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**MASTER'S PROGRAM IN SPECIAL EDUCATION  
HANDBOOK**

Department of Educational Psychology  
Texas A&M University

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## Master's Program in Special Education Handbook

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The Special Education Program (SPED) functions within the Department of Educational Psychology (EPSY) and the College of Education and Human Development (CEHD) at Texas A&M University. This handbook contains information for current and prospective students regarding the online Master's program, as well as information required by legal statute or the policies of Texas A&M University. Graduate students in the College are subject to the administrative control of the Office of Graduate Studies (OGS). More information about the OGS can be found at <http://ogs.tamu.edu/>.

We (SPED) currently offer an M.Ed.\* in Special Education consisting of 36 semester credit hours and a 15 semester credit hour graduate certificate in Applied Behavior Analysis for qualified individuals. Faculty expertise in SPED includes the following: Autism, Behavioral Disorders, Positive Behavior Supports, Severe Disabilities, Reading, and Transition. More information about faculty expertise is available at <http://sped.tamu.edu/>. The department is consistently ranked as a top national program by *U.S. News and World Report* and has some of the most prominent national and international scholars in special education. Thus the application process is competitive and the program is rigorous.

\*an M.S. in Special Education is also available and may be discussed with an advisor for students interested in a thesis option.

### **The M.Ed Special Education is currently offered completely online.**

The Master's of Education program in Special Education at Texas A&M University prepares educator practitioners to serve as skillful, knowledgeable, and caring professionals. We take a broad, non-categorical view of disability, and include in our training the knowledge and skills for effectively meeting the needs of students classified as having disabilities as well as those identified as "low-performing" and "at-risk." Our faculty supports the integration of individuals with disabilities with their typically-developing peers in inclusive settings (e.g., schools, community, and employment settings) with well-trained professionals. We encourage our Master's students to have an understanding of and respect for the ethnic and cultural diversity of the students and families with whom they may work and the communities they represent. We share a commitment to teaching empirically-supported best practice interventions and methods in the identification of students with disabilities, assessment of

students, instructional programming, and progress evaluation. We believe that graduates from our program will encounter increasing changes and challenges in the field of special education. As a result, we facilitate problem solving, collaboration, and communication skills as part of the professional development of our Master's students.

Graduates from our online Master's program often gain admission to prestigious doctoral programs; acquire leadership positions in school districts, advocacy organizations, and state government; and advise or create non-profit organizations for the betterment of individuals with disabilities. While in the program, students can expect to interact with national scholars; learn the most current technological methodological, legal, and topical issues related to the education of individuals with disabilities; and opportunity to engage in scholarly activities as desired.

The online Master's program consists of 36 hours (or 12 courses) and is designed to lead to a Master's degree in special education at the end of a two year program of study. Incorporated into the program also are the necessary course work for those who wish to go further and apply for BCBA certification. The following table represents the recommended program of study for the on-line master's degree program.

## Special Education Online Master's Degree Recommended Program of Study

See <http://registrar.tamu.edu/General/Calendar.aspx> for academic calendar dates

Semester	Courses	
Fall Year 1	SEFB 618 SPED 630	Applied Behavior Management** Early Literacy for Students with Diverse Instructional Needs
Spring Year 1	SPED 609 SPED 617	Educating Individuals with Autism Spectrum Disorders ** Adolescent Literacy for Students with Diverse Instructional Needs
Summer I June-July	SPED 628 SPED 601	Consultation in Special Education Assessment in School Settings
Summer II July-Aug	SPED 642 SPED 610	Program Development for Students with Behavior Problems** Special Education and the Family
Fall Year 2	SPED 699 SPED 632	Advanced Applied Behavior Analysis** Transition from School to Work
Spring Year 2	EPSY 630 SPED 620	Single Case Research** Bilingual Special Education

\*\* Coursework required for students seeking certification as Board Certified Behavior Analysts® and the ABA graduate certificate. Additional requirements are necessary and information may be found at [www.bacb.com](http://www.bacb.com).

