FLORIDA ATLANTIC UNIVERSITY
Department of Special Education
College of Education

Doctoral (PhD) Program Handbook

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Welcome to Your Doctoral Degree Program!

Congratulations on your acceptance to the Doctor of Philosophy (PhD) in special education degree program! The doctoral program in special education is designed to prepare leaders in the discipline. Our students come from diverse backgrounds (e.g., special education teachers, certified behavior analysts, curriculum specialists). Graduates take leadership positions in colleges and universities, school districts, and community agencies. The pursuit of a PhD in special education at Florida Atlantic means more than coursework. Students work closely with their Major Professor to conduct, publish, and disseminate research; develop and teach courses; prepare grants; and engage in service to the field. The degree program is offered through a hybrid platform (i.e., a mix of online and face-to-face courses) and accommodates full- and part-time students.

Program Entry Activities

Orientation

Newly admitted doctoral students must attend the Department's *New Doctoral Student Orientation*. This orientation is an early opportunity to meet Department faculty, learn about the nuances and the requirements for completing the program, including tips for success, communication and engagement expectations. These orientations take place in-person, just prior to the beginning of entry semester.

Degree Planning

Upon acceptance into the degree program, students should work with their Major Professor to plan their doctoral study. Decisions regarding specialization and research courses, internship, residency, and other relevant activities will be made at this time. Three documents are used to guide program development:

- *Department of Special Education (DSE) Curriculum Plan*
- *DSE Doctoral Information and Planning Sheet*
- *Graduate College Electronic Program of Study*

Degree Completion Requirements

Students completing the doctoral degree must:

I. Complete all coursework requirements (See Appendix A).

II. Maintain continuous enrollment and demonstrate progress toward the degree.

III. Successfully complete the department's annual evaluation process each spring while in the program.

IV. Defend an original dissertation.

V. Complete 72 credits beyond the bachelor's degree. This includes the 66-credit minimum to satisfy doctoral degree requirements.

VI. Receive a Department and College faculty recommendation for the degree.

Department of Special Education Curriculum Plan

The Department offers curriculum plans for students intending to complete the PhD degree in full or part-time status. Curriculum plans are also devised for students who enter the degree program with or without a master's in special education. Prior to their initial advising appointment, students are required to choose a path and review the appropriate curriculum plan.

- Full-Time Students with a Non-Special Education Master's Degree (4 Year Program)
- Part-Time Students with a Master's not in Special Education (5 Year Program)
- Full-Time Students with a Master's in Special Education (3.5 Year Program)
- Part-Time Students with a Master's not in Special Education (5 Year Program)

Course Delivery Methods

Doctoral courses in the program are delivered in structured online formats designed to foster both flexibility and live engagement. Core doctoral courses will be offered as *synchronous online classes* (live lectures) that meet on designated days throughout the entire semester. Seminar courses, by contrast, will be scheduled in *eight-week segments* (during either the first or second half of the semester) and will also meet through live online lectures. Official course dates and meeting times will be published

as soon as they become available. Students are expected to make the necessary arrangements to attend all synchronous sessions and to participate fully in course activities.

Department Information and Planning Sheet

At initial advising, students will discuss their academic plan with their Major Professor. The student is expected to use the Department of Special Education (DSE) Curriculum Plan as a reference to guide the discussion and ultimately to complete the *DSE Doctoral Information and Planning Sheet.* Once completed, this document will detail choices and the plan for completion of the doctoral degree.

Graduate College Electronic Plan of Study (ePOS)

Within one semester of starting the doctoral program, students are to use the information from their *DSE Doctoral Information and Planning Sheet* to complete the Graduate College ePOS. This process is completed electronically. While developing the ePOS, students should include any petitions involving coursework, transfer of credits, etc. During this time, the Graduate College also requires students to address questions regarding *Research Compliance and Safety*.

There are several "layers" of review for the ePOS. The Major Professor is the first reviewer, then the Department Chair, the College Dean, and finally, the Graduate College. It is the student's responsibility to ensure the ePOS is fully submitted and approved at all levels. Students are advised to log in to the ePOS system to check the status of their approvals. A student's department POS is not official until the ePOS is on file and approved by the Graduate College.

Program of Study Changes

As students progress through the doctoral program, certain courses may be added or substituted as students develop new academic interests. Students may change courses with the Major Professor's approval. If changes are made to the Program of Study, then a program change must be submitted via the Graduate College ePOS system prior to graduation. The final electronic Program of Study must be on file and approved one semester before graduation. Learn more about how to modify your approved POS here. All Graduate College forms can be found here.

Doctoral Coordinator

The doctoral coordinator plays a vital role in the administration, development, and success of the Special Education Doctoral Program. This faculty member oversees program operations, admissions, general student support, and ensures the program aligns with institutional and accreditation standards. Learn more about the Doctoral Coordinator's responsibilities in Appendix B.

Major Professor Model

The Major Professor is the central support person and point of contact for students pursuing their PhD in Special Education at Florida Atlantic. The role of the Major Professor is multifaceted, encompassing mentorship, guidance, and support to ensure the doctoral student's success in research, teaching, and service. As a pivotal figure in the student's academic journey, the Major Professor facilitates professional growth, scholarly achievement, and preparation for future leadership roles in special education. The Major Professor guides the student through all significant milestones in the program, beginning with initial planning of the academic program, extracurricular activities (e.g., conference participation and presentation), comprehensive exams, and dissertation.

Students give input on their choice of Major Professor before entering the program. As part of the application process, a "selection of Major Professor" form is completed, detailing how students' research interests align with two potential faculty members' research interests. The admission committee considers the selection of the Major Professor's statement when interviewing the student and makes a final decision after the interview. The roles and responsibilities of the Major Professor are detailed here:

Research. The Major Professor will mentor the student to:

1. Collaboratively Develop Research Goals. Work with the student to identify and refine their research interests, ensuring alignment with the Major Professor's expertise, current trends, and pressing issues in the field of special education.

