Comprehensive Exam Review

Details regarding comprehensive exam format and procedures are found below and are also available in the Special Education Graduate Handbook.

Students seeking a Masters of Special Education are required to pass a comprehensive exam after completing two-thirds of their courses (see Special Notes below for specific requirements). Students who select the thesis option do not participate in the written comprehensive exam, but rather work with a faculty advisor and his/her extended thesis committee to design, implement, and analyze the results from a research-based investigation and complete an oral comprehensive examination as part of that process. Alternatively, degree-seeking students who elect the non-thesis option are required to successfully complete the written Comprehensive Exam.

The purpose of the Special Education Master's Degree Comprehensive Examination is to assess the breadth and depth of your knowledge in special education. You are expected to be able to consider the content of the courses you have taken and apply your knowledge as you respond to essay questions or analyze case studies. It is expected that you will be able to accurately synthesize information and represent your understanding in a clear and professional manner. The comprehensive exam is keyed to your identified area (Special Education or Educational Diagnostician).

Special Notes:

1) Written comprehensive exams are offered once during each long term (usually in February and October), and once in the summer (usually in June).

2) Comprehensive exams are an integral part of the Master's degree in special education and must be passed if a degree is to be awarded. Be aware that the Graduate School allows candidates two attempts to pass the comprehensive exam. Special approval of a departmental advisory committee and the Dean of Graduate Studies and Research must be gained if a third attempt is necessary.

3) A minimum of two-thirds of coursework on your Plan must be completed prior to taking the Master's comprehensive exam. This equates to a minimum of 24 semester hours being completed on the Master of Special Education Plan and 27 semester hours on the Educational Diagnostician Plan. The 27 hours students on the Educational Diagnostician Plan must have completed prior to registering for the comprehensive exam must include, but may not be limited to, the completion of all prerequisites for Psy 691.
When planning your timeframe for taking the comprehensive exam and scheduled graduation, please remember that coursework cannot exceed the six-year time limit. Thus, no courses applied to your Plan can be older than six academic years. Also, it is not advised to wait until the semester you want to graduate to take your comprehensive exam.

Comprehensive Exam Components:

Master of Special Education Written Exam:
Candidates are required to respond to essay questions or perform case study analysis on topics from three categories:
1. Characteristics/Content: high/low incidence, balanced approach to reading instruction, and preparing lesson plans to meet individual student’s needs
2. Techniques & Strategies: differentiation, behavior, assistive technology, authentic & functional assessment, transition, discipline, motivation, social skills, and classroom management
3. Special Education Law/Processes: collaboration, inclusion, parents/families, minorities/culture, the IEP process, drafting appropriate and measureable IEP goals/objectives, and necessary steps/protocol for a student to become eligible for special education services.

Master of Special Education with Educational Diagnostician Certification Written Exam:
Candidates are required to respond to essay questions or perform case study analysis from the following content areas:
- eligibility criteria, multidisciplinary team membership and roles, members of IEP (ARD) team, required areas of assessment for full and individual evaluation (FIE), formal and informal evaluation tools, constructing measureable goals/objectives, conducting a functional behavior assessment (FBA), behavior intervention plans, transition planning

Oral Examination for Thesis Students:
1. Characteristics/Content: high/low incidence, balanced approach to reading instruction, and preparing lesson plans to meet individual student’s needs
2. Techniques & Strategies: differentiation, behavior, assistive technology, authentic & functional assessment, transition, discipline, motivation, social skills, and classroom management
3. Special Education Law/Processes: collaboration, inclusion, parents/families, minorities/culture, the IEP process, drafting appropriate
and measureable IEP goals/objectives, and necessary steps/protocol for a student to become eligible for special education services.

Preparing for the Exam:
Once we have received your registration information and the registration deadline has elapsed, you will receive more direction as to the content of your specific questions.

Grading Criteria:

All written exams are graded using blind review. Your submission will receive two independent grades, and, if there is a discrepancy, it will get a third review.

