

# UConn

## Special Education Doctoral Program Handbook

*A Handbook for Doctoral Students in the Department of Educational Psychology  
with a Concentration in Special Education*

Neag School of Education  
Department of Educational Psychology  
249 Glenbrook Road, Unit 3064  
Storrs, CT 06269-3064  
<https://specialed.education.uconn.edu/>

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## Program Overview

This handbook is designed to provide current and future Ph.D. students with important Special Education Program information that complements the material in the University's *Graduate Catalog* (<http://catalog.grad.uconn.edu/>). Upon completion of a PhD, students will have demonstrated excellence in subject matter relating to special education, acquisition of research skills, and a concentration of knowledge in a specific area or topic. The essence of this degree is scholarship, based upon completion of courses and intense study in a topic of a Ph.D. student's choosing.

### Mission Statement

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Our commitment is to inspire and prepare professionals in special education to create and broaden opportunities for individuals with disabilities. Ph.D. students develop their interests in educating learners with or at risk for a wide range of disabilities across the lifespan perspective. The Doctoral Program is designed to enhance independent thinking and leadership qualities through an individualized program embedded in a thorough knowledge of theory and the existing literature and culminating in active research to guide, direct, and inform the field.

### Faculty and Program Information Links

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Biographical information for all faculty at the Neag School of Education can be found through the "People" link on the School's homepage: <http://education.uconn.edu>. Faculty in the Special Education Program, include:

- Mary Beth Bruder, Ph.D. (<https://education.uconn.edu/person/mary-beth-bruder/>)
- Michael Coyne, Ph.D. (<http://education.uconn.edu/michael-d-coyne/>)
- Susannah Everett, Ph.D. (<https://education.uconn.edu/person/susannah-everett/>)
- Jennifer Freeman, Ph.D. (<http://education.uconn.edu/jennifer-freeman/>)
- Devin Kearns, Ph.D. (<http://education.uconn.edu/devin-kearns/>)
- Craig Kennedy, Ph.D. (<https://education.uconn.edu/person/craig-kennedy/>)
- Allison Lombardi, Ph.D. (<http://education.uconn.edu/allison-lombardi/>)
- Joseph Madaus, Ph.D. (<http://education.uconn.edu/joseph-madaus/>)
- Natalie Olinghouse, Ph.D. (<http://education.uconn.edu/natalie-g-olinghouse/>)
- Brandi Simonsen, Ph.D. (<http://education.uconn.edu/brandi-m-simonsen/>)
- Tracy Sinclair, Ph.D. (<https://education.uconn.edu/person/tracy-sinclair/>)

The Special Education Program is part of the Department of Educational Psychology (EPSY). Students may also take courses from other EPSY programs or the other departments:

- Department of Educational Psychology (EPSY; <https://epsy.education.uconn.edu>)
  - Research Methods, Measurement, and Evaluation (<https://rmme.education.uconn.edu>)
  - School Psychology Program (<http://schoolpsych.education.uconn.edu>)
  - Creativity and Gifted Education (<https://gifted.uconn.edu>)
  - Counselor Education (<https://counseling.education.uconn.edu>)
  - Learning Sciences (<https://cilt.education.uconn.edu>)
- Department of Curriculum and Instruction (EDCI; <http://edci.education.uconn.edu>)
- Department of Educational Leadership (EDLR; <http://edlr.education.uconn.edu>)

## Student Support and Resources

### Admission

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Doctoral applicants come from a variety of backgrounds, including special education, school psychology, counseling, adult services, or services for students with disabilities. Admission to the Doctoral Program is based on a composite evaluation of an applicant's qualifications including scholarly interests, leadership ability, and potential for making a creative contribution to the field. Deadlines for applications are **October 31<sup>st</sup>** for the Spring semester and **December 1<sup>st</sup>** for Summer Sessions and/or the Fall semester.