2. Formulate Research Design and Execution. Provide guidance on designing, implementing, and analyzing research studies, including methodological rigor, ethical considerations, and innovative approaches.

3. Conceptualize Dissertation Research. Assist the student in conceptualizing a dissertation that is, (a) grounded in the need for the area of inquiry, (b) considers previous research, (c) considers gaps in previous research and current knowledge, (d) addresses clearly designed research studies using rigorous methods, (e) ensures data collection aligns with each research question, (f) ensures data analysis aligns with each research question, and (g) discussion of results includes implications for research and practice.

4. Develop as a Scholarly Writer. Support the student in developing academic writing skills through the preparation of manuscripts, conference proposals, and grant applications.

5. Disseminate and Fund Research. Mentor the student in funding, presenting, and publishing their research.

6. Collaborate with Other Scholars. Facilitate connections with other scholars and researchers to encourage collaborative projects that broaden the student's academic perspective.

University Teaching. The Major Professor will:

1. Cultivate Teaching Skills: Provide opportunities for the student to develop effective university teaching practices through co-teaching, observing classes, and providing constructive feedback.

2. Guide Curriculum Design: Assist the student in developing university course materials and understanding pedagogical strategies tailored to diverse learners in special education.

3. Encourage Reflective Practice: Support the student in critically analyzing their university teaching experiences to identify strengths and areas for improvement.

4. Prepare for Academic Careers: Offer insights into university teaching expectations in higher education and strategies for balancing teaching with research responsibilities.

Service. The Major Professor will:

1. Model Professional Engagement: Demonstrate active participation in departmental, university, and professional organizations to inspire similar engagement from the student.

2. Facilitate Networking: Introduce the student to leaders and peers in the field to build professional networks and collaborative opportunities.

3. Encourage Advocacy and Leadership: Guide the student in identifying opportunities to advocate for individuals with disabilities and assume leadership roles within the profession.

4. Promote Community Involvement: Support the student in engaging with community-based initiatives that enhance their understanding of special education in practice.

Holistic Mentorship. The Major Professor is committed to fostering a positive and inclusive mentoring relationship by:

1. Providing Individualized Support and Monitor Student Progress: Tailor guidance to the student's unique goals, strengths, and areas for growth to meet key academic benchmarks in program completion in a timely manner. In instances where the student is not making adequate progress, cooperatively develop a plan for remediation with the student.

2. Encouraging Professional Identity Development: Help the student articulate their career aspirations and build a professional identity aligned with their values and research interests.

3. Offering Emotional Support: Create a supportive environment that acknowledges and addresses the challenges inherent in doctoral studies.

Through these responsibilities, the Major Professor plays a central role in preparing doctoral students to excel as researchers, educators, and leaders in the field of special education.

Procedures for Changing a Major Professor

The procedure is designed for students who are choosing to change their Major Professor for one of the following reasons:

- Change or misalignment in research focus
- Conflict in the mentoring relationship
- Major Professor leaving the university or department.

If a student is experiencing a conflict with their Major Professor, the following procedure will be followed-

- Students contact their Major Professor to discuss their desire and reasons for a change. The intent of the meeting is to determine if the relationship can or cannot be repaired. Note: If the nature of the conflict is sensitive, the student can seek the assistance of the Doctoral Coordinator to facilitate the process. If necessary, the Doctoral Coordinator will assist with all steps delineated in the process.
- If there is a possibility of restoring the relationship, the student and Major Professor must then develop an action plan with dates to meet goals and objectives to ameliorate the issues discussed. The date to re-evaluate the plan should not exceed one semester. The action plan should be evaluated at the agreed-upon date, and the Major Professor and student should consider if a change in the Major Professor is still needed; or, if the relationship cannot be repaired, the student should identify a potential new Major Professor.
- The student is responsible for contacting the new potential Major Professor to discuss research interests and additional support needs that are not being provided by the current Major Professor.
- A meeting should be scheduled between the student and potential new Major Professor to ensure the potential new Major Professor is willing and able to meet the student's stated needs.
- A meeting should be scheduled with the three parties (i.e., the old Major Professor, the new one, and the student), if this does not cause further conflict.
- If all agree to the change, the Doctoral Coordinator should be notified of the change, if not already in the process.
- A new academic program plan should be developed between the student and the new Major Professor.

If a student's Major Professor leaves the university, the following procedure will be followed-

- The major Professor should inform the student at least one semester before leaving the university. One academic year is preferred.
- The Major Professor and student will discuss potential faculty to serve as a new Major Professor.
- A meeting should be scheduled between the student and potential new Major Professor to ensure the potential new Major Professor is willing and able to meet the student's stated needs. If all agree to the change, the Doctoral Coordinator should be notified of the change, if not already in the process.
- A new academic program plan should then be developed between the student and the new Major Professor.

If research interests no longer match between the Major Professor and student, the following procedure will be followed-

- Students contact their Major Professor to discuss the change in research focus. The intent of the meeting is to determine if change requires a new Major Professor.
- If there is a possibility that the current Major Professor and the student can continue working together, despite the change in research focus, there is no need for further action. If the change in research focus does necessitate a new Major Professor, the student should identify a faculty member to serve as the potential new Major Professor.
- A meeting should be scheduled between the student and potential new Major Professor to ensure the potential new Major Professor is willing and able to meet the student's stated needs. If all agree to the change, the Doctoral Coordinator should be notified of the change, if not already in the process.
- A new academic program plan should be developed between the student and the new Major Professor.

Research Preparation

An expectation of doctoral study is that students participate in research and scholarship. Research skills are developed not only within the coursework in the doctoral program, but also in directly applying these skills. This occurs best by working with faculty and other doctoral students to develop, conduct, and analyze data. In other words, actively participate in all phases of research projects. The special

education doctoral program includes a residency (described later in this handbook) that encourages students to work directly with faculty on research projects. However, students are encouraged to engage in research activities beyond the residency and coursework.