You will need to synthesize the content from the special education courses you have taken (as appropriate) in responding. Thorough, thoughtful, and comprehensive responses are expected. Again, your writing style should be clear, professional, and representative of a Master’s level educator. Grammatical errors will distract from the content and can affect the scoring of your essays. Individual aids, such as a dictionary or thesaurus, will not be permitted at the test location. Students who are registered with disability services due to a documented disability will be accommodated according to the recommendations of the staff in Disability Services. Consider content, presentation, accuracy, completeness when developing your essays. Oral Comprehensive Exams will be scored on a rating scale for each question; however, the rubric for the written exam is included here.
All responses to the essay/case study questions will be graded based on the following rubric:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>SPED Written Comprehensive Exam Essay Question Grading Rubric*</th>
<th>Score</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Response Requirements</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5 The writer developed each aspect of the question or case study and goes beyond the prompts to address additional related material.</td>
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<tr>
<td>4 The writer addresses each aspect of the question.</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 The writer addresses the appropriate topic and partially fulfills all requirements.</td>
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<tr>
<td>2 The writer addresses the appropriate topic, but omits many requirements.</td>
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<tr>
<td>1 The writer is off topic or vaguely addresses the topic.</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Quality and Quantity of Details</strong></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>5 The quality and quantity of details provided by the writer sufficiently developed each element of the question. Sufficient supporting statements, evidence or examples, as necessary, were provided to explain or persuade effectively.</td>
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<tr>
<td>4 Details support the elements of the text with clarity, depth and accuracy, but additional details, examples or explanations were needed.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 Details are related to the elements of the text, but do not support all elements with sufficient clarity, depth or accuracy. Answers do not fully address the question.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 Details are loosely related to the elements of the text, but lack clarity, depth and accuracy. Additional details, examples or explanations are needed to develop most points.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 Virtually no details are present. Details do not develop the elements of the text.</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Grammar and Mechanics</strong></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>5 Sentences are grammatically and mechanically correct. Good sentence structure and paragraph construction. People first language used consistently. Good flow between elements. Answers to all questions thorough and clearly stated.</td>
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<tr>
<td>4 Minor or few grammatical and mechanical errors exist, but do not affect readability.</td>
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<tr>
<td>3 A number of grammatical errors exist. May need improved clarity, flow and purpose / direction. Writing compromises demonstration of full understanding of scope of task requirements.</td>
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<tr>
<td>2 Grammatical errors (e.g., spelling, grammar, punctuation, word usage, and sentence construction) throughout the paper affect readability and negate understanding.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 Multiple grammatical and mechanical errors, obstructing meaning.</td>
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</table>

Maximum Point Total: 15

*Cognitive Level and Quality Writing Instrument (CLAQWA), modified. Flateby, T. & Metzger, E. University of South Florida.
**Oral Comprehensive Examination for Thesis Students**

**Rating Form**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>DUE DATE: Return this rating form to Tabitha</th>
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</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Examinee</th>
<th>Rater:</th>
</tr>
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<table>
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<tr>
<th>Rating: (Place an X next to the appropriate outcome.)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Pass:</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**New Point System For Each Answer:**

This system IS NOW IN EFFECT. Please circle one of the numbers below for **each** of the student's responses. Please still indicate pass or fail above, but the points now will matter.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>First Answer</td>
<td>Second Answer</td>
<td>Third Answer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>0 (nothing is accurate regarding question)</td>
<td>0 (nothing is accurate regarding question)</td>
<td>0 (nothing is accurate regarding question)</td>
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<td>1</td>
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<tr>
<td>4 (Excellent)</td>
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<td>4</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

**Comments (Required if Failed):**

Students must meet minimum standards (a score of 70% or higher) to pass the examination (oral or written). On the oral exam, this equates to a total score of at least 8.4/12. On the written exams this will be a total score of 10.5/15.
Applying for the exam:

You can apply for the exam after you have completed 2/3 of your coursework. If you meet that requirement, then you need to respond to the email (sent every semester) with the date of administration. You will only be registered and permitted to take the exam if you register via email with either the administrative assistant or Dr. Jones. If you are a thesis student, you will take your oral exam at the time of your thesis proposal meeting.

