to examine their own files; this request should be directed to the student's advisor or the Area Coordinator. The only material that will be withheld is that which the student has clearly waived his or her right to examine, e.g., confidential reference letters. (Other than the latter, files generally only contain records of which students already possess copies.) Once students graduate, a permanent file is maintained by the program which, among other things, may assist documentation for future employment and credentialing.

## X. RESPONSIBLE CONDUCT OF RESEARCH

As of September 2011, Michigan State University requires that all graduate students and research project staff be trained in the Responsible Conduct of Research (RCR) as part of their research experience. For the purposes of RCR training compliance, the training year for special education program students runs from 8/16 to the Annual Review due date of the following year (e.g., 8/16/12–4/1/13).

	<b>Initial Training Year 1</b>	<b>Refresher Training Annually After Year 1</b>
<b>Required Hours</b>	5 Hours	3 Hours
<b>Training Components</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Human Research Protection Program (2 hours)</li> <li>• Conflict of Interest (30 min)</li> <li>• Research Misconduct Issues and/or Authorship and Data Issues (1 hour)</li> <li>• Additional Discussion of Issues Related to Responsible Conduct of Research (1.5 hours)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Complete the Required Recertification for Human Research Protection (1-2 hours)</li> <li>• Additional Discussion of Issues Related to Responsible Conduct of Research</li> <li>• Participate in Workshops Described Under Initial Certification</li> </ul>

### How do I log my hours using the Research Training Tracking System (RTTS)?

- Students are responsible for tracking their RCR training hours in the Research Training Tracking System (RTTS) as required by the College of Education.
- *Creating your account:* As you complete RCR trainings/educational activities, please log-in to RTTS at <https://www.egr.msu.edu/secureresearchcourses/> by providing your MSU Net ID (i.e., email without the "msu.edu"), password, your academic program and your advisor's MSU Net ID. Click on "Create/Edit Trainee Account" and follow the directions for creating your account.
- *Adding completed training information to RTTS:* Use the "Edit Account Information" button and then click the "Add Course from Primary College/Department" to enter training information. A tutorial video is available at <http://education.msu.edu/irtl/training/>

### Examples of RCR Education/Training Content & Resources

- MSU College of Education of IRTL training website (<http://education.msu.edu/irtl/training/>)
- MSU Human Research Protection Program (HRPP) required training and online tutorial for all investigators (<http://www.humanresearch.msu.edu/requiredtraining.html>)
- HRPP CITI online human subjects training modules (<https://www.citiprogram.org/>)
- MSU Graduate School Research Integrity resources (<http://grad.msu.edu/researchintegrity/>)
- U.S. Department of Health & Human Services Office of Research Integrity (interactive movies on research misconduct at <http://ori.hhs.gov/thelab>)
- MSU Graduate School RCR workshop series
- Course Content (e.g., CEP 930: Educational Inquiry)

## APPENDIX A

### Academic Honesty and Ethical Principles and Practices

The faculty recognizes its role in supporting the learning and professional development of each student and in doing everything legitimately possible to help the student pass the comprehensive examinations. In recognition of this responsibility, the faculty will make every effort to ensure that the examination questions, examination procedures, evaluation of responses, and reporting of results and recommendations for improvement will be done in a fair and timely manner.

In a community of scholarship and practice, students share the responsibility for ensuring the quality of the comprehensive examination. Students are therefore expected to prepare thoroughly for the examination and to follow established procedures for registering for the examination, taking the examination, and seeking results of the examination. At all times throughout this process, students, as well as faculty, are expected to conduct themselves with the highest character and integrity.

The comprehensive exam is based on an honor system. The completed exam represents the work, understandings, and knowledge of the student, without assistance from other individuals to complete the exam. Completion of the exam means that the student agrees to comply with these policies and represents the work solely as their own.

To ensure the security and integrity of the examination process, it is expected that:

- No faculty or staff member shall give any student information about the comprehensive exams that would give the student an unfair advantage over other students.
- Any faculty or staff member having knowledge of any student or students receiving information about the content of any exam that gives that student an unfair advantage over others, must report that knowledge to the Department Chairperson.
- No student shall accept exam information if it is suspected that the information is about the content of the comprehensive exam.
- Students shall report to the Department Chairperson any knowledge they have of other students or faculty giving or receiving information about the content of any examination.

Source: Comprehensive Examinations for Doctoral Students in Counseling, Educational Psychology and Special Education (9/15/97)

#### Academic Honesty, Michigan State University

*Academic honesty is central to the educational process and acts of academic dishonesty are serious offenses within the University community. Suspension from the University could be the consequence for acts of academic dishonesty. (Spartan Information and Services, p. 78)*

#### General Student Regulations

##### 1.00 Protection of Scholarship and Grades,

The principles of truth and honesty are fundamental to the educational process and the academic integrity of the University; therefore, no student shall:



- 1.01 claim or submit the academic work of another as one's own.
- 1.02 procure, provide, accept or use any materials containing questions or answers to any examination or assignment without proper authorization.
- 1.03 complete or attempt to complete any assignment or examination for another individual without proper authorization.
- 1.04 allow any examination or assignment to be completed for oneself in part or in total, by another without proper authorization.
- 1.05 alter, tamper with, appropriate, destroy or otherwise interfere with the research, resources, or other academic work of another person.