Collaborative Inter-Institutional Training Initiative (CITI)

Part of the University-wide program to assist faculty and graduate students in conducting research is the training module for conducting research in the Social Sciences (related to accepted practices with human subjects). This training is required by the Florida Atlantic University Institutional Review Bord (IRB) and is provided by the Collaborative Inter-Institutional Training Initiative (CITI). Students are required to complete the CITI online training module and earn the CITI certificate of completion prior to participating in any actual research activities. Students should retain a copy and give a copy to the academic advisor for placement in the Department file. Additional Information about CITI Training for research involving human subjects can be found here.

Research Prior to the Dissertation

Although faculty strongly encourage students to select and participate in rigorous research courses, coursework alone does not fully prepare students to conduct research. Students who have experienced the different roles associated with conducting research (e.g., managing research activities, collecting and analyzing data, describing results, and submitting their findings to journals) approach the dissertation process with a healthy degree of skill and confidence that enhances the dissertation experience.

As noted, research and scholarship are a central part of doctoral leadership in special education. This is not the case in all disciplines. Students who actively participate in research and scholarship *prior to the dissertation* have a fundamentally different doctoral experience than students who do not.

Students are encouraged to think about research as more than completing one study or dissertation, but rather as a line of inquiry. A line of inquiry is a cohesive collection of studies that may use comparable methods, involve similar populations, or some other similar thread. To promote the development and enhancement of a line of

inquiry, students are encouraged to immerse themselves within the research culture of the department and their Major Professor and complete pre-candidacy research.

Pre-candidacy Research

Students have an applied research requirement for which they *conduct research* prior to the dissertation (e.g. Pre-candidacy Research). This research may include implementing an intervention, conducting a survey, or piloting an instrument.

Whatever the nature of the project is, the project must be designed such that the purpose and method are clear to others. Next, the research activities must be implemented and completed. After conducting the research, students will write up the method and results in a format suitable for publication. This manuscript does not have to be submitted for publication, but if the quality of the manuscript meets publication standards, students are strongly encouraged to submit the manuscript for publication. This research serves as the basis for the research component of the comprehensive exams as well as a possible model for the dissertation research.

Prior to conducting any research involving human participants, students must submit a proposal that is subject to review by the Florida Atlantic University Institutional Review Board (IRB). Complete proposals outlining the research procedures are sent to the IRB for approval. The Division of Research-Research Integrity information about how and when to submit an application to the IRB can be found here.

College Teaching Internship Requirement

The Department of Special Education (DSE) requires doctoral students to participate in a college teaching internship (apprenticeship). During this internship, the doctoral student works under the supervision of their Major Professor or another Department faculty mentor to help plan the class, provide guest lectures, create graded assignments, evaluate student work, and conduct other instructional activities assigned by the faculty mentor.

Students must meet with their Major Professor the semester prior to the Internship to identify the course and the specific activities to be conducted during the internship. During the Internship semester, students register for *EEX 7945 Doctoral Internship in Special Education.* During their internship, doctoral students will serve as an enhanced teaching assistant, which includes, but is not limited to, co-teaching or serving as the

instructor for specific lectures, evaluating student work, and conducting course communications (e.g., responding to student inquiries, providing grading feedback).

Evaluating College Teaching Internships

Evaluation of doctoral teaching interns is based on multiple indicators, including feedback from the faculty mentor (based on observations of teaching) who supervises the doctoral student's teaching experience, timely communication, and attention to course and Departmental "housekeeping" tasks. This includes tasks such as submitting end-of-semester grades and scores for Critical Assignments (policy adopted by Department of Special Education 9/12/2012). If available, enrolled student feedback will be factored into the evaluation of the doctoral student as well.

Doctoral Residency Requirement

The Department of Special Education (DSE) requires doctoral students to participate in a doctoral residency experience. Residency activities are a vital component of the doctoral experience in special education, fostering scholarly growth, professional development, and academic engagement. These activities provide immersive opportunities for students to collaborate with faculty, engage in research, contribute to teaching/teaching related activities, and participate in service within the field. Through structured experiences students will be prepared for leadership roles, and enhances their ability to contribute meaningfully to the discipline.

During this residency, the doctoral student works under the supervision of their Major Professor or another Department faculty mentor to engage in activities associated with the professorate (e.g., teaching, and service). The activities may vary, but may include curriculum development (new course) for an academic program in the Department, response to an accreditation request, or compile data to develop an assessment report for the Department.

Students must meet with their Major Professor the semester prior to the Residency to identify the activities to be conducted during the residency. During the Residency semester, students register for *EEX 7982 Doctoral Residency in Special Education.* During their residency, doctoral students will work with a faculty member or possibly more than one faculty member (including the Major Professor) to conduct the teaching and service activities.

Annual Student Evaluation

Doctoral students are encouraged to engage in all aspects of the program and make progress toward completion, well beyond coursework. To ensure that students make adequate yearly progress toward this goal, students are evaluated at the end of each academic year, in the spring semester.

Expectations are different for students, depending on their status in the degree program. Prior to the dissertation, students are expected to actively engage in (a) coursework completion, (b) research engagement, and (c) teaching/service. While completing the dissertation, students are expected to focus on the dissertation and maintain some level of research engagement (e.g., conference presentations) and service.

The Annual Evaluation of Student Progress form is to be completed by the student in consultation with the Major Professor. The completed form can be used to prompt discussion about progress made during the year between the student and the Major Professor.
The form should be initiated, completed, and submitted to the Major Professor with the required materials no later than the last day of classes of the spring semester. Submission of the evaluation should prompt a meeting with the student's Major Professor. Students should make themselves available for this meeting prior to the start of the summer semester.

After a review of the student's yearly activity, the possible outcomes are satisfactory, marginally satisfactory, or unsatisfactory. The overall rating is determined as follows:

- Overall Satisfactory- student attained a satisfactory rating in three areas.
- Overall Marginally Satisfactory- student attained a marginally satisfactory rating or unsatisfactory in one area.
- Overall Unsatisfactory- student attained an unsatisfactory and/or marginally satisfactory rating in 2 or more areas.

