



**Student Handbook  
Graduate Programs in Special Education**

**Texas A&M University–Commerce  
Department of Psychology and Special Education**

**Coordinator:  
Dr. Beth A. Jones**

**Faculty Members:**

**Dr. Kelly Carrero  
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Dr. Beth A. Jones  
Dr. Belinda Rudinger**

Congratulations on your acceptance for graduate studies in special education! The faculty of the Department of Psychology and Special Education welcomes you. We are honored that you have selected Texas A&M University-Commerce.

You have chosen to pursue a graduate degree and/or additional certifications and, therefore, you are committing a significant amount of time. Graduate education is more than simply completing the requisite coursework. Rather, a graduate education is the “pursuit of knowledge.” While all education can be characterized by “the pursuit of knowledge”, this pursuit is intensified at the graduate level. Graduate students typically demonstrate increased interest and understanding of research, collaboration, specific interventions, and communication skills. Graduate education requires critical thinking, deep analyses, and application. Successful graduate students do not limit learning to the course assignments. Rather, they consistently seek ways to increase both their knowledge base and understanding through research-based activities.

There are several resources available (e.g., internet, library, professional conferences, workshops, professional journals, etc.). The successful graduate student routinely accesses these resources to expand their professional standards. The faculty recognizes there are many constraints on the graduate student’s time. However, successful graduate students are expected to find time to access information beyond their textbooks and lecture notes. Major resources available to graduate students at TAMUC include: (a) the faculty, (b) peers, (c) previously taken courses, (d) reputable internet sites, and (e) the TAMUC library. Successful graduate students access resources and get involved in their education. The Department of Psychology, Counseling, and Special Education supports a variety of ways for the dedicated student to get involved. These include:

- ✚ Specific research activities with faculty;
- ✚ Participation in professional organizations such as CEC/TCEC, CLD, TEDA, LDAT, The ARC, and AAIDD;
- ✚ Attendance and/or presentation at professional workshops and conferences;
- ✚ Participation in departmental monthly speaker events; and
- ✚ Participation in departmental social events.

Graduate studies prepare students to demonstrate expertise and leadership in their profession. You are expected to develop the data-based critical thinking skills associated with successful learner outcomes.

***This booklet is provided as part of your formal orientation program. Take the time to become familiar with it. This booklet contains detailed information about specific courses of study, timelines, opportunities for involvement, and processes necessary for practicum, comprehensive examinations, graduation, and certification. Students will also be provided an orientation video upon admission to the program. Students will work directly with the faculty advisor to sign and return a degree plan and formal invitation to the program.***

Again, we would like to congratulate you on your admission into the master’s degree or additional certification program in special education. Do not hesitate to ask any faculty or staff if you need assistance or clarification. We will see you in class and anticipate seeing you at departmental functions.

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Graduate studies offered by Texas A&M University-Commerce are distinguished from undergraduate studies in that graduate students are expected to demonstrate mastery in scholarship, seriousness of purpose, and ability to think critically and independently. In accordance with this distinction, graduate courses are designed to develop the student's ability to gather relevant facts, subject these facts to applied and theoretical analyses and arrive at reasonable generalizations and produce sound data-based conclusions.

Your application for graduate studies indicated that you are willing to devote the time and energy necessary to obtain a quality graduate education. Your acceptance into the master's degree or additional certification program indicates that the department believes in your ability to successfully participate in graduate studies.

## **Program Overview**

### Responsibility:

Pursuit of a graduate degree or an additional certification is a substantive undertaking. It requires commitment. Although the entire faculty and staff are available to assist you, you must assume primary responsibility for your graduate education. The knowledge you gain is ultimately in your hands. The amount of effort you devote to the process is directly related to the amount of difficulty you might encounter in completing the degree.

There are several steps, rules, regulations and procedures applicable to graduate studies. To the extent that you take the time to become well informed about these, you will experience fewer problems and less frustration. In addition to the information contained in this booklet, you should also become knowledgeable of the rules, regulations, timelines, and procedures detailed in the Graduate Catalog.

### Advising:

Your advisor is the single most important faculty member for you, particularly in the early stages of your studies. It is recommended that you meet with your advisor at least once per semester. This individual is your primary resource and is responsible for assisting you with the paperwork necessary for an orderly progression of your graduate program. This full-time faculty member provides guidance. It is up to you to put the plan into action. A list of faculty can be found in **Appendix A**.

Your faculty advisor is: Dr. Beth Jones  
[Beth.Jones@tamuc.edu](mailto:Beth.Jones@tamuc.edu)

#### Advising Helpful Hints:

- PSY 595 can be subbed for SPED 595, but enroll in the SPED section first please as they are cross-listed.
- If there is a W in the section number in the online schedule of classes, that indicates a web-based class; MPLX=Mesquite Metroplex
- If you are planning to take the majority of your coursework online, please plan to take both 573/574 during the summer block. These courses are only offered face to face.
- Begin planning for 691 (Practicum) early to avoid a delay in graduation/being able to apply for diagnostician jobs. You will have to be permitted to enroll in 691—after a complete application is received.

- If you are on the thesis route, you will have at least two semesters of 518 (thesis hours while you are proposing and defending). You will have to be permitted into those sections.