### Program of Study Notes:

- The entire Online Master's degree requires 36 credits and can be completed in five semesters; each course is 3 credits.
- Course syllabi are available online. Online Education is not independent study. Check syllabi for meeting time expectations. Courses during *Fall* and *Spring* semesters are usually offered from 4:30-7:30 PM. Each 3-hour class meets for up to 3 hours online per week. Online students participating in online courses should expect to be online participating in course activities during the 4:30-7:30 PM time slot *for at least some class sessions*. Courses during *Summer* may be offered in the day time, course times will vary but, given the condensed timeframe of the summer sessions, summer courses often meet daily for 3 hours each day. Students should check the current summer schedule for specific days and times.
- Courses identified with a double asterisk (\*\*) are associated with the BCBA option. Students participating in the Applied Behavior Analysis (ABA) graduate certificate option only (not the entire Master's degree) would take only these five courses. Access to the other courses requires admission to the Master's program. The ABA graduate certificate is explained below.

**SEFB 618 (3 credits): Applied Behavior Management\*\***

Field-based course related to effective management of challenging behavior problems in the classroom using proactive classroom strategies, effective instruction and planned behavior interventions; discussion and applications of methods for observing, assessing and analyzing challenging behaviors.

**SPED 630 (3 credits) Early Literacy for Students with Diverse Instructional Needs**

Research-based strategies for teaching beginning reading and writing to pre-K through 4th grade students with disabilities, with an emphasis on current issues, assessment, prevention, and intervention.

**SPED 609 (3 credits) Educating Individuals with Autism Spectrum Disorders\*\***

This course presents a study of the incidence, prevalence, and characteristics of individuals with autism spectrum disorders for teachers, counselors, and related fields; research and best practices in assessment, treatment, and education are explored; approaches emphasized include treatment of social, communication, academic, and behavior deficits with emphasis on behavior analysis.

**SPED 617 (3 credits) Adolescent Literacy for Students with Diverse Instructional Needs**

Research-based strategies for teaching reading and writing to 4th through 12th grade students with disabilities, with an emphasis on current issues, assessment, motivation, intervention, and content area issues and strategies.

**SPED 642 (3 credits): Program Development for Students with Behavior Problems\*\***

Field-based course relating to effective management of challenging and severe behavior problems in the classroom using proactive strategies; effective instruction and planned behavioral interventions; methods for observing, assessing and analyzing challenging and severe behaviors; includes a 20-hour field based component. Prerequisites: Graduate classification and approval of department head.

**SPED 628 (3 credits) Consultation in Special Education**

Rationale, strategies, procedures, and resources for providing consultation as systematic problem-solving to school procedures, and resources for improving services for children with disabilities, and those who are at-risk of school failure.

**SPED 610 (3 credits) Special Education and the Family**

Overview of special education and major issues in the field; emphasis on the impact of the family; relationships among the school, the families, and the community; impact of relationships on service provision; field experiences working with families of individuals with special needs.

**SPED 601 (3 credits): Assessment in School Settings**

Assessment in school settings; includes formal and informal assessment; State assessment and alternatives; techniques used with students with disabilities; using data to make educational decisions.

**SPED 699 (3 credits): Advanced Behavior Analysis\*\***

This course provides a rigorous repertoire of knowledge *and* skill in behavior analysis. This course is a comprehensive and contemporary description of applied behavior analysis. The principles and paradigms of theoretical and experimental aspects of behavior analysis require this course and the accompanying lab or field experience in which to apply them. It is not sufficient to be able to merely espouse theory if one cannot apply it successfully and ethically in the environments in which it is needed. Prerequisite: SEFB 618.

**SPED 632 (3 credits) Transition from School to Work**

Current issues and practices related to the transition of students from school to work; partnerships with business and industry; secondary and postsecondary education linkages; work-based training.

**EPSY 630 (3 credits): Single-Case Research\*\***

Provides skills to conduct research with N=1 designs in the area of special education, school counseling and school psychology. Skills are applied for use functional assessments, individual interventions, and evidence based practices. Students are required to demonstrate competency through projects and presentations.

**SPED 620 (3 credits) Bilingual Special Education**

Topics concerning bilingual special education will be covered including history of the field; language acquisition and assessment; general assessment; individual education plans (IEPs); curriculum development; mainstreaming; consultation services; and parental involvement.