Source: MSU, General Student Regulations, 1989, p. 79

#### Integrity of Scholarships and Grades

1. The principles of truth and honesty are recognized as fundamental to a community of teachers and scholars. The University expects that both faculty and students will honor these principles and in so doing protect the validity of University grades. This means that all academic work will be done by the student to whom it is assigned, without unauthorized aid of any kind. Instructors, for their part, will exercise care in the planning and supervision of academic work, so that honest effort will be positively encouraged.

2. If any instance of academic dishonesty is discovered by an instructor, it is his or her responsibility to take appropriate action. Depending on his or her judgment of the particular case, he or she may give a failing grade to the student on the assignment or for the course.

Source: All-University Policy, November 18, 1969, revised July, 1990, 1993

Violation of these ethical principles and policies may result in automatically failing the exam.

I have read, understand and agree to abide by the ethical principles and honor code described above. I understand that the work on the exam must represent my own work without the assistance of others.

---

Student's Name (print)

---

Student's Signature

Date \_\_\_\_\_

Source: Comprehensive Examinations for Doctoral Students in Counseling, Educational Psychology and Special Education (9/15/97)

## APPENDIX B

### PRELIMINARY EXAMINATION: FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

#### **What is the general format of the exam?**

Students answer questions about a published research article. The article is chosen by the student's program area faculty, and a different article is used for each administration of the exam.

#### **What competencies are tested by the Preliminary Examination?**

The preliminary examination is designed to test the following competencies:

- Understanding of theoretical perspectives appropriate to the student's field of study,
- Knowledge of basic research design and data-analysis procedures,
- Ability to integrate knowledge of research methods and conceptual knowledge and apply them to a substantive issue in the field of study,
- Ability to appropriately interpret and generalize research results relevant to the field of study,
- Ability to assess and communicate the importance or significance of a study and its results and implications, and
- Proficiency in the skills of scholarly writing

#### **Who takes the Preliminary Examination?**

All doctoral students in the SPED program are required to take the Preliminary Examination.

#### **What is the nature of the questions?**

The questions ask students to carefully analyze a piece of published research that is representative of special education research

#### **Who chooses the articles?**

The special education faculty is responsible for selecting an article for students to analyze for the preliminary examination. CEPSE has developed guidelines for article selection, and these guidelines are consulted when faculty select an article. It is the responsibility of the program area's Director of Doctoral Studies to organize faculty for the selection of articles.

#### **When in the course of the doctoral program does a student take the Preliminary Examination?**

Students typically take the preliminary examination during the 9<sup>th</sup> week of the fall semester of the second year of coursework, unless they are attending on a part-time basis. Due to the nature of the exam, students should successfully complete the first two courses in the methodology sequence (CEP 930 and 932) and the CEPSE Department proseminar (CEP 900) prior to taking the preliminary examination. Although students who have taken these courses cannot be *guaranteed* to do well on the preliminary examination, students who do not take them are at serious risk of not gaining the skills and competencies that will be tested on the examination.

#### **Is every student required to take the Preliminary Examination as soon as he or she has reached this point in the program?**

Yes. If students delay taking the exam when they have reached this point in the course of their study, they may put off the exam until they have invested inordinate amounts of time in the program. The preliminary exam is designed to provide an **early** warning sign of areas that need to be addressed, or of the possibility that a student may be unable to complete the doctorate. With early feedback, remediation of weaknesses is more likely to be possible. Every student in the doctoral program must take the preliminary examination when they have passed CEP 900, 930, and 932, which are recommended courses for first-year students.

### **What if the student has completed the required coursework but still doesn't feel prepared?**

All students are required to take the examination at the scheduled time in their course of study. If a student is not prepared, the examination will provide an opportunity to identify and assess areas of strength and weakness, and serve as a catalyst for addressing problems that may prevent a student from successfully completing future program requirements. If a student does not take the exam at the specified time, the advisor and program faculty are notified. Not taking the examination would be cause for dismissal from the special education program.

### **What is the statement of academic honesty and ethical principles and practices?**

This statement is a document that students review and sign prior to taking the preliminary exam to ensure the security and integrity of the examination process. It is expected that students and faculty will abide by the principles outlined in this document. This document must be signed by the student and returned to the Director of Doctoral Studies the week prior to the exam administration. Failure to submit the signed statement on time will prevent the student from being eligible to take the preliminary exam.

### **How many times may the student take the Preliminary Examination?**

Students are allowed to attempt the preliminary examination twice. We expect that only a small number of students will receive a Fail and therefore need to repeat the exam. A plan of remediation must be filed by the student and his/her advisor prior to attempting to retake the preliminary exam. The retake procedures will be identical to the first administration, with the exception that students will be presented with a new piece of published special education research. Because serious remediation is required before a second attempt, a second poor performance indicates significant deficiencies that are likely not to be overcome.

### **When is the Preliminary Examination administered?**

The preliminary examination is administered annually during the 9<sup>th</sup> week of the fall semester and, under special circumstances (see below) during the 9<sup>th</sup> week of the spring semester. Students are notified of the exam date at the beginning of the fall semester via email from the special education program faculty.

