

Doctor of Philosophy in Special Education

Special Education Doctoral Program

The mission of the doctoral program in special education is to prepare civically-committed scholars who, through rigorous and relevant research and transformational interventions, address significant educational and social problems in ways that advance education, social policy, research, care giving, and public service to enhance the quality of life of persons of all ages with disabilities and their families. Program students and graduates rely on interdisciplinary theoretical knowledge and the full range of methodological approaches to engage, influence, and transform educational and social institutions and their practices.

Program graduates are highly-competent, socially-committed educational researchers, leaders, and teacher educators engaged in the design, development, and/or use of educational and social interventions that result in transformational outcomes. Graduates are scholars who steward the profession, working across disciplinary boundaries to address the educational and social challenges of the 21st century.

The doctoral program is premised on four instructional principles: (a) *problem-centered learning* focusing on the formulation of significant research questions and specification of corresponding methods of inquiry; (b) *apprenticeship with multiple mentors* involving intentionality, collective responsibility, recognition, respect, trust, and reciprocity; (c) creating and sustaining a safe and engaging intellectual community/culture in which students feel support among themselves and in collegial relations with faculty; and (d) *scholarly integration* in which the teaching and research mission of the department and faculty is closely linked.

Every year the doctoral program accepts a cohort of students from throughout the world. Each cohort consists of students with diverse interests and career goals. Underlying this cohort design are seminars, various research and teaching experiences, and an interrelated topics structure. Each doctoral student chooses a topic of interest. Currently, our program has the following topical areas of interest:

- Early Childhood Unified (Blending of Early Childhood and Early Childhood Special Education)
- Evidence-based Practices: Supporting Students with Intensive Interventions Needs in Tiered Systems
- Instructional Design, Technology, and Innovation
- Strengths-Based Practices for Students with Complex Support Needs

Admission to Ph.D. in Special Education at KU

Individuals applying to the Ph.D. in Special Education at the University of Kansas must have relevant professional training, usually represented by undergraduate and graduate degrees in special and/or general education or a related field. Applicants are usually expected to have at least three years of professional experience teaching in public schools or related work in agencies that serve individuals with disabilities. Both formal education and experience in the field help to demonstrate the foundational knowledge necessary to develop expertise in special education.

Applicants are strongly advised to establish a dialogue with one (or more) faculty members in the topic of interest prior to applying for the doctoral

program. The purpose of the dialogue is to understand how scholarship interests align and/or intersect with departmental faculty, and to ensure the topic of interest focus aligns with the student's interests and skills. Meeting with faculty will help identify a good match between a student and the topic of interest advisor with whom they may wish to study. This dialogue is critical to inform students about various social, academic, and teaching aspects of the doctoral experience that will complement their development as a scholar. Communicating with topic of interest faculty prior to submitting the application is strongly recommended and is considered vital to the department admissions process.

Graduate Admissions Requirements

Applicants must meet both the University and departmental admission requirements to be considered for the program.

University of Kansas Graduate Admission Requirements

- All applicants must meet the requirements outlined in the Admission to Graduate Study (<https://policy.ku.edu/graduate-studies/admission-to-graduate-study/>) policy.
- Bachelor's degree: A copy of official transcripts showing proof of a bachelor's degree (and any post-bachelor's coursework or degrees) from a regionally accredited institution, or a foreign university with equivalent bachelor's degree requirements is required.
- English proficiency: Proof of English proficiency (<https://gradapply.ku.edu/english-requirements/>) for non-native or non-native-like English speakers is required. There are two bands of English proficiency, including Admission and Full proficiency. For applicants to online programs, Full proficiency is required.

Doctor of Philosophy in Special Education Application Requirements:

- A completed graduate application (<https://gradapply.ku.edu/>).
- Application fee.
- Official transcripts of all degree-granting post-secondary institutions you have attended and an official transcript for each degree earned.
- Three letters of recommendation. The references should reflect individuals who can provide a thorough and objective evaluation of your abilities as an effective practitioner with students with disabilities and your abilities to pursue advanced study at the doctoral level. Two of the three references should address this latter set of abilities.
- Statement of purpose: Prepare a personal letter of introduction addressed to the faculty member you wish to study under. The letter should present a thorough and precise summary of your professional preparation, qualifications, objectives for doctoral study, and projected career goals so that reviewing faculty members can become well acquainted with you. The quality and clarity of your writing skills will also be assessed through this letter. Please identify the specialization you wish to study in. Follow this link (<https://specialedu.ku.edu/academics/special-education/phd/details/letter-introduction/>) for a copy of the areas and questions to be addressed in your letter.
- Current resume or CV which describes past employment experiences, licensure received, educational preparation, number of years teaching experience, publications and presentations, professional association memberships, and other professional activities.
- Writing sample. The application requires three professional work samples, with two of these samples being written work (e.g., academic papers, published journal articles). The third professional work sample is of the applicant's choosing: either another written sample or a multimedia-based submission of professional experience

(e.g., video of applicant teaching, video of applicant conducting a professional development, the applicant's professional website, etc.).