**SPED 602 (3 credits): Ethical and Professional Conduct in SPED and ABA\*\***

This course focuses on the ethical and professional conduct required for special educators and behavior analysts. This course is intended to provide students with information required for those preparing to become and who are certified behavior analysts and will cover ethics content required by the Behavior Analyst Certification Board. This information is also highly relevant to individuals who work with children or adults with disabilities in any capacity, including teachers, community service providers, and therapists.

### **The Applied Behavior Analysis Graduate Certificate**

Approximately one in every 88 children in Texas has an autism spectrum disorder (ASD). Without early intervention, the cost to care for a person with autism over his or her lifetime is about \$3.2 million (Ganz, 2007). A Texas A&M University transcribed certificate identifies individuals with specialized professional preparation at the graduate level in evidence-based interventions to improve the quality of life for individuals with ASD and others with challenging behaviors, as well as a framework for providing instruction to others with developmental disabilities. Texas A&M University supplies greatly needed professionals to challenge current proliferation of unproven or even dangerous interventions. Teachers who are unable to critically evaluate the research are susceptible to such practices.

This certificate relies on applied behavior analysis (ABA) practices and techniques rooted in ABA (e.g., Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports) which have been repeatedly demonstrated to be effective with many students with ASD (Loiacono & Allen, 2008) and others with challenging behaviors. The courses, which comprise this certificate, are specifically designed to cover content recommended by professional organizations and guided by the National Competencies for Teachers of Children with ASD; the Council for Exceptional for Exceptional Children (CEC) Standards for Professional Practice; and recommendations by the CEC, the Autism Society of America (ASA), and the Network of Autism Training and Technical Assistance Programs (NATTAP).

Required Courses: 18 semester credit hours (see course descriptions above)  
SEFB 618 (3 credits): Applied Behavior Management  
EPSY 630 (3 credits): Single-Case Research  
SPED 642 (3 credits): Program Development for Students with Behavior Problems  
SPED 699 (3 credits): Advanced Behavior Analysis  
SPED 609 (3 credits): Educating Individuals with Autism Spectrum Disorders  
SPED 602 (3 credits): Ethical and Professional Conduct in SPED and ABA\*

*Taking these six courses will lead to a TAMU ABA graduate certificate, but will not lead to BCBA® certification without additional requirements. Those interested in national BCBA certification should visit [www.bacb.com](http://www.bacb.com) for more information. \*The sixth course (SPED 602: Ethics) is an addition to the Master's and will be required by the BACB beginning with the tests administered in 2014.*

## **Information for Applicants**

### **Admission and Application Process**

We currently admit a cohort of 40 Master's students each year. Applications are reviewed by the Master's committee each Spring for Fall admission. Grants, scholarships, and fellowships are sometimes available and the nomination for this process is secondary to admission to the program. For more information about available grants, see ([sped.tamu.edu](http://sped.tamu.edu) or contact the academic advisor by emailing [epsyadvisor@tamu.edu](mailto:epsyadvisor@tamu.edu)). Strong candidates for our program have outstanding academic skills and preparation, experience teaching or working with individuals with disabilities, strong communication and analytic abilities, and potential for leadership in the field through teaching, service, or research. The application process is competitive; individuals with exceptional experiences and skills are encouraged to apply.

### **Suggestions for Applicants**

- Seek letters of recommendation from supervisors and/or former university instructors who can speak to your experiences with individuals with disabilities, your leadership potential, and your ability to succeed in graduate courses.
- Use the candidate statement to highlight your accomplishments and also to demonstrate your written communication skills and academic writing abilities; revise and edit your writing samples thoroughly.
- Thoroughly prepare for the GRE.
- Begin the application process in advance to ensure completion by the application deadline.

### **Administrative Issues**

The TAMU Graduate Student Handbook may be found here:

[http://catalog.tamu.edu/pdfs/GRAD\\_catalog13\\_14.pdf](http://catalog.tamu.edu/pdfs/GRAD_catalog13_14.pdf)

## **Information for Current Students**

### **Prior Graduate Course Work and Waivers**

Waiving a course requires the consent of the Program Chair, with advisement and recommendation from the student's chair or temporary advisor and the instructor of the course. The procedure for this includes a written request by the student to the advisor with attached documentation such as prior course syllabi, syllabi for the course requested to be waived, and any relevant capstone requirements. In addition, faculty may require examination or competency demonstration prior to evaluating the course for waiver. Students may not receive transfer credit for courses that have previously been applied toward a degree. Undergraduate courses or courses for initial certification are not transferable. In most cases, transfer credits are limited to no more than 6 semester hours.