### **Is the examination "in class" or "take-home"?**

Students are given the examination on the **Friday morning of the 9<sup>th</sup> week of classes and have until the following Monday at noon to return the exam to the exam administrator**. The article and examination questions (see below) are emailed to students

who have submitted a Statement of Academic Honesty and Ethical Principles and Practices, which in essence serves as an application for the exam, the week prior to the administration of the exam.

### **When are the questions given to students?**

This document includes a copy of the standard questions that are asked on the preliminary exam. A copy of these questions also is provided to each student on the first day of the exam. Because students have had access to the questions as soon as they are admitted to the program, the questions should be very familiar and responses to these questions should be practiced.

### **How is Preliminary Examination performance evaluated?**

Preliminary Examinations are evaluated by two faculty members in special education. Three outcomes are possible:

Pass. The student and his/her advisor receive a letter from the Director of Doctoral Studies in Special Education indicating satisfactory performance.

Conditional Pass. The student and his/her advisor receive a letter from the Director of Doctoral Studies in Special Education indicating marginal satisfactory performance with feedback identifying areas of weakness suggested by the faculty evaluators. The advisor should help the student develop a remedial plan and ensure it is implemented. The student must report on any remediation efforts in his or her next annual review.

Fail. The student, his or her advisor, and the program's unit coordinator receive copies of a letter from the Director of Doctoral Studies in Special Education indicating his or her status is "in jeopardy," with feedback identifying areas of weakness suggested by the faculty evaluators. Both the advisor **and** other program faculty must be involved in decisions regarding remediation. Two avenues seem likely:

1. The student remediates with close monitoring, followed by a retake of the exam in the following semester. The student may retake the Preliminary Examination once. The student must report on any remediation efforts in his or her next annual review.
2. The student may be dropped from the program. This latter decision would only occur if other serious negative evidence about progress in the doctoral program exists, or if the student has failed his/her second attempt.

### **Who scores the exam?**

Exams are scored by teams of two Special Education program faculty.

### **What is the nature of the feedback provided?**

Faculty scorers provide feedback about responses provided to the specific questions asked on the exam, as well as more general feedback about students' writing skills and skills in analysis and communication. Students receive written feedback about their exam performance if they receive a Conditional Pass or Fail score. To the extent that it is possible to suggest specific avenues of remediation or further study, scorers also provide those in their written feedback.

### **How are overall Preliminary Exam scores computed?**

Scorers evaluate the preliminary exam performance of each examinee in each of three domains. The domains are (1) theoretical perspective, (2) research design and analysis, and (3) interpretation and implications. Although the exam is structured to elicit critical analyses in each of these domains from the student, the faculty evaluate the examinee's response on a holistic basis to arrive at a Pass, Conditional Pass, or Fail score. When a discrepancy arises (e.g., the first faculty scorer assigns a Pass and the second scorer assigns a Conditional Pass), the faculty scorers will meet to arrive at a consensus.

### **What do raters look for when they score an exam in each of the three domains?**

- Theoretical Perspective (about 3 pages)
  - Critique the author's conceptual framework.
  - Comment on the need for this study and its importance.
  - How effectively does the author tie the study to relevant theory and prior research?
  - Evaluate the clarity and appropriateness of the research questions or hypotheses.
- Research Design and Analysis (about 4 pages)
  - Critique the appropriateness and adequacy of the study's design in relation to the research questions, hypotheses, or study goals.
  - Critique the adequacy of the study's sampling methods (e.g., choice of participants) and their implications for generalizability.
  - Critique the adequacy of the study's procedures and materials (e.g., interventions, interview protocols, data collection procedures).
  - Critique the appropriateness and quality (e.g., reliability, validity) of the measures used.
  - Critique the adequacy of the study's data analyses. For example, have: important statistical assumptions been met? Are the analyses appropriate for the study's design? Are the analyses appropriate for the data collected?
- Interpretation and Implications of Results (about 3 pages)
  - Critique the author's discussion of the methodological and/or conceptual limitations of the results.
  - How consistent and comprehensive are the author's conclusions with the reported results?
  - How well did the author relate the results to the study's theoretical base?
  - In your view, what is the significance of the study, and what are its primary implications for theory, future research, and practice?

### **What if I have additional questions?**

For additional information see your advisor or the Director of Doctoral Studies for your program area.

## APPENDIX C

### PRELIMINARY EXAMINATION GUIDELINES

#### Article Selection

These are guidelines for faculty in to follow when selecting an article for the preliminary examination:

1. The selected article should represent an empirically-based inquiry into a substantive area of knowledge in the students' major area of study.
2. The article should be relatively brief and should be representative of the type of research article students are exposed to during their first year of coursework. However, the selected article should not have been the focus of prior class/seminar/proseminar discussion.
3. If at all possible, the selected article should have appeared in a "mainstream" journal in the students' discipline.
4. The methodology employed and described in the selected article should be basic enough to be accessible to beginning second-year students. Studies describing complex designs or analyses (e.g., structural equation modeling, factor analysis) would be inappropriate.
5. The article should provide an introduction/rationale to the research questions under investigation that is accessible to students who may not have highly specialized prior knowledge about the particular topic.
6. The selected article does not need to be an exemplary piece of research. Rather, the article should be selected on the basis of its potential to stimulate critical student responses to each of the four domains assessed by the Prelim questions.