IMPORTANT Reminders to Test-takers:

As you prepare to sit for your comprehensive examination, remember…

1. Plan to arrive a few minutes before the start time to locate and settle into the testing room. A proctor will be present to oversee the process.

2. You must be pre-registered for the exam. If you have not pre-registered, you will not be allowed to sit for the exam.

3. You will be allowed access to Microsoft Word to complete your exam. However, you will not be allowed to have any other application open during the exam.

The day of the exam:

- Bring a photo ID with you. You will need to show your ID before being admitted to the exam room.
- Bring a jacket or dress in layers to be most comfortable in the computer lab.
- You will complete your exam electronically. You should not bring in notebooks, textbooks, or cell phones. You will be provided with blank paper to use for making notes and organizing your thoughts, all of which will be collected at the end of the exam.
This portion of the study guide outlines the course competencies that will be assessed through the comprehensive examination and suggested resources to assist with preparation.

Course Content Breakdown:

SPED 524
SPED 524 examines characteristics of students identified as having emotional or behavioral disorders, mild mental retardation (intellectual disabilities), and learning disabilities, with applications for other exceptionalities. The content includes state and federal rules and regulations, issues and trends, instructional strategies, school-home partnerships, and formal and informal assessment.

Essential Skills
- IDEA eligibility criteria for special education and related services for students with mild disabilities
- Texas Education Agency procedural rights and safeguards
- Procedures and timelines for evaluation, service implementation, and dismissal

Texas EC-12 Special Education Competencies
1. Competency 001: The special education teacher understands and applies knowledge of the characteristics and needs of students with disabilities.
2. Competency 003: The special education teacher understands and applies knowledge of procedures for planning instruction for individuals with disabilities.
3. Competency 005: understanding assistive technology as defined by state and federal regulations.
4. Competency 007: The special education teacher knows how to promote students’ educational performance in all content areas by facilitating their achievement in a variety of settings and situations.
5. Competency 008: The special education teacher promotes students’ performance in English, language arts, and reading.
6. Competency 009: The special education teacher promotes students’ performance in mathematics.

Texas EC-12 Educational Diagnostician Competencies
1. Competency 001: Knows eligibility criteria.
2. Competency 001: Knows procedures for identification of disabilities and determination of education need.

Resources
SPED 526
S0PED 526 examines the characteristics of students with moderate to severe disabilities. Emphasis is placed on etiology, ethics, contributing factors, conditions that affect learning, the challenges of identifying students with disabilities, and the need for academic, social, and emotional accommodations, assistive technology, and support.

Essential Skills
- IDEA eligibility criteria for special education and related services for students with moderate to severe disabilities
- Texas Education Agency procedural rights and safeguards
- Procedures and timelines for evaluation, service implementation, and dismissal

Texas EC-12 Special Education Competencies
1. Competency 001: The special education teacher understands and applies knowledge of the characteristics and needs of students with disabilities.
2. Competency 003: The special education teacher understands and applies knowledge of procedures for planning instruction for individuals with disabilities.
3. Competency 005: understanding assistive technology as defined by state and federal regulations.
4. Competency 006: understanding and applying knowledge of transition issues and procedures across the life span.
5. Competency 007: The special education teacher knows how to promote students' educational performance in all content areas by facilitating their achievement in a variety of settings and situations.
6. Competency 008: The special education teacher promotes students' performance in English, language arts, and reading.
7. Competency 009: The special education teacher promotes students' performance in mathematics.