### **Research Involving Human Subjects**

Any research conducted with human subjects must be approved by the Institutional Review Board (IRB) of Texas A&M University. All students should take the online training and receive the certificate prior to conducting research with human participants, including applied, classroom research. The training and additional IRB information may be found at this URL:  
<http://researchcompliance.tamu.edu/irb>.

### **Advising**

The EPSY department has a full-time academic advisor ([epsyadvisor@tamu.edu](mailto:epsyadvisor@tamu.edu)) who is available to guide the application process and to answer any questions about the program or provide assistance in locating the appropriate staff or faculty member who might answer questions. The EPSY advisor and the EPSY website ([epsy.tamu.edu](http://epsy.tamu.edu)) are also sources of information regarding financial aid, deadlines, & registration information including drop/add/q-drop or in-absentia registration. The EPSY advisor is also available for any questions regarding student records, transcripts, grade changes, or variable credit course sign ups (i.e., 485, 685, 683 etc) and departmental or program procedures.

The SPED program Master's Committee Chair is also available to answer relevant questions about the Master's degree and ABA graduate certificate ([spedmasters@tamu.edu](mailto:spedmasters@tamu.edu)). Individuals who are admitted to the program are assigned advisors based on interest expressed in their candidate statement. Matches between faculty and student interest are sought first, followed by faculty availability. The advisor is available to assist students in all program advising.

A program of studies is filed with the OGS during the first semester of study. At this time, the student will identify a “chair.” A chair is someone who advises the student in the program of study and any research or scholarship activities. Each student may choose to keep the assigned advisor as his or her chair or he or she may request a new chair by approaching a faculty member with whom he or she shares interest. Special Education faculty members and their research interests or specializations are listed at the following URL: [sped.tamu.edu](http://sped.tamu.edu).

### **Expectations of Students**

Students are held to the standards of the Student Rules at TAMU (<http://student-rules.tamu.edu/>) and the standards of the Office of Graduate Studies at TAMU. The TAMU Graduate Student Handbook is available at the following website: [http://catalog.tamu.edu/pdfs/GRAD\\_catalog13\\_14.pdf](http://catalog.tamu.edu/pdfs/GRAD_catalog13_14.pdf). Further, students in the SPED program are expected to maintain high levels of performance in the following areas:

**1) Academic performance.** The expectation for academic performance is that the student maintain a grade point average and continuous enrollment to meet the requirements set for good academic standing (3.0; Student Rules 10.4.3 and as stated in the Graduate Catalog). Although not required in all courses to the same extent, it is expected that students will demonstrate the ability to communicate their knowledge through papers, articles, reports, and other forms of written expression. Graduate students are expected to complete tasks with minimal assistance or support although faculty members are available for mentoring and guidance,. The University procedures will be followed in cases where students are placed on probation due to GPRs below 3.0.

**2) Ethical behavior.** Students will behave in accordance with professional ethical standards. They are also expected to adhere to the Aggie Honor Code, as promulgated by Texas A&M University. Students are required to be familiar with the TAMU Honor Code policies, which are found at this URL: [aggiehonor.tamu.edu](http://aggiehonor.tamu.edu).

**3) Professional behavior.** Students have an obligation and expectation to behave in a professional manner. Professional behavior includes timeliness (e.g., completion of tasks by due dates; being on time for class, meetings, or practica settings; completion of course requirements in designated time frames), accepting constructive feedback from faculty or other supervisors, and behaving in a manner that is supportive of others and not disruptive to the learning process (e.g., turning

off cell phones in class or meetings). Further, this expectation extends to students' use of text messaging, emailing, instant messaging, cell phones, and other social network communications including, but not limited to internet communications using message boards, blogs, Facebook, and Twitter. Such professional behavior is exemplified by forming respectful relationships with faculty, staff, other students, other professionals in the community, and consumers.