#### Scoring Guidelines and General Performance Criteria for Preliminary Exam Readers

Students taking the preliminary examination read a research article related to their area of study and then respond to a series of questions reflecting different domains of knowledge and critical thinking. These domains are (1) theoretical perspective, (2) research design and analysis, and (3) interpretation of and implications of results.

The students writing this exam have completed only their first year of doctoral work and are just beginning to develop the knowledge base and critical thinking skills necessary to function as competent professionals. The preliminary exam is not intended to be a test of knowledge of an experienced scholar or, for that matter, of an advanced doctoral student. Rather, it is an exercise designed to reveal first-year doctoral students' progress toward developing an understanding of the tools, language, and logic of scholarship, along with the critical thinking and writing skills that are requisite to becoming competent, experienced scholars. Thus, when we ask our students to read and critically appraise a research article from their field of study, we do so with the idea firmly in mind that these are beginning doctoral students who are "en route," not finished candidates who have arrived.

The basic objective of the preliminary exam is to evaluate how well students can use and integrate their knowledge about research methodology within the substantive context of their own area of study. When viewed in this way, the exam can be seen as a diagnostic assessment, designed to reflect students' potential for developing and refining their abilities to understand, appraise, and use research, to think analytically, and to clearly express their knowledge in writing. The exam experience is designed to be an early source of feedback to both students and faculty regarding a student's current status and potential needs for further development.

## Scoring Procedures

Each exam is evaluated by two scorers from the SPED program. The two faculty members evaluate each student's examination response holistically with three possible outcomes: Pass, Conditional Pass, or Fail. In cases of disagreement, the faculty meet to reach consensus on the outcome of the assessment. **Scores and any relevant feedback are due to the Director of Doctoral Studies within two weeks of the examination completion.** The SPED program Director of Doctoral Studies will inform the raters if there is not consensus and charge them with meeting to reach agreement. **In any case, scores and relevant feedback are due to the Director of Doctoral Studies within 30 days of the conclusion of the examination for distribution to students, their advisors, and the program coordinator, as necessary.**

## Scoring Meetings

Before preliminary examination scoring commences, pre-scoring meetings are held by the program faculty. The product of each of these meetings should be a set of explicitly written scoring criteria, which aids faculty in reaching consensus regarding the student's performance on the exam. These written criteria are given to the examinees when their examination results are returned with faculty feedback.

## Guidelines for Providing Feedback on Preliminary Examination Answers

Beyond arriving at final judgments regarding students' exam answers (i.e., Pass, Conditional Pass, or Fail), faculty raters of these exams must provide written feedback to students concerning the quality of their answers when either a Conditional Pass or Fail has been assigned by a scorer. It is imperative that students receive such feedback so that they might better understand how their responses were deficient and how they should prepare for a retake of the preliminary exam if necessary.

In providing feedback to students, raters should attend to the following guidelines:

- Make sure that the evaluative comments are closely tied to the specific exam question(s) for which the student's answer was considered deficient.
- Wherever possible, identify important omissions or misrepresentations that contributed to a less favorable evaluation.
- Avoid global or non-specific feedback (e.g., "student's response was weak") and, instead, indicate how the response could have been strengthened (e.g., "student's response to question 6 did not note the serious limitations of the sampling method used in this study").
- Comment on the quality of the student's writing, especially if poor writing contributed to a less favorable evaluation. If possible, suggest ways that the writing can be improved.
- Keep in mind that the preliminary examination serves both assessment and developmental purposes. By providing specific, thoughtful feedback to our doctoral students, you are contributing to their professional development.

## APPENDIX D

### SCORING GUIDELINES FOR RESEARCH PRACTICUM/APPRENTICESHIP PAPER

A research paper usually involves several sections: (a) theoretical framework and rationale for a study (i.e., the literature review), (b) research methodology and design, (c) results and analysis, and (d) conclusions, implications and limitations. To pass this requirement, students must receive a Pass (60% of total point possible, excluding NA) on ALL of the following components related to their research paper. In the notation below, NA represents the category "Not Applicable" for criteria that may not fit the author's study or design.

#### 1. *Introduction/Literature Review*

		Strong Average Poor					
		5	4	3	2	1	NA
1.	Contains a theoretically or conceptually developed literature review.	5	4	3	2	1	NA
2.	Addresses or provides rationale for the study; provides rationale for examining the critical or independent variables of concern (e.g., age, gender, treatment)	5	4	3	2	1	NA
3.	Introduction is complete (author has included the relevant scholarly and research literature and excludes that which is irrelevant or tangentially related to the topic).	5	4	3	2	1	NA
4.	Introduction concludes with problem statement and/or statement of purpose. These statements are adequately developed and supported in the literature review, and logically orient the reader to the purpose of the research (e.g., conclusions are adequately supported with evidence).	5	4	3	2	1	NA
5.	Introduction is written well and is well-organized; that is, introduction is clear, with a strong sense of purpose and direction, organization of information and relationships among the parts of the literature review are clearly indicated.	5	4	3	2	1	NA