Texas EC-12 Educational Diagnostician Competencies
3. Competency 001: Knows eligibility criteria.
SPED 528
This course will provide students with a history of special education litigation and legislation. Specifically, students will gain a deep understanding of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act, the major legislation governing the provision of special education services. Students will become familiar with federal statutes and regulations concerning assessment and evaluation procedures, due process and mediation, discipline, individual education plans (IEP’s), free appropriate education (FAPE), and least restrictive environment (LRE).

Essential Skills
- Students’ right to a free and appropriate education (FAPE)
- Responsibilities of school personnel to be in compliance with IDEA
- ARD meeting timelines and procedures
- Student discipline procedures; Manifestation Determination procedures

Texas Special Education Teacher Competencies
1. Competency 010: The special education teacher understands the philosophical, historical, and legal foundations of special education.
2. Competency 011: The special education teacher applies knowledge of professional roles and responsibilities and adheres to legal and ethical requirements of the profession.

Texas EC-12 Educational Diagnostician Competencies
1. Competency 001: Knows procedures for identification of disabilities and determination of educational need.
2. Competency 002: Understand and applies knowledge of ethnic, linguistic, cultural, and socioeconomic diversity.
3. Competency 008: Understand apply knowledge of the purpose, philosophy, and legal foundations of evaluation.

Resources
SPED 535
The course provides a focus on the principles of applied behavior analysis (ABA). While wide application of ABA principles is possible, the application of ABA to the field of education is highlighted.

The overarching goal of this course is to provide advanced training proactive and scientific-based approaches to behavior management and behavioral aspects of education. In order to meet this overarching goal, students must be able to demonstrate mastery of the course objectives, or learner outcomes. At the conclusion of this course, students will be able to:

1. Demonstrate a thorough knowledge of the key concepts, vocabulary, techniques and outcomes of the use of the basic principles of Applied Behavior Analysis (ABA; the scientific approach).

2. Demonstrate skill in the use of ABA principles in the design of behavior change programs (systematic observation and recording of behavior, charting and graphing data, developing behavioral objectives, and designing and implementing behavior change programs) in classrooms for students with disabilities, including individual and group behavior management intervention strategies.

3. Understand components of a positive behavior interventions and supports (PBIS) and how these components are applied to individual, classroom, and schoolwide systems of support.

4. Understand the importance of professional ethics as related to special education programming and the use of behavior change programs.

TExES Competencies for Special Education
Competency 002: The special education teacher understands formal and informal assessment procedures and knows how to evaluate student competencies to make instructional decisions.

Competency 004: The special education teacher understands and applies knowledge of procedures for managing the teaching and learning environment, including procedures related to the use of assistive technology.

Competency 006: The special education teacher understands and applies knowledge of issues and procedures for teaching appropriate student behavior and social skills.

TExES Competencies for Diagnosticians

Competency 003: The educational diagnostician understands and applies knowledge of student assessment and evaluation, program planning, and instructional decision making.

Competency 004: The educational diagnostician selects and administers appropriate formal and informal assessments and evaluations.

Competency 006: The educational diagnostician understands appropriate curricula and instructional strategies for students with disabilities.

Competency 007: The educational diagnostician understands the use of appropriate assessment, evaluation, planning, and instructional strategies for developing students’ behavioral and social skills.

Competency 008: The educational diagnostician understands and applies knowledge of professional practices, roles, and responsibilities and the philosophical, legal and ethical foundations of evaluation related to special education.

Resources


**SPED 540**

This course addresses the (a) process of verbal, non-verbal, and paralinguistic communication skills; (b) assessment of communication competence, including social skills; and (c) research-based intervention strategies and effective practices for promoting effective communication for learners with social communication impairments, including Autism Spectrum Disorders. Language development, communication and language-based assessments, social skills training, alternative/augmentative modes of communication, assistive technology devices, and the impact of contextual factors affecting communication competence will be discussed and investigated.

At the conclusion of this course, students will be able to:

1. Students will demonstrate their knowledge of the etiologies and characteristics of receptive/expressive language, cognitive communication, social aspects of communication & communication modalities in individuals with autism spectrum disorders (ASD).