Official GRE Exam Results

The GRE exam is NOT required but can be requested to be considered for admission to the Department of Special Education as a doctoral student. Request GRE scores to be submitted by Educational Testing Service as stated: for electronic submission (ETS), the Institution Code for KU is 6871 and the Department Code is 3705. Students who have an official copy of their GRE exam results, should upload a copy when applying online under "Misc documents". **The Admission Committee can use unofficial copies of the exam results for reviewing applications if GRE scores were requested. Official scores must be submitted if the applicant is recommended for admission and scores were submitted with the application.**

Admission Process Components

Doctoral program applications are only reviewed for fall admission. Application materials will continue to be accepted based on available space and funding. After the Admission Committee has reviewed applications, applicants who are identified as a finalist will be invited to interview sometime in late January or early February.

Ph.D. Degree Program

The doctoral degree program encourages and supports students to work with faculty on cutting-edge research and development related to address significant educational and social problems that advance education, social policy, and research in the field of disabilities. The degree requires intensive and rigorous study in educational foundations, disability issues, special education, organizational and individual change, curriculum, teaching, program development, and research.

The KU Department of Special Education doctoral program is designed to provide students with learning opportunities and practical experiences in research, teaching, and service. These experiences occur in consultation with your advisor and are reflective of your funding expectations (if applicable).

Doctor of Philosophy

This is a full-time research degree. Graduates are prepared for roles as university faculty members, researchers, or policy analysts. Specific core and research skills for the Ph.D. are required. In the first 3 years of the program, students typically take 3 courses per fall and spring semester. In the summer enrollment in 1 course is optional and contingent on funding and determined with your advisor. This is followed by work on the dissertation. In addition to the special education core courses, students complete course work in a topic of interest, 15 hours of Research Skills, and a dissertation based on original research.

Students are reviewed annually starting with a Probationary Review, then a Second Year Review, Comprehensive Exam, Dissertation Proposal, and the final Dissertation Defense. Examples of annual review requirements are outlined in the department Ph.D. handbook. Doctoral students must maintain a 3.0 cumulative GPA.

Minimum hours for the program are 72.

- Research skills require 15-18 credit hours of research methods courses.

- Responsible Conduct of Research is satisfied with EDUC 800.
- College Teaching Experience: We require one teaching experience where students teach a college course at KU and an experience such as a teaching activity in a different modality than the college course taught, or a mentorship activity of other students. Students may enroll in SPED 996 College Teaching Experience (optional), or SPED 995 Field Experience as determined with your advisor.
- Research Internship Experience: We require at least one research internship where activity is up to the equivalent of 3 credit hours. This is planned with your advisor. This experience typically results in products such as a poster for presentation at a national convention, a paper for use in the comprehensive examination portfolio or for submission to a professional journal. It is at the discretion of the student and advisor to determine if the student enrolls in credit hours for this internship. The research internship may be used to complete the research proposal and the research project for the Second Year review.
- Service Experience. Students will complete at least one service experience determined by the student and their advisor, in each level: National/International, State/Local, and University
- Students will enroll in department pool courses for a minimum of 6 credit hours. Courses are selected in consultation with your advisor and are listed in the program handbook.
- Students may also choose to enroll in specialization seminars up to 3 credit hours per academic year. Choosing to enroll in specialization seminar credits is a decision made in consultation with your advisor.
- Comprehensive Exam: The comprehensive examination is your gateway to doctoral candidacy and usually occurs in the spring of your third year. The exam includes written and oral components, both designed to permit you to demonstrate mastery of curricular content, scholarly and leadership aptitude, and higher order analytical thinking. The student passes the comprehensive examination if a majority of the official examining committee members (including the chair, your advisor) finds the portfolio meets or exceeds expectations and the student's oral defense was adequate or excellent. If a student's oral components are inadequate as determined by the majority of the committee, another oral defense may be permitted if a majority of members agree; the oral defense may not be attempted more than three times. The student may not repeat the oral examination until at least 90 days have elapsed since the last unsuccessful attempt.
- Dissertation proposals will vary depending on the format chosen for the dissertation. Details on what needs to be in the proposal are outlined in the in the department PhD handbook. You are eligible to hold your dissertation proposal at least one week after successfully completing the Comprehensive Exam. The dissertation proposal meeting is not a formal milestone meeting and the purpose is to come to consensus on a student's dissertation research. *Following approval of the proposal, you may begin the formal dissertation work.*
- Dissertation enrollment: After passing the comprehensive examination, the candidate must be continuously enrolled until the degree is completed. Summer enrollment is optional unless the student is completing a milestone (i.e., comprehensive exam, proposal defense, or dissertation defense). A student must be continuously enrolled in accordance with the following schedule: Until the degree is completed or until 18 post-comprehensive hours have been completed (whichever comes first), the student must enroll for at least 6 hours a semester (fall and spring). Students who have not completed the degree after completing 18 hours of post-comprehensive enrollment must continue to enroll for the amount of credit that best reflects their demands on faculty time and university

