

COLLEGE OF EDUCATION

DEPARTMENT OF CHILDHOOD, READING, AND DISABILITY SERVICES

PROGRAM IN VISUAL IMPAIRMENT



Handbook for Graduate Students



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Introduction

Welcome to the Department of Childhood, Reading and Disability Services at Florida State University! This handbook has been designed specifically for master's degree seeking students in the Program in Visual Impairment. For questions regarding the other programs within the department, consult an advisor.

You are preparing for one of the most challenging, interesting and fulfilling careers available. We want your involvement in the Program to be as easily managed as possible, and above all, for you to enjoy what you are doing. In order to make efficient progress toward your degree, it is important for you to familiarize yourself with this handbook, your academic advisor, and other faculty members.

Specialization Areas

Within the Program in Visual Impairment, it is possible to plan your studies so that when you graduate, you are prepared to work with adults or with children who have visual impairments, either as a public or residential school teacher, a rehabilitation teacher, or an orientation and mobility specialist.

Graduate students are expected to select an area of service to individuals with visual impairments in which they plan to specialize. This area may lead to additional certification or endorsement, either by a state education agency or professional organization. You must work closely with your advisor to determine the courses that will be required for the completion of your program. Be advised that courses in many specialization areas are not available during the summer term.

The specialization in Orientation and Mobility is a limited access program. Priority is given to graduate students who demonstrate an interest in working in this field after graduation.

Application Process

Before any steps can be taken toward entry into the department, you first must go through the application procedures required for admittance into the University as stated by the Admissions Office. All graduate students must meet the following criteria:

- minimum GPA of 3.0 when counting the last 60 hours of your last completed degree program **or**
- minimum GRE (verbal and quantitative) of 1000

Regardless of one's GPA, all applicants must take the GRE and have the score recorded before the end of the first semester at FSU.

Individuals interested in being teachers of students with visual impairments also must be exempted from or pass all parts of the Florida Teacher Examination General Skills Test. The Praxis I can be substituted for this exam. Please see an advisor for passing scores on each of these exams.

The Program requires that two (2) letters of recommendation be submitted on your behalf and that you submit a statement of your professional goals.

Once the above requirements have been met and confirmed with documentation (i.e., a transcript), an interview will be scheduled with a departmental advisor. This interview may occur over the telephone.

You will be notified of the decision of the Admissions Committee within two weeks of your interview.

Ongoing Evaluation

In order to complete this program and become a qualified professional in this field, you must be willing to commit a great deal of time and energy. The faculty will continuously evaluate your ability to contribute to the field based on your classroom performance, practicum experiences, and demonstration of qualities necessary for successful teaching. Qualities shown to be most important for success include enthusiasm, organization, clarity of presentation, and knowledge of subject matter. If the faculty determines it necessary at any point during your program, you may be advised to discontinue the Program for the benefit of you and/or persons with visual impairment with whom you might work.

Academic Advising

Once you have been notified of your acceptance into the Department of Childhood, Reading, and Disability Services an academic advisor will be assigned to you. You are to meet with your advisor prior to registering for classes each semester to ensure that all requirements are being met for program completion.

Your area of specialization interest will determine which courses you will be required to take. Work closely with your advisor to assure that you are taking the courses that will lead to certification in the service area of your choice upon graduation.

Academic advising is the key to successfully completing the Program in Visual Impairment. While it may be beneficial to

consult other students throughout the program, DO NOT allow such consultations regarding class scheduling to replace academic advising. *It is your responsibility to make an appointment with your advisor each semester to help with scheduling.*

Grant Recipients

If you are receiving financial support from the Program in Visual Impairment, you must meet with the Project Administrator during the first week of each semester to determine how you are going to meet the work requirement, if applicable. In addition, tuition waiver and stipend forms must be signed at this time.

Admission to Teacher Education

If your preliminary plan of studies involves acquiring the competencies of a teacher of visually impaired children, you must complete the Admission to Teacher Education form. This form is required to add the correct major code to your record and enable you to register for “majors only” courses. It must be signed by one of the program faculty members. The form can be picked up in room 108 Stone Building. You will not be allowed to student teach without this form in your file.

As indicated above, all teacher education candidates must have passed all parts of the General Knowledge Exam or achieved acceptable scores on the Praxis I.