TOTAL: \_\_\_\_\_

Pass / No Pass



## 2. Method

		Strong Average Poor					
1.	Author includes sufficient descriptive information on participants (e.g., age, gender, ethnicity, IQ, criteria for classifying students with disabilities, grade levels, chronological ages, reading achievement scores, or achievement data provided in targeted academic area).	5	4	3	2	1	NA
2.	Participant information is provided that substantiates difficulties in targeted areas(s) of need (data provided by author that indicates that subjects need intervention); data presented that shows problem to be of functional importance to the individual target students	5	4	3	2	1	NA
3.	Comparison data are provided on experimental/control participants when appropriate; statistical tests are performed on groups to determine that no differences exist prior to participants' participation in the study (e.g., achievement scores, IQ).	5	4	3	2	1	NA
4.	Special education/general education placement information on participants is provided (e.g., resource room setting, self-contained, etc.); procedures or participant assignment to treatments described, when appropriate.	5	4	3	2	1	NA
5.	Materials (e.g., assessment, intervention, teacher-training, observational materials) are adequately described. This description may include example definitions, figures/tables, etc.	5	4	3	2	1	NA
6.	Scoring procedures related to the assessment materials are described in sufficient detail in this section or a later section of the paper.	5	4	3	2	1	NA
7.	Procedures are adequately described, including such information as: assessment procedures (pretest/post-test), teacher-training process, observational procedures (e.g., # of observations, how observations were conducted).	5	4	3	2	1	NA

		Strong	Average	Poor			
8.	Duration or length of experiment is described, e.g., number of sessions, duration of sessions, frequency of sessions, etc. The study is of sufficient duration to accomplish its stated purposes and/or limitations related to length of experiment are described in the discussion section.	5	4	3	2	1	NA
9.	Extensive information concerning the instructional conditions and teaching methods is provided, e.g., teacher/experimenter instructions to students, teacher-student dialogue, types of responses to student errors, etc.	5	4	3	2	1	NA
10.	If interrater reliability is measured, author explains how these reliability checks were conducted.	5	4	3	2	1	NA
11.	Research methods are appropriate to answer research questions, subject matter or setting requirements, student requirements, (and appropriate to the theoretical perspectives identified in the literature review, etc.	5	4	3	2	1	NA

TOTAL: \_\_\_\_\_

Pass / No Pass

**3. Results**

		Strong	Average	Poor			
1.	Techniques of data analysis (qualitative, quantitative) are appropriate and clearly described.	5	4	3	2	1	NA
2.	Author does not run multiple tests (e.g., multiple t-tests; ANOVAs) on correlated data, but chooses appropriate tests (e.g., MANOVA)	5	4	3	2	1	NA
3.	Author supports quantitative analyses with qualitative information about performance, uses descriptions or examples to make the results meaningful and explanatory (e.g., the author may choose to show representative responses for a particular group, age, etc. to provide an explanation for results)	5	4	3	2	1	NA

4.	Data and results are reported in a systematic way, e.g., author includes means, standard deviations, F value, p ratio, df for each variable in the text or table or a quantitative analysis; for a qualitative analysis, e.g., quotes from primary sources.	5	4	3	2	1	NA
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TOTAL: \_\_\_\_\_

Pass / No Pass

**4. Discussion**

		Strong	Average	Poor			
1.	The discussion is thorough; explanation for effects are provided.	5	4	3	2	1	NA
2.	Discussion ties back to theoretical points of view (in introduction) in interpreting results, and discussion is embedded in the theoretical or conceptual framework that was established in the introduction.	5	4	3	2	1	NA
3.	Discussion includes information concerning the limitations of the study; points out major design or methodological flaws or limitations.	5	4	3	2	1	NA
4.	Discussion contains practical implications of the study (e.g., teacher training, assessment, teaching procedures, implications for classroom teachers).	5	4	3	2	1	NA
5.	Author is careful not to extend conclusions beyond the results of his/her study; results justify conclusions that author draws.	5	4	3	2	1	NA

TOTAL: \_\_\_\_\_

Pass / No Pass

## APPENDIX E

### Special Education Program Doctoral Comprehensive Examination

***The University and Department require a doctoral comprehensive examination covering the major and related fields. The Special Education Program (SPED) policy is intended to supplement these policies and provides specific information concerning the format and content of the exam. Students are responsible for being familiar with the University, Department, and SPED policies on comprehensive exams. The SPED policy has been integrated into the text of the Department policy below and is marked in bold.***

***The policies described below apply only to students admitted to the doctoral program in Special Education beginning Fall 2009.***

#### COMPREHENSIVE EXAMINATIONS FOR DOCTORAL STUDENTS IN COUNSELING, EDUCATIONAL PSYCHOLOGY, AND SPECIAL EDUCATION (CEPSE)

University regulations require that all doctoral candidates take comprehensive examinations. The CEPSE faculty believes that it is essential that students receiving Ph.D. degrees from the Department have an understanding of their fields beyond that gained in courses. The comprehensive exams give students the opportunity to demonstrate their ability to integrate and use information acquired from various readings or courses, as well as to demonstrate their ability to clearly communicate ideas in an acceptable writing style, which reflects good grammar, organization, and composition.