Specific criteria used in determining qualified applicants for the Doctoral Program include: (a) academic background, (b) experience, (c) research interests, (d) standardized test scores, (e) recommendations, and (f) program fit (i.e., research interests aligned with work of one or more faculty members). Additional general information about the admissions process is available from the members of the Special Education Doctoral Admissions Committee ([allison.lombardi@uconn.edu](mailto:allison.lombardi@uconn.edu), [joseph.madaus@uconn.edu](mailto:joseph.madaus@uconn.edu), and/or [brandi.simonsen@uconn.edu](mailto:brandi.simonsen@uconn.edu)). *Applicants are strongly encouraged to contact faculty members for preliminary discussions regarding research interests. The application should clearly demonstrate a match between the applicant's professional interests and goals and the research agenda of a faculty member.*

### Financial Aid

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Financial aid comes from a variety of sources. Aid based on academic merit includes graduate assistantships, predoctoral and dissertation fellowships, and summer fellowships. Your advisor can provide you with suggestions for exploring these possibilities as well as scholarships available through the Neag School of Education (see general information at "financing" tab on <https://grad.uconn.edu>).

Aid based on demonstrated financial need includes Federal Stafford Loans, Federal campus-based aid, and University of Connecticut Tuition Remission Grants. Additional information and forms may be obtained from the Office of Student Financial Aid Services (see <http://financialaid.uconn.edu> or call 860-486-2819).

### Advising

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The Graduate School requires the appointment of a **major advisor** so that every graduate student begins their course of study with a designated advisor, based upon their stated preference or a "match" between their research interests and faculty areas of expertise. At times, a change of major advisor may be warranted, particularly if your research interests evolve and incorporate areas of expertise of another faculty. If a change of major advisor is necessary, a Change of Advisor form, available from the Graduate School (<https://grad.uconn.edu/forms/>), must be filed with the signatures of your former advisor and the new advisor.

Selection of a **Dissertation Advisory Committee** should occur when you have completed 12 credits of coursework and are preparing an official [Plan of Study](#). The Dissertation Advisory Committee is comprised of a Chair (the Major Advisor) and at least two Associate Advisors. The Chair must hold graduate faculty status in the student's Area of Concentration (AOC). If there is no AOC, the Field of Study (FOS) takes precedence. At least one of the Associate Advisors must hold University of Connecticut Graduate Faculty status, and at least one must be from your AOC or FOS. If an external Associate Advisor is desired, the guidelines for securing this appointment must be followed.

Committee decisions regarding the approval of the dissertation proposal as well as the General Examination, the written dissertation, and oral defense of the dissertation must be unanimous. Additional information about the Advisory System can be found at <http://gradcatalog.uconn.edu/guidelines-for-grad-study/advisory-system/>.

## Program Procedures and Timelines

Although there is a core of required courses that doctoral students in Special Education complete, students have an opportunity to work closely with their major advisor to develop a plan that is individualized based upon their experiences and professional goals. However, coursework comprises only one component of a student's program. Practica, clinical experiences, and research opportunities may also play an equally important role in preparation. The emphasis on competencies is delineated in the Doctoral Plan of Action, a tool designed to assist students as they work with their major advisor in determining the competencies on which to focus.

### Plan of Study

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Although there is no fixed requirement regarding number of credits, the Graduate School expects about 20 to 24 credits of coursework beyond the Master's degree. At least 15 credits of GRAD 6950 (Dissertation Research) must be included in the Plan of Study in addition to at least 20 credits of other coursework. GRAD 6950 credits represent the research effort the student devotes to the research leading to the dissertation. Credits from other institutions, as well as nonmatriculated credits, can be included in a Doctoral Plan of Study so long as they are post-Master's degree credits. Credits acquired while pursuing a Sixth Year Certificate (<http://specialed.education.uconn.edu/masterssixth-year-program-overview-2/>) may also be applied toward a Doctoral Plan of Study with approval of your Advisory Committee, in lieu of completing a Sixth Year. If the Sixth Year Certificate is awarded, those credits *cannot* be transferred to the Ph.D. Plan of Study. See the Graduate Catalog, Graduate Degree Programs: General Requirements (<https://gradcatalog.uconn.edu/grad-school-info/academic-regulations/#Standards>) for additional details.

Although the courses described in the [Course Listings](#) section are generally included in a Plan of Study, exceptions can be negotiated between you and your advisory committee. After completing 12 credits (and typically after the first year in the program), students (a) develop a plan of study in collaboration with their advisor and (b) submit a formal Plan of Study (<https://registrar.uconn.edu/wp-content/uploads/sites/1604/2019/02/Plan-of-Study-Doctor-Philosophy.pdf>) to the graduate school.