Students who receive an overall rating of "satisfactory" can be secure in the progress they are making in their doctoral studies and should continue to work productively. Students who obtain a "marginally satisfactory" overall rating, in consultation with their Major Professor, will identify areas in which they should focus their attention if they wish to be successful in their pursuit of a doctoral degree. Students who receive an

overall unsatisfactory evaluation for one academic year must request written feedback from their Major Professor and develop a personalized productivity improvement plan. Students who receive unsatisfactory evaluations for two consecutive academic years may be assigned an ad hoc committee on doctoral academic discipline to consider further options.

Completing Doctoral Comprehensive Exams and the Dissertation: Committee Formation

The comprehensive exams mark a major milestone in the doctoral program. At this point, students embark on the final stages of the program. The comprehensive exams and dissertation mark the final two major activities for the student. The Major Professor will continue to be the primary guide for the student, with the addition of the *Comp/Dissertation Committee* that will work with the student to administer the comprehensive exams and support the student to complete the dissertation. The committee consists of at least four faculty members. Three members must be faculty members in the Department of Special Education and at least one member from outside the Department. When appropriate, the outside member may be from outside the College of Education. *At least one committee member should have methodological expertise related to the design and analysis of the proposed study.* At least one member should have expertise in the topic being studied.

The Major Professor will guide and support the student to form the Comp/Dissertation Committee. The Major Professor and student will consider the following to form the committee:

1. Identifying Potential Members:
    - Consider faculty members who align with research interests.
    - Consider faculty members whose expertise complements different aspects of the dissertation study (e.g., theoretical framework, research design, population focus).
2. Reaching Out to Faculty Members:
    - Schedule meetings with potential committee members to discuss research interests and seek their willingness to serve on the committee.
    - Clearly explain research goals, timeline, and faculty member's contribution (e.g., methodological expertise).
3. Formal Approval:

- Once you have secured verbal/written agreements from potential members, the committee will be discussed and finalized by the Major Professor.

4. Initial Committee Meeting:
    - After the committee is approved, schedule an initial meeting to discuss your comprehensive exam process, dissertation proposal timeline, and any expectations or requirements.
    - Use this meeting to establish clear communication protocols and set a schedule for regular updates.

The formation of the Comp/Dissertation Committee will guide/supervise the activities moving forward. The procedures for comprehensive exams and the dissertation are described below.

Doctoral Comprehensive Examination ("Comps")

Generally, the intent of doctoral comprehensive exam includes: (a) examination of student's previous knowledge (e.g., content from coursework), (b) examination of content students have learned after extensive and intensive study of a topic guided by faculty, and (c) a capstone event for achieving doctoral candidacy.

Students must complete at least 39 credits, including all the Department of Special Education al core courses, the statistics/research core courses (including the pre-candidacy applied research study), and the courses in the concentration area to become eligible to take the Comprehensive Examination. Students must have at least a 3.0 grade point average in coursework indicated in the Program of Studies.

The Comprehensive Exam consists of six (6) questions in the following areas:

- General Special Education (Time allotment: 3 hours)
- Specialization (Concentration) Area (Time allotment: 3 hours)
- Grant Writing (Time allotment: 1 ½ hours)
- Research linked to students' pre-candidacy topic (Time allotment:1 ½ hours)
- Teaching and Learning of Students with Disabilities (Time allotment:1 ½ hours)
- Contemporary issues in Special Education or Policy (Time allotment:1 ½ hours)

Comprehensive exam period

The doctoral comprehensive exams are offered twice per academic year. In the fall, generally the third week of October, and in the spring, generally the third week of

February.

Students are required to complete their comprehensive exams under timed, controlled conditions (e.g., in a secure location on the Boca Raton campus, using Department-issued equipment).

Preparing for the exam

Approximately six months before planning to take the Comprehensive Exam, students should meet with their Major Professor to form the Comp/Dissertation Committee (see description above). Once the committee is formed, the Major Professor and student will determine which faculty members will write and read each question. Students will work with Comp/Dissertation Committee members to get guidance on how to prepare for the exams. Once these decisions are made, the Major Professor is to notify the *Doctoral Coordinator*

Pre- and post-meeting

Prior to the exam period, the faculty member(s) contributing to the student's comprehensive exams will gather for a *pre-exam meeting* to discuss the questions, nuances, and expectations for mastery. The *pre-exam meeting* is generally scheduled at least two weeks before the exam period. At the *pre-exam meeting*, changes may be made to the question and/or evaluation criteria used to guide the scoring of the question. The purposes of these meetings are:

- to ensure that all faculty members responsible for scoring the questions understand the intent of the question,
- to delineate the parameters for the response (sometimes referred to as a rater's guide); and
- to discuss the scoring, results, and feedback for the students.

After the exam, the *post-exam meeting* is scheduled by the Major Professor and is generally scheduled within two weeks after the exam period. At the post-meeting, readers discuss responses and individual scores and will have the opportunity to revise their scores, if applicable. The Major Professor will then calculate the final average scores for each question, complete the *Comprehensive Exam Results Summary Sheet*, and notify the students of the results. Comprehensive exam results will be included in the student's file that is maintained within the Department.

Scoring of comprehensive exams

Upon completion of the exam, each reader will independently score *all six questions*; these faculty (i.e., question writers) will have approximately ten days to read and independently score student responses using the *Doctoral Comprehensive Exam Scoring Rubric*.

Once all faculty members have scored the responses, an average score is computed by the Major Professor using the information from the individually scored rubrics. A passing score is designated as 6.5 out of 10, or higher for each question. Thus, students must earn an average of 6.5 or higher across all raters to 'pass' a question. If a student fails a question (i.e., receives an average score less than 6.5), then the student will be required to engage in a remedial activity, as recommended by the faculty writers/readers. Prior to the remediation, specific preparation activity(ies) may be prescribed for the student to complete prior to the remediation.