2. Students will identify and describe sequences and major milestones of typical development during infancy in the areas of cognitive, social and language development.

3. Students will integrate developmental theories and milestones into an assessment of individuals with social communication impairments, including ASD.

4. Students will be able to identify, explain, and compare strategies and materials used to educate individuals with social communication impairments, including ASD.

5. Students will demonstrate understanding of procedures of effective assessments, instruction, and supports that target (a) social communication, (b) functional behavior, and (c) the academic performance of individuals with social communication impairments, including ASD.

**TExES Competencies for Special Education**

**TExES Competencies for Diagnostician**
**Competency 001.** The educational diagnostician understands and applies knowledge of ethnic, cultural, linguistic and socioeconomic diversity and the significance of individual diversity for evaluation, planning and instruction. Recognizes and applies knowledge of the cognitive, academic, communicative, physical, social and emotional characteristics of individuals with disabilities, including those with different levels of severity and with multiple disabilities. Knows how to access information on the cognitive, academic, communicative, physical, social and emotional characteristics of individuals with various disabilities.

**Competency 002:** The educational diagnostician understands and applies knowledge of ethnic, cultural linguistic and socioeconomic diversity and the significance of individual diversity for evaluation, planning and instruction. Demonstrates knowledge of issues related to the identification of disabilities in individuals from ethnically, culturally, linguistically and/or socioeconomically diverse backgrounds. Recognizes how the ethnic, cultural and environmental background of students and their families, including linguistic and socioeconomic diversity, may affect evaluation, planning and instruction.

**Competency 003.** Applies knowledge of the links between evaluation, goals and objectives and placement decisions. Uses assessment and evaluation information to assist in identifying realistic expectations for educationally relevant behavior (e.g., vocational, functional, academic, social) in various settings. Interprets and uses assessment and evaluation information to plan individualized programs, make instructional decisions and support ongoing review.

**Competency 004.** Communicating and advocating for the needs of students with ASD to police, emergency responders, and other individuals and groups in the community.

**References**


SPED 573
The purpose of this course is to attain knowledge of cognitive functioning and develop skills in the cognitive assessment of children and adolescents. This course integrates the skills of administration, scoring, and interpretation of major cognitive assessment instruments (e.g., KABC-II, WISC-V, & WJ-IVCOG) in the context of recent cognitive theories and research. The Cattell-Horn-Carroll (CHC) Theory of Cognitive Abilities will be the primary underlying framework for interpreting test data. Also, an emphasis will be placed on utilizing the Cross-Battery Assessment approach when utilizing the CHC theory of cognitive abilities. Issues of assessing culturally and linguistically diverse children and adolescents are integrated throughout the course in addition to specified lectures.

Essential Skills
- Establishing rapport and conducting interviews
- Administering tests of cognitive functioning, including handling test materials, following test directions, and demonstrating competency in timing tests
- Scoring test protocols
- Interpreting test findings
- Writing reports

Texas EC-12 Special Education Competencies
1. Competency 002: The special education teacher understands formal and informal assessment and evaluation procedures and knows how to evaluate student competencies to make instructional decisions.
2. Competency 011: The special education teacher applies knowledge of professional roles and responsibilities and adheres to legal and ethical requirements of the profession.

Texas EC-12 Educational Diagnostician Competencies
1. Competency 003: The educational diagnostician understands and applies knowledge of student assessment and evaluation program planning and instructional decision making.
2. Competency 004: The educational diagnostician selects and administers appropriate formal and informal assessments and evaluations.
3. Competency 005: The educational diagnostician applies skills for interpreting formal and informal assessments and evaluations.
4. Competency 008: The educational diagnostician understands and applies knowledge of professional practices, roles and responsibilities and the philosophical, legal and ethical foundations of evaluation related to special education.

