

Special Education (PhD)

The doctoral degree is offered in four areas of specialization: autism and developmental disabilities; early childhood special education; learning disabilities and behavioral disorders; and equity and diversity in special education. Graduate study prepares students for leadership roles in fields that serve children, youth, adults with disabilities, and their families. Students may also complete coursework to fulfill requirements for certification as a behavior analyst. Although there is considerable overlap between degree and certification requirements, additional courses beyond the degree plan are usually necessary.

The doctoral program prepares students to assume leadership positions in institutions of higher education and in local, state, and national agencies that provide services to individuals with disabilities and their families. The core areas of study focus on advocacy, leadership roles as members of the profession, standards of legal and ethical professional practice, and developing programs and services and/or conducting research that contribute to the quality of life for individuals with disabilities and their families. Students also develop the foundation for ongoing professional development and an appreciation of the socio-cultural, linguistic, economic, and technological contexts that shape the development and delivery of services.

Areas of Specialization

- **Autism and developmental disabilities** provides opportunities for students to develop skills in designing, implementing, and evaluating educational interventions for people with autism and developmental disabilities.
- **Early childhood special education** focuses on the development of early intervention programs for children from birth through six years of age, reflecting a family-centered philosophy and application of the most recent theoretical concepts in natural and inclusive settings.
- **Learning disabilities and behavioral disorders** is a doctoral area of specialization that provides advanced coursework in contemporary trends and issues in learning disabilities and behavioral disorders. Students learn ways to conduct theoretically-driven research that addresses important issues pertinent to the major field including developing, implementing, and evaluating instructional and behavioral interventions and exploring the impact of assistive technologies on learning. Students participate in research-based experiences that help prepare them for instructional and/or leadership roles, and for conducting independent empirically-based research in the major field.
- **Equity and diversity in special education** is a doctoral area of specialization that focuses on critical issues, knowledge, and skills related to the complex relationships between culture, race and ethnicity, language, and disability. This specialization is designed to prepare students for leadership roles in the provision of culturally and linguistically responsive educational services for exceptional children and youth from diverse backgrounds.

Graduate Handbook

Graduate handbook information is updated and maintained by each program. Graduate handbooks are available within each program's office and [online](#). Please contact the program with concerns or questions.

Total Hours Required: 72 Requirements

Because the Doctor of Philosophy is a research degree, the program is structured to provide students with both academic and practical experience in conducting research in educational settings, clinics, and other research settings. Degree plans focus on students' areas of specialization; research; interdisciplinary studies; and professional skills related to research, teaching, and service. The dissertation is expected to be a theoretically-based piece of original research that contributes to knowledge in special education or rehabilitation counseling. In addition to coursework, all students are expected to become actively involved in a variety of professional activities, such as supervision of student teachers, conference presentations, publications, and college teaching.

Code	Title	Hours
All students must also follow the following requirements and policies:		
Graduate Education Requirements		
Graduate University Requirements		