### Course Loads and Registration

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As students plan with their major advisor, the number of credits and course selection will evolve. According to the Graduate School Catalog, classification as a full-time student can occur in one of the following ways:

A student may be classified as a full-time student in one of three ways: (1) enroll in nine or more credits (coursework or research); (2) enroll in six or more credits while holding a graduate assistantship; or (3) enroll in one of the following four special purpose three-credit courses: GRAD 5960 (Full-Time Master's Research), GRAD 6960 (Full-Time Doctoral Research), GRAD 5930 (Master's Level Directed

Studies), and GRAD 6930 (Doctoral Level Directed Studies). The former two courses may be taken by students who have completed all requirements for the respective degree except the research component and who have no other obligations at the University (i.e., no other coursework and no graduate assistantship). The latter two courses denote a full-time, off-campus directed project, such as an internship, field work, or other special activity. (<https://gradcatalog.uconn.edu/grad-school-info/academic-regulations/>).

Instructions for registration are sent to all students via e-mail, and materials are also available from the Registrar (<https://registrar.uconn.edu>). Two advance registration periods are available for the fall semester, one beginning in early April and the other beginning in mid-August. Similar periods for the Spring semester occur in late October and early January. Depending on course selections, most students can register entirely via the Student Administration System site (<https://student.studentadmin.uconn.edu>). Students are encouraged to review information about payment of fees and deadlines for graduate students at the website of The Office of the Bursar (<http://www.bursar.uconn.edu/>).

It is important to be familiar with the Graduate School's policy regarding requirements for Continuous Registration. Students are advised to read about this policy in the Graduate Catalog (<https://gradcatalog.uconn.edu/grad-school-info/academic-regulations/>). Registration must be maintained continuously (except summer sessions) each semester after completing course work until all requirements for the degree have been completed. Failure to maintain continuous registration during any semester results in the student's inactivation with reinstatement possible only after payment of all fees in arrears and the reinstatement fee.

## **Course Listings**

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Each student will plan an individualized plan of study that includes required courses, recommended courses, and may include practicum and fieldwork opportunities.

### **Required Courses**

#### **Doctoral Seminars (12 Credits):**

EPSY 6194: Four doctoral seminars are required. These are designed to provide in-depth exploration and discussion of current topics in special education such as law and policy, issues relating to persons with behavior disorders and learning disabilities, literacy, theory and academic writing. These can be taken out of sequence, and occasionally, in a different program with the advisor's approval.

#### **Research Methods (9 Credits):**

EPSY 5605: Quantitative Research Methods I (3 credits)

EPSY 5610: Regression (3 credits) and/or EPSY 5607: Quantitative Research Methods II (3 credits)

EPSY 6601: Methods and Techniques of Educational Research (3 credits)

#### **Learning Theory (3 Credits):**

EPSY 5510: Learning (or the equivalent; 3 credits)

#### **Area of Emphasis:**

A minimum of 12 credits (which could include independent study) provides an opportunity to develop expertise in a specialty area such as teacher education, cognitive and attention deficit

disorders, early childhood special education, and postsecondary disability services.

### **Dissertation Research (At Least 15 Credits Required):**

GRAD 6950: Doctoral Dissertation Research

### **Recommended Courses**

EDCI 6000: Qualitative Methods of Educational Research (3 credits)

EPSY 6499: Doctoral Practicum (1-6 credits). A practicum comprises an opportunity to apply theory in a student's area of specialization or interest. This may be in conjunction with a graduate assistantship.

### **Related Area**

The Graduate School (<https://gradcatalog.uconn.edu/grad-school-info/academic-regulations/>) requires either foreign language proficiency or six (6) credits in a "related area" (typically in a different department). However, this is **not** a requirement for students in the Department of Educational Psychology (and thus, Special Education students).

### **Practicum and Fieldwork Opportunities**

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As students plan for a practicum that can include grant related and/or field-based activities, there are a number of possibilities to explore within the Department of Educational Psychology, across the University, and in the greater educational community beyond the campus. Students can collaborate with their faculty advisor(s) to identify foci and sites for potential fieldwork.

Opportunities for graduate assistantships include positions with various grant initiatives coordinated by faculty who are Principal Investigators of national, state, and local projects. Students are encouraged to explore options with your major advisor as well as to network with other faculty and graduate students to learn about assistantships.