**4) Online program expectations.** Because the Online SPED Master's degree and ABA graduate transcribed certificate programs are exclusively offered online, students must have continuous access to the required technology and high-speed internet access and must become proficient in the use of online course management systems and other online tools (such as Centra, MediaMatrix) that are used in the program. It is each student's responsibility to work with the appropriate "Help Desks" to resolve any difficulties and to solve personal computing problems. The current program requirements are found here: <http://epsy.tamu.edu/degrees-and-programs/graduate-degree-programs/online-masters-special-education/technology>.

**5) Continuous program progress.** Because of the professional nature of the training program, it is critical that students progress at a rate that is consistent with program guidelines. Grades of "Incomplete" are the rare exception and are given only under extraordinary circumstances, at the discretion of the instructor. Based on TAMU Student Rules (10.5), an incomplete can only be given if the student is making adequate progress in the course, but not able to complete specific requirements.

Students must document their agreement to current standards of the SPED Master's Program by completing the Student Agreement once per academic year. The agreement can be found here:

[http://epsy.tamu.edu/articles/special\\_education\\_distance\\_masters\\_student\\_agreement](http://epsy.tamu.edu/articles/special_education_distance_masters_student_agreement).

**6. Comprehensive Exam Requirement.** A comprehensive exam is given at the end of the master's program and covers the content across all completed courses. The exam is used formatively at the beginning and mid-point of the masters program to determine current performance levels and monitor progress toward degree completion. The exam is also used summatively at the end of the program to evaluate mastery and retention of knowledge and skills. First test administration (baseline) is used for program evaluation and results are not shared with the students. Second test administration (progress exam) is scheduled at the end of the

first year of course work and results are shared with the student as one of three categories (meets criterion, exceeds criterion, or doesn't meet criterion). If a student does not meet criterion he or she will meet with their advisor and the masters committee to review a course of action for remediation. This may include suggestions for re-reading in a content area or additional writing in a content area. Students may also be provided an opportunity to re-take a course. Passing the comprehensive exam at program completion is required for graduation.

### **Student Probation**

Students who fail to meet any of the "Expectations of Students" listed above will not meet program expectations. Failure to maintain expectations in one or more of these areas will result in consideration for placement on probation by an ad hoc committee of a minimum of three members of the SPED graduate faculty. The student will be notified of the program's concerns in writing. The student will be given a maximum of two weeks to explain his or her circumstances to the committee members prior to this meeting to respond to the faculty complaint in writing or via web conferencing. After faculty evaluation of the student, the following actions are available to the faculty:

- a. The complaint may be dismissed after considering the student's evidence;
- b. A plan for remediation of the problem that is agreed to by the student and the faculty may be implemented;
- c. The student may be placed on formal probation during the program. Such probation would include a written list of behaviors that must be displayed by the student during the probationary period and a description of sanctions to occur if the requirements of the probationary period are not met. Such a probation plan will include a specific time frame in which these behaviors must occur; or
- d. The committee may recommend that the student be dismissed from the program.

The sanctions listed above do not have to be applied in any particular order, however, fairness in determining sanction(s) appropriate to the student problem is the goal. Additional university and departmental expectations and procedures serve as a general guide as well.

### **Student Grievance Process**

In addition to the grievance procedures established by the University, the Department of Educational Psychology has developed, a process known as the Student Advocate. This process (described below) is available for students who disagree with and wish to challenge a faculty member's actions related to the student's participation in EPSY programs.

An EPSY faculty member selected by the Department Head assumes the Student Advocate position. Contact the EPSY office, or the graduate advisor ([epsyadvisor@tamu.edu](mailto:epsyadvisor@tamu.edu)) for the name of the current Student Advocate/Ombudsperson. In the event of a conflict of interest between a student and the current Ombudsperson, an alternate faculty member may fill this role. There is also an Ombudsperson at the College level, as well as one at the Office of Graduate Studies. The following policies were derived by the Student Advocate in consultation with EPSY faculty, students and the department head.

Graduate and Undergraduate Grievance Advisory Committees have been established. Each committee is made up of one faculty member and two students. The purpose of these committees is threefold:

- 1) To advise the Student Advocate concerning policy and issues related to faculty/student relations in EPSY,
- 2) To forward possible student concerns to the Student Advocate, and
- 3) To aid in the resolution of student concerns when requested by the Student Advocate.