Resources


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**SPED 574**

Explores a variety of methods designed to assess the learning abilities of students. Students will learn to administer, score, and interpret results of evaluations. Topics covered will include measuring achievement, oral language, visual motor integration, and adaptive behavior.

**Essential Skills**

- Demonstrate knowledge of basic measurement concepts and evaluate the psychometric properties of individual achievement, oral language, visual motor integration, and behavioral assessments
- Select, administer, and score a variety of educational tests.
- Complete and review education evaluations
- Interpret test results and review reports to generate appropriate educational goals and objectives
- Use assessment information in making eligibility, program, and placement decisions for individuals with exceptional learning needs, including those from culturally and/or linguistically diverse backgrounds.
- Evaluate and recommend evidenced-based interventions
- Collect informal academic and behavioral data using technology applications
Texas EC-12 Special Education Competencies
3. Competency 002: The special education teacher understands formal and informal assessment and evaluation procedures and knows how to evaluate student competencies to make instructional decisions.
4. Competency 011: The special education teacher applies knowledge of professional roles and responsibilities and adheres to legal and ethical requirements of the profession.

Texas EC-12 Educational Diagnostician Competencies
5. Competency 003: The educational diagnostician understands and applies knowledge of student assessment and evaluation program planning and instructional decision making.
6. Competency 004: The educational diagnostician selects and administers appropriate formal and informal assessments and evaluations.
7. Competency 005: The educational diagnostician applies skills for interpreting formal and informal assessments and evaluations.
8. Competency 008: The educational diagnostician understands and applies knowledge of professional practices, roles and responsibilities and the philosophical, legal and ethical foundations of evaluation related to special education.

Resources

SPED 583
SPED 583 provides students with an understanding if effective reading writing, and math instruction, with emphasis on the challenges faced by children (K-6) with a wide array of disabilities. Major approaches to informal assessment and remediation in reading and math will be reviewed, enabling students to develop diagnostic-prescriptive programs. In addition, this course will provide students with methods of remediation in handwriting, spelling, and conceptual writing.

Essential Skills
- Familiarity with TEKS as they relate to assessment, IEP development, and curriculum/intervention methods
- Developing data based goals on IEP’s; writing measurable goals
- Knowledge/application of effective reading, writing, and math instructional methods

Texas EC-12 Special Education Competencies
1. Competency 001: The special education teacher understands and applies knowledge of the characteristics and needs of students with disabilities.
2. Competency 002: Understanding of formal and informal assessment procedures and how to evaluate student competencies to make
3. Competency 003: The special education teacher understands and applies knowledge of procedures for planning instruction for individuals with disabilities.

4. Competency 007: The special education teacher knows how to promote students’ educational performance in all content areas by facilitating their achievement in a variety of settings and situations.

5. Competency 008: The special education teacher promotes students’ performance in English, language arts, and reading.

6. Competency 009: The special education teacher promotes students’ performance in mathematics.

Texas EC-12 Educational Diagnostician Competencies
1. Competency 003: Understand and apply knowledge of program planning and instructional decision-making
2. Competency 004: Selects, administers, and interprets informal assessments and evaluations.
3. Competency 006: Knows and understands appropriate curricula and instructional strategies for students with disabilities.

Resources
SMART IEP’s (Wrightslaw):

Additional Helpful Texts/Review Materials

Texts:
All textbooks utilized in your graduate coursework, with specific emphasis on your texts from 520, 524, 526, 528, and 586.

EC-12 SPED Standards and TExES Frameworks:
http://cms.texas-ets.org/files/9113/4193/4123/special_education_ec_12_161_TAAG.pdf
http://cms.texas-ets.org/files/5813/4186/3524/educational_diagnostician_153_TAAG.pdf

Council for Exceptional Children (CEC) Standards:
http://www.cec.SPED.org/Standards

State:

Other CEC Resources:
http://www.cec.SPED.org/

Texas Education Agency (TEA) Special Education Newsletter/Website: http://www.tea.state.tx.us/index2.aspx?id=2147491399