The A.J. Pappanikou Center for Developmental Disabilities (<http://www.uconnucedd.org>), adjacent to the University of Connecticut Health Center in Farmington, is a member of a national network of centers for excellence in research, education, and service in the area of developmental disabilities. This Center is funded by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services to conduct interdisciplinary training, research, and information dissemination related to disabilities in children and adults. Center projects address many areas of interest to students in special education, including assistive technology, transition from school to work, community living for adults with disabilities, early childhood special education, and special education law. The faculty and information resources of the Pappanikou Center are available to all graduate students in the Special Education Program. In addition, a number of Center projects support graduate assistantships for doctoral students with interests related to Center areas of emphasis.

### **Doctoral Outcomes and Competencies**

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The Doctoral Program in Special Education at the University of Connecticut comprises a multifaceted experience to help students develop the knowledge, research, and leadership skills necessary to fulfill their professional goals. Special Education Ph.D. graduates will have demonstrated knowledge and competency to be a successful faculty member, scholar, and educational researcher at a Research 1 University. Coursework, practica, clinical experiences, and student/faculty collaboration are intended to provide opportunities for desired learner outcomes. Many of the tasks are developmental (e.g., submit a proposal, make a presentation, evaluate/critique a presentation), occurring as students

progress through the doctoral experience. Special Education Ph.D. Outcomes and Competencies are organized into four broad areas: (1) Knowledge & Content, (2) Research & Scholarship, (3) University Teaching & Professional Development, and (4) Service (as described below).

### **1. Knowledge & Content Outcomes and Competencies**

This area includes foundational, specialized disciplinary, and methodological knowledge and content.

**Foundational Knowledge and Content.** Ph.D. graduates will have demonstrated fluency with theory, content, and the professional knowledge base related to the field of special education and educational research and scholarship. Specially, Ph.D. candidates will:

- Successfully complete a series of four doctoral seminars in special education
- Successfully complete other graduate course related to theory, content, and professional knowledge (e.g., special education law/policy, advanced foundations of special education, ethics)

**Specialized Disciplinary Knowledge and Content (currently 12 credits or more).** Ph.D. graduates will have demonstrated fluency with theory, content, and history of one or more specialized areas of interest within, or related to, the field of special education (e.g., behavior supports, literacy, transition/postsecondary disability). For example, Ph.D. candidates may:

- Successful complete a series of graduate courses related to area of interest
- Successfully complete independent studies related to area of interest

**Methodological Knowledge and Content.** Ph.D. graduates will have demonstrated fluency with theory, content, and procedures of research design and extensive knowledge of one or more specific research methodologies (e.g., quantitative, single case, qualitative, program evaluation). For example, Ph.D. candidates will:

- Successfully complete a series of graduate courses related to research design and quantitative research methodology (currently 9 credits or more)
- Successfully complete additional courses in advanced quantitative research methodologies
- Successfully complete course in other research methodologies (e.g., single case, qualitative)

### **2. Research & Scholarship Outcomes & Competencies**

This area includes competencies related to research, scholarly writing, peer review, and professional presentations.

**Research.** Ph.D. graduates will have demonstrated knowledge and ability to conceptualize, design, conduct, analyze, and interpret rigorous research in special education related to their area(s) of interest. For example, Ph.D. candidates may:

- Participate on a research team
- Develop and write research proposal(s)
- Participate in writing a grant proposal
- Participate in writing an IRB proposal
- Take a leadership role in a research study before the dissertation
- Complete dissertation research

**Scholarly Writing.** Ph.D. graduates will have demonstrated knowledge and ability to engage in scholarly writing activities for a variety of purposes, audiences, and outlets. Ph.D. graduates will have



demonstrated knowledge and ability to disseminate/publish scholarly writing. Ph.D. candidates will:

- Write four different items, two for submission for publication and two of the four must be the Literature Review and Dissertation.
- Produce scholarly writing that will include two of the following types of writing:
  - Non-Dissertation Literature review(s)
  - Journal Articles
  - Position paper(s)
  - Practitioner paper(s)
  - Technical report(s)
  - Book chapter(s)
  - Research paper(s)
- Candidate will write their final and successfully defend dissertation scholarly writing that must include:
  - Literature review(s)
  - Dissertation
- Submit at least two manuscripts for publication with prior advisor approval, one of which should be a first author manuscript

**Peer Review.** Ph.D. graduates will have demonstrated knowledge and ability to engage in peer review activities for a variety of purposes. Ph.D. candidates will:

- Engage in peer review activities with faculty in one or more of the following:
  - Serve as a guest reviewer
  - Review conference proposals
  - Review research/grant proposals

**Professional Presentations.** Ph.D. graduates will have demonstrated knowledge and ability to develop, plan, and deliver professional presentations for dissemination of research, scholarship, translation of research to practice, and policy. Ph.D. candidates will:

- Present comprehensive exam (general examination)
- Present dissertation proposal
- Present completed dissertation research (final examination)

In addition, Ph.D. candidates may select experiences from two or more categories of the following:

- Propose and present a poster or talk in a graduate student symposium
- Propose and present a poster or talk at a local/regional conference (independently or with faculty)
- Propose and present a poster or talk at a national/international conference (independently or with faculty) with faculty approval

### **3. University Teaching Outcomes & Competencies**

Ph.D. graduates will have demonstrated knowledge and ability to develop, plan, and teach university level courses in special education and their area(s) of interest. PhD candidates will:

- Plan and deliver at least two guest lectures in university courses (graduate, undergraduate, large, small)
- Engage in a minimum of one supervised college teaching experience (e.g., assist with substantive planning, teaching, grading) with sufficient/mastery performance as deemed by the faculty member of record

In addition, Ph.D. candidates may select experiences from one or more of the following:

- Design a course in special education and/or area(s) of interest (e.g., syllabus, readings, lecture outlines, handouts, evaluation procedures)
- Assume primary responsibility for teaching an undergraduate or graduate course in special education and/or their area(s) of interest.
- Supervise students during a practicum/internship/student teaching.
- Mentor/advise students related to experiences such as research design, inquiry projects, honor student theses, etc.

#### 4. Service & Professional Development Outcomes & Competencies

This area includes competencies related to service and professional development.

**Service.** Ph.D. graduates will have engaged in service to the program/department/university, field of special education, and the larger professional community. Ph.D. candidates may select experiences from two or more categories of the following:

- Engage in local community service (e.g., school, community agency)
- Participate in in-service at the program, department, school, and/or university level (e.g., search committee, IBM admissions, etc.)
- Participate in a local graduate student organization
- Participate in a regional/national professional organization (e.g., CEC, SSSR, NASP)

**Professional Development.** Ph.D. graduates will have demonstrated knowledge and ability to work with teachers/practitioners in a variety of ways to improve practices that will lead to enhanced outcomes for students with disabilities and/or at risk for experience learning and behavioral difficulties. For example, Ph.D. candidates may:

- Develop, plan, and present in-service training(s) and/or presentation(s) to teachers or practitioners in area of interest independently or with faculty (e.g., outcomes/objectives, content outline, presentation slides, activities, handouts, references, evaluation procedures)
- Consult on a case independently or with faculty (e.g., description of case, description of problem/goal, consultation activity plan, evaluation procedures)

#### Doctoral Record of Progress

KNOWLEDGE & CONTENT	List Academic YEAR →	
	Completed	Details
<b>Foundational Knowledge</b>		List course number and title
<i>Required:</i>	Seminar 1	-----
Four doctoral classes in special education	Seminar 2	-----
Other graduate courses related to theory, content, and professional knowledge	Seminar 3	-----
	Seminar 4	-----
	Other 1	-----
	Other 2	-----
	Other 3	-----
	Other 4	-----

Students document their progress toward Doctoral Competencies in a **PhD Record of Progress Workbook**. Each year, students update the workbook with relevant progress in each competency area. (See thumbnail on left of for how students would document annual progress in foundational knowledge.)

The information from each year is summarized on an overview, which provides a snapshot of progress toward competencies. This snapshot allows students and advisors to monitor progress and identify opportunities to support progress. (See thumbnail on right for major milestones and progress toward Competency Area 1: Knowledge and Content on the summary tab.)