The remedial activity might include a re-take of any failed question(s), re-writing some portion of a failed question, re-taking a different version of a failed question, an oral presentation of one's response to the question, or some other activity. The post-meeting held after initial scoring is complete may have an impact on the final scores (see the Pre- and Post-meeting section above).

Feedback and remediation

Students will receive the exam results as well as written feedback from each reader approximately two weeks after completion. *Any remedial action must be initiated within six (6) weeks of notification.*

If students do not pass all of the questions after *two attempts, a Professional Development Plan (PDP) will be prescribed by the Major Professor. The PDP will have a specific timeline and measurable objectives. If the objectives are met successfully, students will be allowed to retake the necessary portion(s) of the exam a third time within 30 days of notification of successful PDP completion. If the PDP objectives are not met by the prescribed timeline, or if the exam is not passed after the third attempt, students will not be admitted to candidacy and will not be eligible to continue in the doctoral program.
* "Two attempts" is defined as a Fail on the original question, followed by a Fail on the retake, *or* a Fail on a "clarifying activity" followed by a Fail on the retake.

Admission to Candidacy

Admission to the doctoral program does not constitute admission to candidacy for the degree. Admission to candidacy for the doctoral degree has the following requirements:

1. The student must have selected a dissertation chair and doctoral dissertation committee.

2. The student must have had a formal program of studies prepared in cooperation with the Major Professor (advisor) and maintained continuous annual enrollment.

3. The student must have completed all doctoral program coursework (excluding dissertation), including EEX 7918, Pre-Candidacy Research in Special Education, EEX 7945, Doctoral Internship in Special Education, and EEX 7982, Doctoral Residency in Special Education.

4. The student must have passed the doctoral comprehensive examination. This examination will be given at or near completion of the coursework in the student's program.

5. The student must have completed Form 8-Admission to Candidacy for the Doctoral Degree with the Graduate College.

Doctoral candidacy is a formal status and requires a review and application for admission. This requires the student to officially designate the *Doctoral Committee Chair* and formation of a *Dissertation Committee.* The student's Major Professor will serve as the Dissertation Chair. In consultation with the Major Professor, the student will select additional members of the dissertation committee. The committee should consist of three Department of Special Education faculty and one member from outside the Department (this includes outside the College and University). Dissertation Chair and committee membership must be confirmed in writing (e.g., via email) to the Doctoral Coordinator. The Doctoral Committee Chair and the Dissertation Committee will also serve as question authors and readers for the student's comprehensive exams.

The admission to candidacy application (Form 8 – Graduate College) is approved first by the Major Professor and then reviewed by the department's *Doctoral Coordinator,*

Department Chair, the College of Education Dean, and the Dean of the Graduate College. The approval is based on: (a) a student's academic record, (b) the opinion of the academic committee concerning overall readiness for candidacy, (c) completion of the residency requirement, (d) completion of the pre-candidacy research, (e) a successful completion of the comprehensive exam, and (f) *an approved dissertation topic.

*When identifying the dissertation topic students will prepare a "mini proposal" or *Dissertation Prospectus*. This working paper provides enough information so the student can provide potential dissertation committee members with the intended direction and method of the dissertation. See the *Dissertation Prospectus* section of this handbook for additional details.

Note: Students may not register for dissertation credits until they have been admitted to doctoral candidacy and completed the Dissertation Prospectus.

Dissertation Prospectus

Students in the Special Education doctoral program are required to write a *Dissertation Prospectus* (DP) prior to developing a full dissertation proposal and registering for EEX 7980 Dissertation. The DP is intended to help the student develop a clear, succinct summary of the intended study. Additionally, the DP will help potential dissertation committee members to determine their willingness to serve on the committee. The DP is a Department of Special Education requirement for students prior to registering for EEX 7980 Dissertation.

The prospectus has three related functions:

- To bring together a student's ideas regarding the need for the specific study;
- To establish the first approximation of an action plan for conducting the study; and
- To communicate the research idea to potential dissertation committee members.

The *Guidelines for Developing the Dissertation Prospectus* should be used to develop the prospectus.

The procedures for implementation are as follows:

1. When students meet with the Comp/Dissertation Committee to plan their comprehensive exams (the semester before the exams), they should also develop a plan and timeline for the Dissertation Prospectus, and a timeline for subsequent enrollment in EEX 7980 Dissertation should be established. That is, students will begin the process of developing the DP as they are preparing for their comprehensive exams.

2. By the end of the semester in which students pass their comprehensive exams and achieve their *Doctoral Candidacy* (submitting Form 8 - Admission to Candidacy), the DP should be shared with potential committee members, and a dissertation committee should be formed.

3. Achieving candidacy and completing the DP will enable students to register for EEX 7980 Dissertation. Under no circumstances will students register for Dissertation unless the Prospectus has been completed and distributed to potential committee members.

4. In the event that a student has achieved candidacy but has not completed a DP at the beginning of a new semester, there is an alternative. Students may enroll for EEX 7906 Directed Independent Study (DIS) (a minimum of 1 credit) and complete the DP as the requirement for that course. The major Professor will guide the student to complete the DIS.

The Dissertation Prospectus does not take the place of the full proposal or eliminate the need for a formal proposal defense. Dissertation Chairs must still decide the process for the development of the full proposal and the process by which the student will conduct the research. The DP is intended to help facilitate the development of a viable topic and the selection of a willing and able dissertation committee.

Dissertation

While the dissertation is the culminating activity for the doctoral program, students are encouraged to think about a possible dissertation topic early in their program and one that is consistent with their identified line of inquiry.

Major Professor Dissertation Responsibilities

- Work with the student to ensure that all department, college, and university requirements are met
- Provide suggestions during the process of conducting the research for the dissertation
- Provide feedback on drafts of the dissertation
- Assist student in preparation for the defense
- Discuss potential job opportunities after student graduation

Further, students choose between different dissertation formats. The section below describes dissertation formats.