The exams are not meant to measure all of the many qualities that are important requisites of an educator, researcher, or psychologist. The exam is an assessment of each candidate's understanding of areas of knowledge thought to be important for doctoral level scholarship.

#### Special Education

**The comprehensive examination provides an occasion that allows students to review and integrate a large fund of knowledge from multiple domains into a meaningful perspective. Typically, students take the comprehensive exam in the spring semester of their third year or the fall semester of their fourth year in the program. The timing is designed to ensure that students have an adequate base of preparation for the exam and that this preparation does not conflict with the completion of other program requirements. Students must complete at least 80% of their coursework and the research practicum project prior to taking the comprehensive exam. University regulations specify that students must pass the comprehensive exam prior to holding the dissertation proposal meeting. Comprehensive exams must be passed within five years of the student's initial enrollment in the program.**

#### I. GENERAL POLICIES AND REQUIREMENTS

##### A. Policies and Procedures

1. Comprehensive examinations are required of all doctoral students after eighty percent of the prescribed coursework has been completed, but within five years from the date the student was admitted to the program.

2. The examination may not be taken until the candidate's academic program has been approved and filed with the Student Affairs Office. Failure to do so renders the exam invalid.
3. Students planning to take the comprehensive examination must apply in writing before the end of the registration period. Both new candidates and those retaking part or all of the examination must file the Application for Comprehensive Examination (Appendix A) with the Director of Doctoral Studies.
4. Candidates may count courses taken during the term immediately preceding the examination as meeting the requirement that 80% of coursework be completed before taking the exam.
5. All examinees are required to attempt all designated items for the exam on the first attempt.
6. All examinees must have submitted the research practicum paper to their committee before taking the comprehensive examination. Advisor approval of the submission must be received by the Director of Doctoral Studies by July 15 prior to the fall comprehensive exam date, or by December 1 prior to the Spring comprehensive exam date.
7. Students must be registered for classes (at least one credit) the semester of the exam. Fall registration is required for the August exam and spring registration for the January exam.

## II. COMPOSITION AND DEVELOPMENT

### A. Content Areas and Length

Content areas and length of exams are determined at the program level.

#### Special Education Comprehensive Exam Composition

**The comprehensive exam in SPED consists of two (2) questions selected randomly from a question pool by the Director of Doctoral Studies in Special Education prior to the examination period. One question will be randomly selected from a group of questions that address general issues in special education research, policy, and practice. Another question will be randomly selected from a group of questions that address specialized interests (an area of emphasis/strand/cognate) of the student and research methodology in special education. The selected questions will be provided to the student by the exam administrator, one question per day, over two successive days during the examination period. The student will be given one day, from 8 a.m. to 4 p.m., to respond to each of the questions. Responses to each question should not exceed 30 double-spaced pages (12-point font with one-inch margins), excluding the reference list. Students are permitted to use any materials they chose during the examination period and are required to provide a reference list for each question to accompany citations used in the response. The exam period should be used to revise and refine initial drafts of question responses developed during the study period to submit final documents for evaluation by the faculty (i.e., use the exam day to polish a draft response so that it is a superlative effort to respond to the question assigned at random).**

The question pool, developed by the graduate faculty in SPED who teach core courses in the program of study, is developed annually to be used for the comprehensive examination. The questions possess the following characteristics:

1. Each question is sufficiently broad in scope such that it extends beyond the content covered in core program coursework vis-à-vis integration with other issues in the field of special education and connections with other relevant disciplinary bodies of knowledge;
2. At least one question represents an area of emphasis/strand/cognate in a student's program plan that requires a depth of analysis beyond that typically required in completing a course assignment; and
3. At least two questions represent methodological issues or approaches that are relevant to a student's program plan/potential research interests; the questions should be specific enough to allow the student to produce responses that examine closely a defined set of problems and solutions in addressing these issues or approaches.

The question pool will be released eight weeks prior to the commencement of the 2-day examination period to each student who has been approved for taking the comprehensive examination. Students should view each question in the pool as a potential examination question, and should use the time between the release of the question pool and the examination period for advance preparation. During this time, students may wish to formulate written responses to all of the potential questions, consult any relevant materials, and collaborate with peers to prepare for examination (note that during the examination period proper, collaboration with others is not permitted, but the use of other resources such as the Internet, journal articles and books, course notes, or drafts of responses is permitted). Faculty members are not permitted to provide any substantive input to students regarding the potential questions or preparatory activities.

#### **B. Examination Procedure**

Examinations in each program area are written and evaluated by the faculty of the interest area. When there are few regular faculty available or an unusually large number of candidates to be examined, one or more qualified faculty from other areas may be added to the area faculty.

The preparation of final copies of examination questions and the administration of the examination will be coordinated by the Director of Doctoral Studies, appointed by the Department Chairperson.

### **III. ADMINISTRATION**

Fall comprehensive exams are given during the week *before* classes begin. Spring comprehensive exams are given *during the week after classes begin*.

Students with special needs requiring special arrangements should see the Director of Doctoral Studies at the time of application for the exam (a MSU VISA will usually be required).