Program of Study

You and your advisor will develop a preliminary plan of studies appropriate to your career and education goals. Students in the master’s degree program are expected to choose an area of specialization relevant to the education or rehabilitation of persons with visual impairments. This plan depends in large part on each student’s previous education and experiences, as well as on special interests expressed by the student. Therefore, every student’s plan is different.

By the end of your first semester on campus, you are required to complete a formal Program of Study. This form can be picked up in room 108 Stone Building. The Program of Study is a contract between you and your Master’s Committee regarding the course requirements that have been established for you for graduation. It also lists the names of the members of the faculty who will evaluate your comprehensive paper.

To select your faculty committee, you must choose two professors within your major (Dr. Correa, Ms. Jones, and Dr. Lewis). The third committee member can be any other

professor within or outside the department with whom you have had a course. You must personally ask faculty members to serve on your committee. Do not assume that any faculty member will serve without your personal request.

Once you have typed the Program of Studies form, have your advisor review it, then have each of your committee members sign it. Return it to Dr. Lewis in Room 205 Stone Building (after you have made a copy for yourself). It is best to begin this process early enough in the semester so that the form can be fully processed before you enroll for your last semester.

There exists a complicated paperwork process should you choose to change your Program of Study. Please discuss any changes with your advisor and consult with the Graduate Advisor in room 108 Stone Building.

Master's Comprehensive Exam

As a final demonstration of your scholarship, you will be required to write a comprehensive paper. The members of your committee must agree to the topic of your paper and sign the form attached to this packet. Although not always, this paper reflects a thorough review of the literature on the topic of your choice. As a minimum guideline, it should be 20 pages long and include a bibliography of at least 15 references.

It is recommended that you work closely with your advisor as you write this paper. You should anticipate having to submit several drafts of your paper and incorporating the comments of your advisor. The final version of your comprehensive paper must reflect high levels of scholarship in the areas of content, organization, grammar, and spelling. Use APA format.

During academic registration for the semester in which you plan to submit your comprehensive paper, you must register for Master's Comps (EEX 8966). There is no fee to take this zero credit course, but you must be enrolled for the paperwork approvals to be generated. If you choose to take no other classes and to register only for comps, you will be charged for one (1) Florida resident tuition credit hour at the master's level.

It is best to plan carefully when you will work on your comprehensive paper. Many students find that they cannot give this paper the attention it requires when they are involved in their internship. In other instances, students discover that they do not have access to appropriate reference materials or necessary computers once they leave Tallahassee.

Be certain to submit the final version of your comprehensive paper early enough in the semester to allow each of the members of your committee to read it. Failure to acquire the necessary approvals may delay your graduation from the University.

If you must take an incomplete in your comprehensive exam, then you will need to re-apply for graduation early in the semester in which you plan to finish this paper. Generally, it is not possible to add a name to the graduation list late in the semester.

Student Teaching Application

One semester prior to your planned semester of internship, if included on your plan of study, you are required to complete a student teaching packet for the College of Education. The packet will be made available to you to purchase some time at the beginning of the semester. Remember to complete these forms carefully, paying particular attention to spelling and grammar. The completed packet is sent to school district or agency personnel, who will decide if they want you to student teach in their facility based on your statements in this document. It is recommended that you have your advisor read over and edit your statements before you type them on your final copy. Your advisor will require that you submit a copy of your student teaching application, with a picture attached, for your file. Student teaching applications usually are due around the sixth week of class.

Because of the limited availability of student teaching placements in Leon County, you probably will be completing your internship in another city. We make every attempt to find you a student teaching placement at a location that meets your financial and educational needs. Many factors are considered when placing a student at a particular school or agency. You can help us by determining the type of services to individuals with visual impairments that are available in the geographic location in which you want to live. Always though, our primary concern is that you have a student teaching experience that fully prepares you for your future career working with people with visual impairments.

During academic registration, you must register for the number of student teaching (EEX 5841) hours established in your Program of Study, just as any other class. You must obtain a course reference number from the Department secretary before registering. If you entered the master's degree program directly from the undergraduate program (without completing your

student teaching semester), you may enroll the undergraduate student teaching section (EEX 4861).

Graduation Check

To ensure that all of the academic requirements have been fulfilled for the Program in Visual Impairment, ask your advisor for an informal graduation check to determine if you have taken all courses required for the degree.