Academic YEAR →	Academic YEAR →					
	Year 1	Year 2	Year 3	Year 4	Year 5	Year 6
<b>MAJOR MILESTONES</b>	Completed	Completed	Completed	Completed	Completed	Completed
Write Comprehensive Exam						
Defend Comprehensive Exam						
Write Dissertation Proposal						
Defend Dissertation Proposal						
Complete Dissertation Data Collection						
Write Dissertation						
Defend Dissertation						
<b>KNOWLEDGE &amp; CONTENT</b>	Completed	Completed	Completed	Completed	Completed	Completed
<b>Foundational Knowledge</b>						
<i>Required:</i>	Seminar 1					
Four doctoral classes in special education	Seminar 2					
Other graduate courses related to theory, content, and professional knowledge	Seminar 3					
	Seminar 4					
	Other 1					
	Other 2					

## Annual Summary of Progress (SoP)

At the end of every academic year, each Ph.D. student will participate in an Annual Summary of Progress (SoP) review. The purpose of the SoP review is to (a) ensure students are meeting core competencies in a timely manner, (b) set annual (or more frequent) goals, and (c) provide feedback to the student on current performance. Students work with their major advisor to schedule their review. Depending on their progress in the Ph.D. program, their review may be conducted with (a) their advisor only or (b) a SoP committee (major advisor and two other members of program faculty).

### Preparing for SoP Review

To prepare for this meeting, students complete or update the following documents and send to their advisor 1-week in advance of their scheduled review:

- Curriculum Vitae* updated with all relevant information
- Record of Progress Workbook* (see prior section)
- Summary of Progress and Goals* for upcoming academic year (see screenshot below).
  - **Summary of progress section.** Students provide a short (2-4 sentences) summary of progress for this past academic year and progress to date (all years in Ph.D. program). Concise summaries focus on the key expectations for each area.
  - **Goals for upcoming academic year.** Students develop 1-3 goals that target key/needed expectations.

KNOWLEDGE AND CONTENT	
Summary of progress (academic year):	
★ Summary of progress (to date):	
★	
Progress Evaluation	Next Steps
<input type="checkbox"/> Student is making adequate progress	<i>Develop goals for upcoming academic year</i>
<input type="checkbox"/> Student is making some progress*	<i>Develop goals for upcoming academic year Develop intermediate goals (3-6 months)*</i>
<input type="checkbox"/> Student is making minimal progress*	<i>Develop goals for upcoming academic year Develop intermediate goals (2-4 months)*</i>
★ Goals for upcoming academic year	Completion Date
•	Click or tap to enter a date.
•	Click or tap to enter a date.
•	Click or tap to enter a date.

### SoP Committee Review Meeting

If students are meeting with their advisor, the meeting may be in a brief check-in on progress. If students are meeting with a SoP committee, plan for the following.

- Prepare a **formal presentation** using a set of slides (no more than 10) that describe
  - career goals,
  - specific details about the progress from the previous year's evaluation in each competency area,
  - if relevant, describe the degree to which students have met your overall and intermediate goals for any area of need recommended by prior advisor/committee,
  - a summative self-evaluation based on the data of your last year of progress, and
  - key goals for the upcoming academic year.
- Deliver 10-15 min formal presentation at your SoP Meeting.

### SoP Review Outcomes

The advisor and/or SoP review committee will provide (a) narrative feedback and (b) an evaluation for each Core Competency area (Knowledge and Content, Research and Scholarship, University Teaching, Service and Professional Development) as well as overall progress. During the review, the student and advisor/committee will discuss self-determined annual goals and recommendations for changes, if any. When appropriate, the student and committee may agree upon a set of intermediate goals to document progress toward annual goals and competencies.

In making an evaluation of a student's progress, the student and their advisor/SoP committee will consider the student's past and current progress, compared to expected progress, to yield one of three review evaluation outcomes (see Table below).

Review Evaluation Outcome	Next Steps
<b>Adequate Progress</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Develop goals for upcoming academic year</li><li>• Continue on projected path</li></ul>
<b>Some Progress</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Develop goals for upcoming academic year</li><li>• Identify areas of focus</li><li>• Develop intermediate goals (3-6 months)</li></ul>
<b>Minimal Progress</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Develop goals for upcoming academic year</li><li>• Identify areas of focus</li><li>• Develop intermediate goals (2-4 months)</li><li>• Review continuation in program</li></ul>

Students are responsible for working with supervising faculty to achieve their annual or intermediate goals. For students making minimal progress in one or more years, the review committee will determine whether probation or continuation in the Special Education program is warranted.