Students will be sent via email the exam question for each day of the 2-day examination period from the administrator on the morning of the exam at 8 a.m. and return the completed exam by 4:00 p.m. of the same day. Students will complete at

a place of their own choosing without the assistance of others. Students who are approved for an extended time accommodation will be permitted to have up to one additional day to complete their examination.

#### **IV. STATEMENT OF ETHICAL PRINCIPLES AND PRACTICES**

To ensure the security and integrity of the examination process, it is expected that students and faculty will abide by the procedures outlined in the document titled Academic Honesty and Ethical Principles and Practices. All students must read and sign this attachment and submit it to the Director of Doctoral Studies before taking the comprehensive exam.

#### **V. SCORING AND EVALUATION**

##### **A. Scoring**

Scoring procedures are set at the program level.

##### **Special Education Comprehensive Exam Scoring Procedures**

**All responses to the selected questions will be scored by a graduate faculty judging panel composed of three members:**

- a. The student's Guidance Committee Chairperson (or academic advisor, if these are different individuals);**
- b. A second member of the student's Guidance Committee; and**
- c. A member of the SPED graduate faculty who does not serve on the student's Guidance Committee or as the student's academic advisor.**

**Faculty judges will designate each question as PASS, MARGINAL PASS, or FAIL. A student passes a question if all faculty judges designate a PASS or MARGINAL PASS for that question, but each question must be passed in order to pass the examination. A student fails the examination if either of the two questions is failed; a question is failed if at least two judges designate a FAIL. Each question for which a designation of FAIL has been assigned must be retaken following CEPSE retake policies and procedures (see below), which include the development of a formal study plan. Students who receive a majority of MARGINAL PASS designations or a solitary FAIL designation for one or both questions must meet with their Guidance Committee to develop a review plan to address the deficiencies evident in their response(s). Any designation of FAIL or MARGINAL PASS will be accompanied by detailed written feedback for the student.**

##### **B. Reporting and Interpreting Results**

The program reports all examination results at a meeting of the faculty, following which results are available from the student's advisor. It is the responsibility of the advisor to go over student responses and the raters' comments with students requesting such a review.

Comprehensive examination results will be reported not later than 30 days following the last day of the examination period.

### C. Retakes (rev. 4/26/99)

A plan of study must be written for any student who fails an examination. This plan must be approved by the advisor and the student's Guidance Committee in consultation with faculty who represent the failed areas of the examination. Such a plan might include additional coursework, guided readings, tutoring, and practice in writing answers to previous exams, and must include a time line for completion. This plan must then be submitted to and approved by the faculty. Successful execution of the approved study plan is a matter of shared responsibility among the student, the advisor, and the Guidance Committee. The Guidance Committee must attest to the completion of the study plan three weeks prior to the retake attempt (see Study Plan Chronology below). No more than two retakes will be allowed unless the retake and the plan of preparation are authorized by a vote of 80% of the faculty present and voting at a CEPSE Department meeting.

#### Study Plan Chronology

Weeks Prior To Intended Retake Examination Date	Action
more than 11 weeks	Study plan developed with Guidance Committee in consultation with faculty involved in failed areas of the exam
11 weeks	Final date for study plan approval by Guidance Committee
10 weeks	Final date for study plan approval by faculty
3 weeks	Guidance Committee reviews/endorsees study plan completion
3 weeks	Faculty verifies Guidance Committee endorsement of completed study plan

#### **Special Education Retakes**

**Students who retake the examination will be administered only the question(s) which they have failed.**

## VI. STUDY AIDS

### A. Reading Lists

Reading lists are developed and distributed at the program level. The reading lists are not prescriptive, but the books and articles listed represent, in the faculty's judgment, the breadth and content of the area.

#### **Special Education Reading Lists**

**Because students who take the comprehensive examination will be given an eight-week period to prepare in advance for each potential question on the**



**exam, no reading list will be provided. Students are expected to submit a reference list for each response they submit at the end of each day of the examination. These reference lists will help faculty judges identify citations used in responses and determine if any substantive relevant research has been omitted from their responses.**

#### **B. Coursework**

Questions on the exam are not limited to the content of particular courses. The student's understanding of an examination area is expected to be greater in breadth and depth than that generally required of a particular course in that area.

#### **C. Sample Questions**

Copies of old comprehensive exam questions are no longer available.

#### **D. Individual Preparation**

The coursework and reading throughout the doctoral program provide general preparation for comprehensive examinations. It is also expected that students will reduce their coursework prior to and during comprehensive exams, allowing three to six months for more intensive, critical study.

#### **E. Study Groups**

Informal study groups, arranged by the candidates themselves, are considered to be the most efficient and pleasurable means of preparation. The methods of these groups vary, but critical discussion of concepts, methods, applications, and issues encountered in reading is often profitable. Posing questions to one another to be answered in writing and critically reviewing the answers is another technique that some groups have found useful in preparation for comprehensive exams.

#### **F. Writing Hints**

There are no infallible guides to good writing; however, students taking comprehensive examinations are expected to demonstrate sufficient mastery of language and writing skills to communicate intelligently and effectively with other professionals. Answers to the comprehensive examination questions should model the organization, directness, clarity of expression, and quality of analysis that one typically expects from an educated and disciplined person.

Students may want to review the following five suggestions before taking comprehensive exams.