Once your grad check is complete, it is your responsibility to apply for graduation. Your name is NOT automatically added to the graduation list. Applications for graduation can be obtained and submitted in the Graduation Section of the Registrar's Office. The deadline for applying for graduation usually falls during the first week of classes (when you may be student teaching in another part of the state). For more details regarding the graduation process, call the Registrar's Office at 644-1050.

Please note that if you do not meet the requirements to graduate during the semester for which you have applied for graduation, you must re-apply to graduate during the next semester (or the semester in which you intend to finish the graduation requirements. Again, application for graduation must be made during the first week of each semester.

Exit Interview

If you have been a loan recipient through the Office of Financial Aid during any term in which you attended FSU, you must attend an exit interview prior to graduation. This meeting is intended to inform you of your loan obligations once you are no longer considered a student. The interview is scheduled through the Cashier's Office in 109 Westcott. For more specific information regarding the interview or your individual status as a loan recipient, contact the Cashier's Office at 644-4469.

Grant Payback

If you received a stipend, graduate assistantship, or tuition was paid for you from a grant, you will need to report to your advisor your new address and continue to report this information, along with details about your employment, to Dr. Lewis for at least twice as many years as you attended school. If you do not work in the field in which you studied, (rehabilitation teaching, teaching visually impaired children, or orientation and mobility), then you will need to pay back a sum equal to the amount of money from which you received benefit, plus interest. See your advisor or Dr. Lewis for more information about the payback.

Student Teaching

The student teaching experience is intended to allow you the opportunity to put “theory into practice.” Under the supervision of a qualified teacher who has at least three years of experience, you will first observe how s/he manages the assigned caseload of visually impaired students or clients. Gradually, you will take on responsibility for more and more of the planning, teaching, and evaluation of these individuals.

Critical to the success of your internship will be the expression of enthusiasm and interest in your new role as a student teacher. You can demonstrate your enthusiasm before even starting your internship by calling your supervising teacher to set a meeting time, by offering to observe him/her teach before your assigned date, or by asking to review student or client files before you begin the internship. *Above all, do not be late for your first meeting.* It is always a good idea to drive the route to your school or agency on a weekday at the time you would normally be traveling before your start date.

You will have purchased a student teaching manual when you complete the student teaching application. Read this manual carefully and follow its guidelines. If you cannot meet a deadline, please contact your university supervisor.

You will be assigned a university supervisor to help guide you through your internship. You should feel free to call this individual whenever you have questions, problems, or triumphs you want to share. The university supervisor will arrange to make a minimum of two visits during the semester to observe your teaching and to discuss your progress with you and your supervising teacher.

Florida Teacher Certification Exam (FTCE)

The FTCE is a state exam must be passed by all teacher education majors in order to graduate. If you are planning to teach school-age students in Florida, you must take (and pass) the following two sub-tests:

- The general test, titled Professional Education, is required of all teachers in the state and focuses on information presented primarily in your Schooling, Ed Psych, and Applied Behavior Analysis classes.
- The subject area exam (SAE) in Visual Impairment.

You may take both of these sub-tests on the same test date.

It is best to plan to take these tests toward the end your student teaching semester, when both the theoretical information and the practical application of it are still fresh in your mind. You will have two years after beginning teaching to pass both sub-tests. If you pass the test after your internship has been completed, your graduation will be retroactive to the date of the end of your internship.

Study guides for preparation for the Professional Education and each subject area exam are available. They can be purchased for less than \$5.00 from

Florida Department of Education
Education Materials Office
Room B-01, Collins Building
(corner of Gaines and Duval)

**Finding
Employment**

The Program keeps an updated computerized list of employment opportunities in the field. When requested, your advisor will assist you in your job search by keeping you informed of job announcements for positions for which you might be qualified. This service is available for both new graduates and graduates who are seeking to change their current employment situation.

**Teaching
Certificate**

Applications for Florida Teaching Certificates and the for fingerprinting are available in Room 108 Stone Building. Any police/sheriff's department will handle the fingerprinting for you.

You cannot be fully certified to teach in Florida unless you have been hired by a Florida School District. It is possible to begin the certification process, however, early. Contact the Certification Office at the Department of Education for more details.

**AER
Certification**

Your advisor will assist you in the completion of the documents necessary to receive certification in Rehabilitation Teaching or Orientation and Mobility from AER.