### Comprehensive (General) Examination

Faculty in the Special Education Program have determined that the **comprehensive** (qualifying or general) exam consists of an integrative, in-depth paper in an area of research interest that students develop following the completion of coursework. A presentation, called the general examination, based upon the paper is scheduled for members of your Advisory Committee, faculty, and other students, and can take place at any time of year dependent upon Committee availability. According to the Graduate School, **at least five (5) faculty members must participate** in this general exam. Students should give members of their Advisory Committee a copy of their paper at least two weeks prior to their presentation. Many students find that this qualifying exam results in a thorough review of the literature that subsequently becomes Chapter II of their dissertation (traditional format) or Chapter I (alternative format).

Upon passing this general exam, including a review of the status of the Doctoral Plan of Action requirements, completing all required (and the majority of other) courses on the plan of study, fulfilling related area requirements, as well as the residency requirement, students become a candidate for the degree. The Report on the General Examination for the Doctoral Degree form can be found at: <https://registrar.uconn.edu/wp-content/uploads/sites/1604/2018/02/Report-on-General-Exam-Doctoral.pdf>.

## Dissertation Procedures

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The dissertation procedures include steps for (a) developing a dissertation proposal, (b) writing the final dissertation, and (c) engaging in the final examination or dissertation defense.

### ***Dissertation Proposal (Thesis Preparation and Dissertation Prospectus)***

A dissertation prospectus is a written proposal that delineates the critical problem(s) students plan to examine, a supportive literature review, and the methodology for studying the problem(s).

Dissertation Proposal Guidelines for the Department of Educational Psychology are available at:

[https://epsy.education.uconn.edu/wp-content/uploads/sites/3017/2018/10/Dissertation\\_Proposal\\_Guidelines\\_Forms.pdf](https://epsy.education.uconn.edu/wp-content/uploads/sites/3017/2018/10/Dissertation_Proposal_Guidelines_Forms.pdf).

**Submitting the Proposal.** The student shall submit a written draft of the proposal to their Advisory Committee for feedback and preliminary approval. The date of the submission shall be flexible, and determined by the Major Advisor and the student. It is recommended that the proposal follow the guidelines regarding length and format found in the [EPSY Dissertation Proposal Guidelines](#), although the Advisory Committee may make the determination regarding final format. Note: Each time a revised document is submitted for feedback and approval to members of the Advisory Committee, the student should allow a minimum of 2 weeks for feedback.

**Engage Readers.** Upon preliminary approval of the written draft by the student's Advisory Committee, the Major Advisor (acting on behalf of the Head of the Department or Program to which the student was admitted) shall select two readers from outside the Advisory Committee to review the proposal. The readers may be selected from outside the student's field of study and may include any University of Connecticut faculty member. In addition, it is acceptable that at least one reader from outside the University of Connecticut be selected. All readers must hold a doctoral degree.

When conducting the review of the proposal, the readers shall use the Dissertation Proposal Review Cover Sheet (see form in [EPSY Dissertation Proposal Guidelines](#)) to guide their comments. Each reader must provide written comments to the advisory committee, including a decision to approve or revise and resubmit, prior to an oral presentation.

**Engage Advisory Committee.** After preliminary approval of the document has been granted by the Advisory Committee, the student should send the proposal with the Dissertation Proposal Review Form to each reader. (The Student completes top portion of the form only, and the Major Advisor who completes the Reader information.) In addition, the student should send a copy to the Department of Educational Psychology (EPSY) office to be filed. Readers shall return the completed form to the Major Advisor and the EPSY office. The readers should complete their review within a period of two weeks or within a period agreed upon by the Major Advisor. At this time, the student may tentatively schedule an oral defense date, anticipating a 2-3 week timeframe for completion of the reader review. Note: At the same time the readers are completing their reviews, the student should ensure each member of the Advisory Committee has an updated copy (i.e., all requested revisions have been completed) in order to allow sufficient time for review prior to the oral presentation.

**Oral Presentation of the Proposal.** Once feedback from both readers has been received, the student shall orally present the proposal to the Advisory Committee. The readers shall be invited, but are not required to attend. This meeting shall be convened and conducted by the Major Advisor. At the discretion of the Major Advisor, the oral presentation shall be open to other faculty and graduate

students. Note that if either reader had recommended the proposal be revised and resubmitted, the student may proceed to the oral presentation of the proposal, but the proposal must be revised and resubmitted to the readers following the presentation.