Dissertation Formats

Students in the PhD program can complete a four-chapter dissertation or a multi-article dissertation.

Four Chapter Dissertation

This format consists of four chapters describing one study. The chapters include:

I. Introduction (including review of literature). The introduction provides background on the problem and a review of the literature that should help the reader understand the purpose of the study. This section should indicate the relation of this study to prior studies in the same area. This section should make clear why the study is of value in extending the research literature, educational theory, technology, or practice (i.e., the contribution the study will make to present knowledge).

II. Method. The method details information about how the study will be conducted and other critical information, including (a) participants, (b) independent variables, (c) dependent variables, (d) data collection procedures, and (e) design.

III. Results. The results communicate the study findings and include answers to all research questions.

IV. Discussion. The discussion should summarize findings and interpret the results in the context of the current evidence. This section should also include a

discussion of the limitations, addressing sources of potential bias and imprecision, as well as the applicability and implications of the study findings.

Multi-Article Format

The multi-article format dissertation consists of chapters describing at least two studies. Considerations for the multi-article format dissertation:

- The works must form a coherent body of work, with the introduction and concluding chapters clarifying this coherence.
- The student must be the first author of all articles and contribute most of each article's original conceptual and intellectual work. Contributions of any co-authors must be delineated in the dissertation proposal and the dissertation.
- Although the literature and methods described in multiple chapters may be similar, students should carefully avoid self-plagiarism so that problems will not occur at the publication stage.
- The student should seek advice from the Major Professor and the Dissertation Committee on authorship and publication outlets (e.g., scholarly journals, practitioner journals, edited books, and other venues). The final decision about authorship, author order, and publication outlet lies with the student.
- The student is responsible for managing article submission, copy edit review, copyright permissions, or other processes associated with seeking publication of the works with chosen outlets.
- Upon completing the FAU-required dissertation formatting and submission to the Graduate College processes, students are encouraged to submit the article(s) resulting from the dissertation research. Publication is not required for graduation.

The chapters of the multi-article format dissertation include:

I. Introduction. The introduction explains the importance and coherence of the collection of articles, including conceptual and/or theoretical links across the articles. This may be brief to avoid redundancy with later chapters.

II. Middle Chapters (minimum two chapters). The middle chapters are complete papers reporting studies (e.g., empirical investigations and systematic reviews of literature). References and appendices should be included within each article. The middle chapters can consist of different investigations. See examples below.

a. *One literature review article* and *one empirical article, or*
b. Two empirical articles

III. Concluding Chapter. The concluding chapter should discuss the findings and implications of the collection of articles, making the work's coherence clear.

Dissertation Process

The dissertation is the culminating activity for the doctoral program. While it is expected that doctoral students will actively engage in research well before the dissertation, the dissertation is another stage in the scholarly development for doctoral students.

Dissertation Stages

The dissertation process may look a bit different for each student, but all students follow similar stages.

Dissertation Stage	Explanation
Candidacy	Before a student begins the dissertation process, four conditions must be satisfied: (1) passed comprehensive exams, (2) dissertation committee has been identified, (3) prospectus is complete (student will complete prospectus template matching deign for traditional format or multi-article format prospectus), (4) committee has reviewed the prospectus and agreed that students should begin developing proposals.
Proposal development	The student develops a full proposal (traditional or multi-article format) and begin to prepare IRB approval documents.

Dissertation Stage	Explanation
Proposal Defense	Defend the proposal. Upon completion of the defense, the student is expected to seek approval from all appropriate IRB committees and upon approval, conduct the study.
IRB process	Students submit an application to the university IRB. It may also be necessary to seek approval from other IRB committees (e.g., school district).
Conduct study	Students are expected to carry out the study.
Data analysis	Students are expected to analyze the data.
Draft full dissertation	Students are expected to have an initial draft of the complete dissertation.
Defend dissertation	Students are expected to defend the study in its entirety.

Transition from Comp/Dissertation Committee to Dissertation Committee

After the comprehensive examination has been successfully completed, and after completion of the Dissertation Prospectus, the Comp/Dissertation Committee will function solely as a Dissertation Committee.

Dissertation credit

Students must complete the Dissertation Prospectus prior to enrolling in EEX 7980 Dissertation. A minimum of 12 credits of dissertation is required to earn the degree. Students are expected to make progress toward completing the dissertation and to enroll continuously (minimum of 3 credits per semester) until the degree is completed. If satisfactory progress is not made in a given semester, the student will receive a grade of Unsatisfactory for EEX 7980 for that semester. The *Thesis and Dissertation Guidelines* can be obtained online from the Graduate College here. Students are advised to read and refer to these guidelines while preparing the dissertation proposal and the write-up of the completed study.

Dissertation proposal defense

The dissertation proposal substantially extends and builds upon the information provided in the dissertation prospectus. This proposal must be submitted to each committee member for review and approval at least two weeks before the defense date, to allow sufficient time to allow committee members to agree that the proposal is ready to be defended. The proposal defense is typically an open forum, allowing other doctoral students and faculty to attend. After a successful dissertation proposal defense (and IRB approval) the student may proceed with data collection and analysis.

IRB review prior to conducting research

Before any data can be collected, permissions from IRB reviews (or the equivalent review process) in participating school districts, agencies, and at FAU must be obtained. Students should contact external agencies to determine the review process and timelines. FAU IRB applications require that the faculty chair serves as the Principal Investigator for student dissertations; obviously this requires considerable consultation between the dissertation chair and the student prior to submitting the study to the FAU IRB. Students should meet early and often with the dissertation chair to navigate the IRB proposal system (IRBNET). The FAU IRB allows simultaneous submission, approval by an outside agency prior to FAU approval, or approval by FAU prior to the outside agency. The key is that all agency IRBs must approve the study prior to initiating research activities. Students are reminded that a valid CITI Training Certificate is required prior to submitting a proposal for IRB review. IRB application is to be submitted here.