**Pre-condition to Student's Initiation of the Grievance Process:**

Students are encouraged to meet with and attempt to resolve problems with the faculty member. If students have met with the faculty member and the problem has not been resolved, they should contact the Student Advocate or a member of the Grievance Advisory Committee.

**OR:**

If students do not choose to meet with the faculty due to the nature of the problem or the faculty member, they also may directly contact the Student Advocate or a member of the Grievance Advisory Committee and initiate the grievance process.

**Overview of Grievance Process:**

A student who has a faculty-student concern and who has addressed the preconditions for initiation of the grievance process is encouraged to meet with the Student Advocate or Department Ombudsperson. However, a student may choose to meet first with other EPSY faculty member(s). The name and contact

information for the current Student Advocate and Department Ombudsperson may be obtained via the Graduate Advisor or by calling the EPSY office at 979-845-1831.

Depending upon the nature of the student's concern, the Student Advocate or Ombudsperson may consult with the identified faculty member, the program coordinator or the department head. At the discretion of the department head, the student's concern may be communicated to the CEHD Dean's office. When there is a discussion of a particular faculty-student concern, maintaining anonymity of the student may not be possible.

Resolution of a student's concern may occur as a result of the following:

- 1) Student's dialogue with the faculty member, a Grievance Advisory Committee member, the Department Ombudsperson, or the Student Advocate.
- 2) Student Advocate or Ombudsperson's consultation with the Grievance Advisory Committee and/or discussions with the faculty member.
- 3) Student Advocate or Ombudsperson's discussion of the student's concern with the program coordinator or the department head. As a result of these discussions, the Student Advocate and/or the department head may confer with the faculty member.
- 4) Pending the outcome of the above-mentioned #3, or the nature of the student's concern, the department head and/or student may enter into discussion with the CEHD Dean's office and appropriate University committees and administrators.

### **Tuition and Fees**

Tuition and Fees are collected each semester. Information on the cost of attendance can be viewed or calculated by going to [http://its.tamu.edu/Distance\\_Education/](http://its.tamu.edu/Distance_Education/).

### **Financial Assistance**

Financial assistance is available through the Department of Student Financial Aid ([financialaid.tamu.edu](http://financialaid.tamu.edu)). Students are encouraged to take the initiative to seek out assistantships with individual faculty members and to advise the Academic Advising office if they are looking for an assistantship.

Financial aid programs for graduate students include the Robert T. Stafford Loan (formerly the Guaranteed Student Loan), the Perkins Loan (similar to the Stafford

Loan), the Hinson-Hazelwood Loan, College Work Study, the Texas Public Education Grant and the State Student Incentive Grant. To be considered for all forms of aid available to graduate students, a student must file either the Financial Aid Form (FAF) or the Family Financial Statement (FFS).

Additionally, there are loans available directly through the University:

### **Short Term Loans**

These loans are made to provide assistance to students who experience temporary financial difficulty in relation to educationally related difficulties, relocation expenses for graduating students, emergency medical expenses, rent, food and other bills. The amount of the loan, terms, and conditions vary according to the designated purpose. Generally, loans must be repaid (with 10% simple interest) within a prescribed payment period of 3 to 9 months.

### **Emergency Tuition and Required Fees Loan Program**

All students enrolled at least one-half time and making satisfactory academic progress who can demonstrate financial need are eligible. Graduate students must have a 3.0 GPA and the loan must be repaid (with a 5% interest rate) within 90 days (within 30 days during the summer).

### **Little Loans**

Cannot exceed \$50 and must be repaid within 30 days. Each loan is subject to a service charge.

### **Installment Plan**

Tuition, required fees, room and board may be paid in installments during the Fall and Spring semesters. This plan must be requested at the time of registration, and a \$15 service charge is added to the fees.

Please contact the Department of Student Financial Aid for further information and/or forms. The Financial Aid website is: <https://financialaid.tamu.edu>.

### **Technology Requirements**

Please follow the link below to get more information about the technology requirements

<http://epsy.tamu.edu/degrees-and-programs/graduate-degree-programs/online-masters-special-education/technology>