

# 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 (dis)abilities 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 to promote learning, equal opportunity, full participation, independent living, and economic self-sufficiency.

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. Moreover, as civic professionals, they also engage in stewardship with their communities.

Our graduates are scholars who recognize that resolving the great social and education challenges we face requires a sense of collective social purpose among the professions, and that the professions' greatest responsibility is to the people most affected.

The specific principles that define how students will be engaged in learning build upon the idea that doctoral education is a complex process of *formation* emphasizing development of scholars' professional identity in all its dimensions, including their recognition of the role the discipline and its scholars are to play in academe and in society. Because such a professional identity requires students to play an active role in its development, 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 weekly seminars, various research and teaching experiences, and an interrelated specialization structure. Each doctoral student chooses an area of specialization and potentially a related area of interest outside the specialization and the department as a cognate. Currently, our program has the following areas of specialization:

- Disability and Diversity in School and Society
- 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

- Special Education Policy and Systems Studies
- Strengths Based, Inclusive Education: Adolescents with Extensive and Pervasive Support Needs

## Graduate Admission to the School of Education and Human Sciences

Graduate programs in education are open to students with acceptable baccalaureate and graduate degrees whose academic records indicate that they can do successful work at the graduate level. Applicants must provide evidence of ability to work successfully at the graduate level, including experience in and commitment to the profession.

Each department in the School of Education and Human Sciences sets its own application deadlines and admission criteria. Prospective graduate students should contact the appropriate department for more information.

See Admission in the Graduate Studies (<https://catalog.ku.edu/graduate-studies/>) section of the online catalog for more information.

## 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 preferred specialization area 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 specialization focus aligns with the student's interests and skills. Meeting with faculty will help identify a good match between a student and the specialization 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 specialization faculty prior to submitting the application is strongly recommended and is considered vital to the department admissions process.

## 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.

## On-line Application Process: (<https://specialedu.ku.edu/admission/>)

- On-line Application
- Letter of Introduction
- Professional Resume/Curriculum Vitae (CV)
- Transcripts (Bachelor's and Master's degree conferral)
- Documentation of English Proficiency for non-native English speakers

Applicants who are non-native speakers of English must demonstrate English proficiency (<https://gradapply.ku.edu/english-requirements/>) in the skill areas of reading, writing, and listening. Please read the full policy and acceptable proof of proficiency options on our policy page (<https://policy.ku.edu/graduate-studies/english-proficiency-international-students/?num1.5>). To forward exam scores electronically, the University code is 6871 and the Department code is 85

- Letters of Recommendation
- Academic Professional Work Samples (3)

The application requires three professional work samples, with two of these samples being scholarly writing (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 link of applicant teaching, video of applicant conducting professional development, the applicant's professional website, etc.).

Students are encouraged to submit application packages in advance of deadlines. Until all components of the application package (online application submitted and fee paid, letter of introduction, resume or CV, official GRE report (if requested), all transcripts, letters of recommendation, professional work samples) are received, the application will not be reviewed by the Special Education Department Admissions Committee. Only completed application packages received by the deadline will be considered.

## 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 that 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.**

## 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 cores, students complete course work in a specialization area, 15 hours of Research Skills (or 18 hours if pursuing the Minor in Research and with the discretion of the specialization area or advisor), 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 credit hours of research methods courses.
- Students may select to fulfill a research minor by completing an additional 3 credit hours of research.
- 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 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.
- Students are required to enroll in 9 credit hours of Specialization Seminars
- 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 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. 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 formatted 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. At least 3 of 5 members must rate all 6 dissertation components as acceptable or above for the defense to move forward,

SPED 930	Praxis Seminar: Scholarship 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		6
Research courses		15-18
Outside courses (School requirement)		6
Internships (two required but enrollment optional)		0-6
Major courses (beyond School requirement in consultation with your advisor)		6

*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