Final defense of the dissertation

Students must share a complete draft of the dissertation *with the Dissertation Committee*. The dissertation must be formatted in accordance with the university's *Thesis and Dissertation Guidelines*, Like the dissertation proposal, students will work with the dissertation chair to determine *when* other committee members should receive the paper for review. In any case, students should allow sufficient time for each committee member to provide feedback that will be incorporated before the final defense.

Two weeks prior to setting the defense date, students must submit the dissertation document to the Graduate College. This draft notifies the Graduate College of the intended defense, and students will obtain *formatting* feedback on the report. (This is particularly important in helping students prepare the title page in the proper format as faculty members might be prepared to sign after a successful defense.) The title page MUST be approved by the Graduate College before obtaining any signatures.

The Dissertation Chair schedules a time and a room, contacts the Dean's office to send a memorandum to the College of Education Faculty, and contacts the Department of Special Education secretary to notify other doctoral students of the defense. The dissertation defense is open, and other doctoral students are encouraged to attend. At the defense, the student will present and defend the research findings and their implications, and address any questions raised. The defense is directed to the committee, but observers are typically invited to ask questions or comment at the end.

The defense is held very early in a semester in order to complete all necessary dissertation and graduation requirements. It will be imperative to follow the FAU Graduate College dissertation guidelines and submission deadlines toward completion of the dissertation process leading toward graduation. These guidelines encompass an entire semester to complete.

It will be the responsibility of the doctoral candidate (being supported by the dissertation chair) to meet all FAU Graduate College deadlines regarding the dissertation process and graduation.

Completing the "post-defense" final draft

After students have successfully defended the dissertation, several additional departmental steps must be completed before completing the dissertation process. Students must work closely with the Dissertation Chair to ensure that changes suggested by the Dissertation Committee are incorporated into the paper. *It is the shared responsibility of both the Dissertation Chair and the student to ensure that all changes have been addressed before moving the document forward to the* Department of Special Education *Chair.*
Formatting changes are a frequent source of frustration and delay for students at the end of the dissertation process. The Department highly recommends that students obtain the services of a professional editor who is well-schooled in FAU dissertation requirements and APA format. These professionals are familiar with formats for the

entire document, including tables, figures, and reference lists. The student should submit the completed final dissertation to the Department of Special Education Chair. *The expectation is that this is the final manuscript, and there should be no need for additional revisions and corrections unless noted by the Department of Special Education Chair.*

After approval from the Department Chair, the dissertation is then submitted to the College of Education (COE) Dean. The COE Dean typically sets a deadline that is *two weeks prior* to the Graduate College final dissertation manuscript submission deadline. Once the COE Dean provides feedback, and approves the document, the dissertation is submitted to the Graduate College.

Once the Graduate College has approved the dissertation, the Graduate College will forward the signature page to all committee members, Deans, and necessary faculty. For more details on the requirements for the final stages of the dissertation, students are strongly encouraged to review the Graduate College *Thesis and Dissertation Guidelines,* found here.

Copies of the dissertation. The Department of Special Education requires students to order one copy of the dissertation for the Dissertation Chair. The number of additional copies ordered will be determined by the student, including copies for the student, other committee members, etc.

Dissertation publishing. Students should adhere to The University's requirement(s) for publishing (e.g., ProQuest, international dissemination). The student is required to pay all costs associated with dissertation publishing. Once the dissertation is signed and filed with the Graduate College, the dissertation is printed.

Graduation

Graduation is an important event that signifies the successful completion of the PhD degree. At the graduation ceremony, students will be hooded on stage by the dissertation chair. Graduation is celebratory and well worth attending.

Students must apply for graduation early in the semester in which they plan to graduate. All dissertation and application paperwork must be completed within the deadlines set by the Registrar and Graduate College. Students are required to check the Academic Calendar and the Graduate College's "I am Ready to Graduate" page to determine the procedures and dates.

The University will confer the doctoral degree when the following minimum conditions have been met:

- Submission of required application for degree
- Positive recommendation of the College of Education
- Certification that all requirements of the degree being sought have been completed
- Achievement of the grade requirements as defined by the Department
- Achievement of the grade requirements established by the College of Education
- Conformance to residency requirements and time limits
- Satisfactory completion and defense of a doctoral dissertation
- A copy of the dissertation due in the Graduate College by the date specified in the academic calendar
- Payment of microfilming costs and copyright fees, if applicable, one week before the date of graduation.

If, for any reason, graduation is delayed, the candidate may reapply for graduation in a subsequent semester.

University Policies that Affect Special Education Doctoral Students

Transfer Credit

All coursework to be included in a doctoral program in the Department of Special Education, including credit for transfer courses, must be reviewed and accepted by the student's Major Professor upon entry into the degree program. Transfer of credit for required doctoral coursework is seldom considered. However, students have some leeway in using transfer credits to meet Graduate College requirements beyond the bachelor's degree, once the Department of Special Education's 72-credit doctoral requirement is met.

The University recognizes two types of transfer credits:

- *Credits transferred from another institution*: The Graduate College accepts 6 credits of transfer courses from another institution.

- *Credits taken at FAU prior to admission into a doctoral program*: The Graduate College accepts six credits of coursework taken at FAU *after* the master's degree,

but *prior to acceptance* in a doctoral program, as long as the coursework is not more than 10 years old.

All transfer credits are to be listed on the Graduate College Electronic Plan of Study (ePOS) for Doctoral Degree and the Department of Special Education Doctoral Information and Planning Sheet.

Recency of Credit

There is an expectation that coursework taken in pursuit of a graduate degree should be current. This is known as the *recency of credit*. FAU defines "recent" as coursework not more than 10 years old. The specific Graduate College policy is that credit is recent if it was earned within 10 years of a student's first semester of enrollment after official admission into a program.