resources each semester until they pass the final oral examination. Typically PhD students who have completed their 18 hours of dissertation, enroll in 1 hour per term (fall and spring) until they are done.

- Dissertations are either a traditional five-chapter format or a three-study dissertation structured with an introductory and culminating chapter, with the literature review and/or dissertation study findings presented in at least two additional chapters that, individually, are in journal article format. The dissertation defense (“doctorate final exam”) includes the full written dissertation and the oral defense. Additional details are outlined in the in the department PhD handbook. Completion of the dissertation is the final academic phase of a doctoral program, culminating in the final oral examination and defense of the dissertation. Seven days prior to the defense date, all committee members complete a rubric to score the written defense product. A majority of the members must rate all 6 dissertation components as acceptable or above for the defense to move forward,

Dissertation honors may be conveyed if the mean of the committee scores for both the written rubric (24 points) and the oral rubric (8 points) is 30 points or higher. Total points achieved across all rubrics scored by the voting members will be added up and divided by the same number of voting members.

For every scheduled final oral examination, the department reports to the Graduate Division a grade of Honors, Satisfactory, or Unsatisfactory for the candidate’s performance. If an Unsatisfactory grade is reported, the candidate may be allowed to repeat the examination on the recommendation of the department

In all but the rarest cases, tentative approval of the written dissertation is followed promptly by the final oral examination. When the completed dissertation has been accepted by the committee in final draft form and all other degree requirements have been satisfied doctoral candidates may submit their dissertation to the graduate school.

Summer enrollment in dissertation hours is required only when students intend to complete major milestones (i.e. comprehensive examination, proposal meeting, dissertation defense) or require significant faculty time in the summer.

Specific examples of Teaching, Research and Service experience requirements are outlined in the in the department PhD handbook.

Course List: (Note: Full Course plan is best viewed in handbook)

Code	Title	Hours
EDUC 800	Education as a Field of Scholarship	3
SPED 950	Civic Professionalism	3
SPED 930	Praxis Seminar: Scholrship and Writing	3
SPED 932	Praxis Seminar: Scholarship of Teaching	3
SPED 937	Cross-Specialization Seminar: Methodological and Conceptual Issues in Special Education	3
SPED 983	Research Funding and Proposal Development ((Praxis Seminar))	3
SPED 999	Doctoral Dissertation (see requirements above)	12-18
Pool Courses (courses listed in handbook)		6
Research courses**		15
Courses outside Special Education		6
Internships (two required but enrollment is optional)		0-6

Electives (beyond School requirement in consultation with your advisor) 6

*** Research courses should be 800 level or above to complete this degree requirement, although, 3 credit hours are allowed below the 800 level. The minimum hours cannot include EPSY 715 or its program equivalent. Up to 6 credits of the required 15 may be waived by research coursework completed as part of a prior master’s degree. If not taken as a part of the student’s master’s degree, must be taken during the student’s first enrollment in doctoral study. This course does not count toward any doctoral requirement.*

At the completion of this program, students will be able to:

- Demonstrate comprehensive knowledge and skill in at least one research methodology important to the field of special education.
- Demonstrate capacity to apply the knowledge, skills, and competencies to the elements of the teaching and learning experience, including being able to design courses, integrate content and evidence-based practices, develop authentic assessments, design various types of instructional arrangements, communicate effectively, and successfully advise students.
- Demonstrate knowledge and skills pertaining to scholarly inquiry and research, including having substantive knowledge of the field and being able to think theoretically and critically, frame fruitful research problems, recognize research as a socially-situated process, design research, collect and analyze data, and communicate with various audiences.