1. Answer the question that is asked. It is crucial that one carefully reads the verb in the instruction.

Students under stress will sometimes try to write down everything they know in a general subject area rather than addressing themselves directly to the specific question asked in the examination. While evaluators are concerned with assessing the extent of a student's knowledge in a particular content area, they are more concerned with the student's capacity to use, focus, and manipulate that knowledge to respond directly to the specific question asked.

2. Work from a suitable design.

Timing: Because students taking comprehensive exams are subject to time limitations in devising their answers, students should attempt to plan for the most effective utilization of the time available. Such planning requires that the students make some assessment of the task before them, break the task down into its component parts, and make appropriate time allocations for each component.

Structure, Organization, and Strategy: If the student is writing an essay, it should have a clear beginning, middle and end. In order to give answers coherence, students should advance some single dominant strategy or organizational pattern and stick to it.

3. Support your ideas with the best possible evidence, but avoid unnecessary repetition.

Students should develop their ideas and demonstrate the depth of their understanding of a content area by providing supporting data, details, examples, and other evidence, and by citing expert opinion; however, students should be alert to the danger of adding words without adding meaning.

4. Be as clear and concise as possible, and use standard English.

Evaluators of answers to comprehensive examinations cannot help but be influenced by the writer's communication skills; therefore, students should make every effort to conform to the standard conventions of good writing: parallel structure, appropriate punctuation, fully developed paragraphs, complete sentences, transition between paragraphs, etc.

5. Use orthodox spelling.

If the answer contains many misspelled words, these words will distract the readers' attention, exhaust their patience, and eventually create a general negative bias toward the writer.

6. The demonstration of good writing skills (grammar, spelling, organization of answers) is considered essential for passing the comprehensive exams, and evidence of poor writing is a basis for failing the exams. You are encouraged to proofread, and may make the necessary grammatical and typographical corrections in pen or pencil.

## **VII. FURTHER INFORMATION**

The Director of Doctoral Studies is available to advise students who have procedural questions about the examination.

Adopted September 15, 1997  
 Retake Policy revised April 26, 1999  
 Revisions approved March 25, 2002

Special Education Program policy revised February 23, 2015

## APPENDIX F

### ANNUAL REVIEW MATERIALS EVALUATION CRITERIA

Annual review materials are due April 15 of each year a student is in the Special Education doctoral program. The review materials document accomplishments and academic progress for the prior calendar year between January 1 and December 31. A simple majority of the faculty evaluate each student's materials using the criteria below. The ratings for each dimension (dimensions are derived from various required elements) of the Special Education doctoral program expectations are averaged across the faculty participating in the evaluation to arrive at an overall judgment of the student's progress in each dimension. A student must receive an average rating of Adequate on each dimension to be judged in good standing in the program. The student's advisor is responsible for tabulating these results, summarizing the comments, preparing a formal letter to communicate the faculty's evaluation of the student's progress in the program, and sharing this information with his/her advisee. A student who receives an average rating below Adequate for any dimension will be considered not to be in good standing and may be subject to sanctions (e.g., loss of opportunities for supplemental funding such as summer scholarships, placement on probationary status, referral for formal disciplinary action, dismissal) depending on the nature and degree of inadequate progress. When limited or marginal progress is noted, the student may be required to take immediate action to ameliorate specific problems in order to continue in the program. Typically, a plan of action to remedy problems is developed and implemented by the student and his/her advisor.

I. Elements Included for This Review:

- a. Annual Review Letter YES or NO
- b. Current Curriculum Vitae YES or NO
- c. Publishable Research Paper \_\_\_\_\_ out of 3 required
- d. Conference Proposal Presentations \_\_\_\_\_ out of 3 required
- e. Demonstration of Teaching Expertise Materials
  - i. Teaching Artifact \_\_\_\_\_
  - ii. Teaching Evaluation(s) \_\_\_\_\_
- f. Evidence of Service/Leadership \_\_\_\_\_ out of 2 required
- g. Responsible Conduct of Research Training YES or NO

II. Ratings of Student's Progress for This Review:

Dimension	Limited	Marginal	Adequate	Excellent
Coursework				
Benchmarks				
Scholarship				
Teaching				
Service/Leadership				
RCR Training				

- III. Context of This Review/Mitigating Factors:
- IV. Areas of Commendation for This Review:
- V. Areas of Concern for This Review:
- VI. Recommended Actions:



***SPED Program Cumulative Requirements (attach artifacts as appropriate)***

<i>Requirement</i>	<i>Date Achieved</i>
Publishable Research Paper 1	
Publishable Research Paper 2	
Publishable Research Paper 3	
Conference Proposal/Presentation 1	
Conference Proposal/Presentation 2	
Conference Proposal/Presentation 3	
Written Teaching Plan	
Teaching Evaluation	
Written Analysis of Teaching	
Service/Leadership Evidence 1	
Service/Leadership Evidence 2	
Responsible Conduct of Research Training (5 hours first year, 3 hours each subsequent year in program)	

***Annual Accomplishments in Research******Annual Accomplishments in Teaching******Annual Accomplishments in Service/Leadership******Perceived Strengths and Limitations******Goals for Ensuing Year and Assistance Needed***