It is the responsibility of the Major Advisor to ensure that the comments and suggestions of the readers are incorporated into a final version of the proposal. In the event that there is disagreement between the readers and the Major Advisor, the Head of the Department or their designee shall serve as an arbitrator to resolve the conflict.

**Final Approval and Submission of the Proposal.** Final approval of the proposal may not be granted without unanimous approval by the Advisory Committee and both readers. A cover sheet (Dissertation Proposal for the Ph.D. Degree) bearing the approval signature of each Advisory Committee member shall be (a) attached to the final proposal and (b) submitted to the EPSY Department Head (see form here: <https://registrar.uconn.edu/wp-content/uploads/sites/1604/2018/02/Dissertation-Proposal-for-Doctoral-Degree.pdf>). The Head's signature on the cover sheet confirms the approval by the committee and readers. The cover sheet and proposal may then be forwarded to the Dean's Office and then to the Graduate School.

If the proposal is initially rejected, the student shall be allowed a maximum of two more submissions of revised versions of the proposal to receive approval.

After receiving final approval of the proposal, the student must either (a) submit an appropriate IRB protocol (IRB-1, IRB-5, or IRB-9) along with a copy of the dissertation proposal to the Institutional Review Board (IRB) or (b) confirm that their study does not meet requirements for human subjects research (see <https://ovpr.uconn.edu/services/rics/irb-2/irb-forms-templates/>). Final approval cannot be granted and data collection related to the proposal cannot begin until IRB approval (or an exemption) is obtained.

### ***Formats for Doctoral Dissertations in Special Education***

The dissertation may take one of three forms:

- A **five-chapter format** including the introduction to the research study (**Chapter 1**), review of the literature (**Chapter 2**), methods and procedures (**Chapter 3**), results (**Chapter 4**), discussion (**Chapter 5**), and appendices.
- A **four-chapter format** including the introduction and review of the literature (**Chapter 1**), methods and procedures (**Chapter 2**), results (**Chapter 3**), and discussion (**Chapter 4**), and appendices.
- An **alternative format** that consists of three individual manuscripts based upon the research study that are appropriate for submission to peer-reviewed journals. The organization of the an alternative format dissertation is: (a) an introduction (brief overview of the underlying issue[s] that tie the manuscripts together); (b) **Manuscript 1**, a critical, integrative review of empirical literature on a current topic; (c) **Manuscript 2**, a research report including the abstract, introduction/statement of problem, methods, results, and discussion sections; (d) **Manuscript 3**, an application paper written for practitioners and emphasizing the application of the research findings; and (e) appendices.

### ***Final Examination: Dissertation Defense***

The dissertation must meet all standards prescribed by a student's Advisory Committee and the Graduate School. Students should plan sufficient time for all members of their committee to make

suggestions for revision. A preliminary or working copy must be submitted to the Graduate Records Office at least seven (7) days before the dissertation defense with a tentative approval page signed by all committee members at the following link: <https://hclleap-prod2.its.uconn.edu/apps/login/org/index.html>. Notification of the time and place of the examination should be communicated to the Graduate Records Office (at the same link).

The dissertation defense is an oral examination and is conducted as such. All faculty and graduate students are eligible to attend. Only faculty may ask questions. Ordinarily, the defense begins with the student presenting their dissertation research (20-30 minutes), followed by faculty questions (30-60 minutes).

The Department of Educational Psychology has adopted this policy relating to the approval of the dissertation: at least **five members of the faculty**, including all members of the Advisory Committee, must be present (in person or virtually) at the final examination, unless approval from the Dean of the Graduate School has been previously secured. Upon agreement of the Advisory Committee, the readers for the proposal may serve as readers for the dissertation. Note, however, that the role of the reader in the final dissertation defense is different from that in the proposal. That is, decisions regarding the outcome of the defense rest solely with the Advisory Committee, taking into account the opinions of other participating faculty members. Since five faculty members must be present at the final defense, the student and Major Advisor may wish to add the two readers of the proposal to the Advisory Committee following approval of the proposal. If so, then written consent to a change in committee membership should be obtained from the Graduate School.

Upon final approval of the dissertation, the student and Advisory Committee members complete the **Report on the Final Examination** in the online system to facilitate electronic signatures (<https://hclleap-prod2.its.uconn.edu/apps/login/org/index.html>).

Any exceptions to the above are subject to policy as outlined in the Graduate Catalog (<http://gradcatalog.uconn.edu>).