Continuous Enrollment in the Special Education Doctoral Program

Students are required to enroll for at least one credit during at least two semesters (fall, spring, or summer) of every academic year to remain eligible for the degree. If a student has completed formal coursework but has not yet been admitted to Candidacy (see section on Admission to Candidacy), the student may enroll in a Directed Independent Study course (EEX 7906) to maintain continuous enrollment. If students have been admitted to candidacy, they may enroll in Directed Independent Study, coursework, or Dissertation (with Dissertation Chair approval) to maintain continuous enrollment. (Enrollment in EEX 7980 Dissertation can only occur after the Dissertation Prospectus has been completed.)

Students who fail to maintain continuous enrollment, as defined above, lose their eligibility for the degree. Eligibility may be restored by the Graduate College working with the College of Education and the Department of Special Education upon appeal. If eligibility is restored, students may be required to register for additional credits of Directed Independent Study, coursework, or Dissertation in an amount equal to the number of such credits missed while not continuously enrolled.

If students find it necessary to suspend studies due to medical or other personal circumstances temporarily, they may apply for a leave of absence from graduate study. Leave of absence is approved by the Graduate College on the basis of the recommendation of the academic advisor, Department Chair, and the Dean of the College of Education.

Incomplete Grades

If a student is passing a course but has not completed all the required work because of extenuating circumstances, the student may, *with the approval of the instructor*, receive a grade of incomplete (I). The grade of "I" is neither passing nor failing and is not used in computing the grade point average; it indicates a grade deferral and must be changed to a grade other than "I" within a specified time indicated by the instructor, not to exceed one calendar year from the end of the semester during which the course was taken.

The "I" grade is used only when the student has not completed work assigned to all students as a regular part of the course. It is not to be used to allow students to do subsequent extra work to raise the grade earned during the regular term. The instructor will record in writing and file with the University Registrar, the work that must be completed for the final grade, the time frame for completion, and the grade that will be assigned if the work is not completed. It is the student's responsibility to make arrangements with the instructor for the timely completion of this work.

Funding Opportunities

Historically, there has been funding available for doctoral students that might include tuition support, salary, stipends, or conference travel. Sources of funding include graduate assistantships through the Department or College, Department or College grants, and Graduate Teaching Assistantships (GTA) opportunities. This support might be arranged semester-by-semester or on an annual basis.

A full explanation of the types of assistantships available through the Graduate College, Department, and University can be found here. A full listing of scholarships that are available through the Department, College, and University can be found at Scholarship Universe. Scholarship Universe is a scholarship matching tool for students that makes finding and applying for scholarships easier. Student travel funding to present at conferences is available through the Graduate and Professional Student Association (GPSA). Learn more here.

Funding is competitive and typically limited. Students should frequently check traditional sources of information (e.g., financial aid, student employment websites) for opportunities throughout the year.

Appendix A
Doctoral Coursework Requirements

Area I Special Education Core Courses - 12 credits

- EEX 7025 Contemporary Trends in Special Education (3cr)
- EEX 7026 Historical, Theoretical, and Legal Foundations of Special Education (3cr)
- EEX 7526 Grant Writing (3cr)
- EEX 7866 Teaching and Learning for Individuals with Disabilities (3cr)

Area II Specialization - 12 credits

- Students choose 12 credits at the 5000, 6000, or 7000 level, 9 of which must be within the Department of Special Education, to create an area of specialization.

Area III Statistics and Research - 18-21 credits

- EDF 7482 Advanced Educational Research (3cr)
- EEX 7918 Pre-Candidacy Research in Special Education (3-6cr)
- STA 7114 Advanced Educational Statistics (3cr)
- Electives in Quantitative or Qualitative Methods: Students select three courses; the department highly recommends EEX 7618, Advanced Applied Behavior Analysis, as one of the three.

Area IV Doctoral Seminar in Special Education - 6 credits

- Two-credit seminar taken three times. *Topics include Course Development and College Teaching*, *Triad of Professional Activities in Higher Education*, and *Professional Dissemination*.

Area V Internship and Residency - 6 credits

- EEX 7945 Doctoral Internship in Special Education
- EEX 7982 Doctoral Residency in Special Education

Area VI Dissertation - 12 credits (minimum)

- EEX 7980 Dissertation - The dissertation must be completed across at least two semesters (fall and spring only), with a maximum of six credits within any one semester.

Appendix B
Doctoral Program Coordinator

The Doctoral Coordinator serves as a leader, advocate, and resource for doctoral students and faculty within the program to ensure the program's curriculum, policies, and practices align with current research, field trends, and accreditation requirements.

Admissions Responsibilities

The doctoral coordinator will:

1. Lead Recruitment Efforts: Develop and implement strategies to recruit highly qualified applicants to the doctoral program.
2. Coordinate Admissions Processes: Oversee the review of applications (i.e., convene the Doctoral Admission Committee, facilitate decisions on student acceptance).
3. Enhance Candidate Communication: Serve as a point of contact for prospective students, providing information about the program and admission requirements.
4. Maintain Admissions Records: Ensure accurate documentation and reporting of admissions data to meet institutional and accreditation requirements.

Leadership and Advocacy

The doctoral coordinator will:

1. Advocate for the Program: Represent the doctoral program within the department, college, university, and professional communities.
2. Promote Faculty Collaboration: Foster collaboration among faculty members to enhance program delivery and support shared governance.
3. Engage in Professional Development: Stay informed about trends in doctoral education and special education to continually improve the program.
4. Ensure Equity and Inclusion: Advocate for policies and practices that promote the participation of professionals from a wide variety of backgrounds in the doctoral program.

Administrative Duties

The doctoral coordinator will:

1. Prepare Reports: Compile and submit annual program reports, accreditation materials, and other required documentation.
2. Manage Program Communications: Facilitate communication program to keep stakeholders informed.
3. Organize Events: Plan and execute events such as orientations, workshops, and seminars to enrich the doctoral program experience.

Through these responsibilities, the doctoral coordinator ensures the doctoral program's excellence and sustainability while fostering an environment that supports student success and faculty engagement. Students work with the Doctoral Coordinator closely when applying to the program. Thereafter, students are assigned a Major Professor.