Courses that are Prerequisites	Courses that Require the Prerequisite
SPED 535	SPED 605
SPED 572 Min Grade B	SPED 573
SPED 524	SPED 583
SPED 524, SPED 526, SPED 528, SPED 586, SPED 572, SPED 573, SPED 574, SPED 535, SPED 540,; Grade of B or better in SPED 572, 573, and 574	SPED 691

Main Offices:

The main office of the department is in Binnion Hall, Room 201. Faculty members have offices on the second floor of Henderson and Binnion. Some faculty members are available to meet with you, by appointment, at any of the university’s off-site campuses.

You should become acquainted with Ms. Marlena Fisk and Ms. Nicole Jones (903-886-5940). Ms. Fisk and Ms. Jones schedules many departmental activities and processes much of the paperwork associated with graduate and certification requirements.

Record File:

As you proceed in your graduate studies, a record file will be maintained in the departmental offices. This file contains the approved degree/deficiency plan as well as any and all decisions regarding your studies. It is your responsibility to insure that all decisions are in writing and placed in your file. The official file is maintained in the Graduate Office in the McDowell Administration Building. Grades and copies of official forms are automatically placed in your file.

Communication with the Department:

Routinely throughout the semester, the department has a need to contact its graduate students. Email is the primary mode of communication between students and the department. These communiqués may be to announce an upcoming speaker, a social function, new courses, or opportunities for the graduate student to participate in research activities. *It is critical that the department and your advisor have your email address and know how to contact you.* University policy mandates all students must use leomail.

You, the graduate student, will also have the need to contact the department prior to applying to take comprehensive exams, taking the appropriate TEXES for certification, applying for practicum, requesting entrance into some courses, etc. This contact assists the department in tracking your program progression as well as updating our data bases. Frequently following your contact, the department will provide you with notification of acceptance or denial. *It is your responsibility to keep all contact information current. In the event of change, you should inform, in writing, Ms. Sutherland and your advisor as soon as practical.*

Changes that you should report to your advisor and Ms. Sutherland may include: name changes, address and phone changes, email address changes, etc. It is also recommended that, at the

beginning of each semester, you email (or otherwise provide in writing) your current contact information, even if the information has not changed. *It is your responsibility to make sure the department and your advisor have current addresses to contact you.*

### Important Documents:

It is important that you keep certain documents as you will need to refer to or furnish them at later dates. You may be asked to submit information to the Educator Certification Office, Registrar or department. Minimally, these include:

1. The letter from the Dean of Graduate Studies and Research informing you of your acceptance to the graduate school;
2. The letter from the department notifying you of your acceptance for graduate studies in special education/your signed invitation;
3. An approved copy of your degree/deficiency plan;
4. Any approved course substitution and course transfer forms;
5. Other information as applicable (e.g., Independent Study Contracts);
6. Informal copies of your transcript (replace each semester); and
7. A copy of your Teacher Service Record.
8. Texas Teaching Certificate

### The Process:

Obtaining a graduate degree or graduate-level certification is a process, but it need not be a “test of endurance”. However, there are critical targets of which you will need to be aware:

- Step 1: Complete file with the Graduate School for study;
- Step 2: Application and Admission to the Certification Office if Seeking Educational Certification as part of your program;
- Step 3: Interview/Acceptance by the department;
- Step 4: Enrollment in one or two courses that do not have prerequisite courses;
- Step 5: Completion of a degree plan or deficiency plan (there is a fee for a deficiency plan);
- Step 6: Approval of degree/deficiency plan (you should receive an approved copy);
- Step 7: Continued enrollment in courses as specified in your degree/deficiency plan;
- Step 8: Completion and submission of Academic Progress Report prior to registering for comps/thesis hours.
- Step 9: Successful completion of the departmental comprehensive examinations (given once each fall, spring and summer) **OR** completion of the thesis requirement for students seeking a graduate degree;
- Step 9: Diag Plan: Approval by the department prior to submitting the application for Practicum (SPED 691) for students seeking certification as an educational diagnostician;
- Step 10: Diag Plan: Approval by the department to take the TExES 253 (there is a fee associated with this exam) for students seeking certification. Approval will only be granted upon earning a score of 85 or higher on Certify Teacher modules assigned during 691 and with practicum instructor approval; and
- Step 11: Application for graduation with the Office of Graduate Studies.
- Step `1: After graduation and a successful recommendation for certification completed by your practicum instructor and mentor, the Certification Office will recommend candidates for certification.

You need to be aware that, although graduate study is a continual learning process, you are expected to be progressing toward your degree and/or certification. Each semester, the faculty reviews the status and progression of our graduate students. If you do not appear to be active or progressing, you will be contacted by the department in an attempt to ascertain your level of commitment. If you have not insured that the department has accurate contact information and you do not appear to be an active student, the department may elect to dismiss you from the program. Re-entry will require submitting another application for admission to graduate studies and being accepted into the department's graduate program.

## **Programs in Special Education**

Texas A&M University-Commerce offers a master's degree with two options, Master of Science (M.S.) and a Master of Education (M.Ed.). The Master of Science and Master of Education require the successful completion of either a comprehensive examination or a graduate thesis. These degree options can also be blended into certification standards for either the generic special education certificate or educational diagnostician certificate. In addition, we offer an educational diagnostician certification only plan and a postbaccalaureate degree with initial teacher certification.

Generally, the program has an established set of "Core Courses" that provide a foundation for additional study and these courses must be taken by all graduate students, regardless of the degree option selected. These core courses are SPED 520, Psy/SPED 535, and SPED 528. Every student in a degree program will take these four courses.

Depending upon the graduate program you are enrolled in, additional coursework may be required in which you explore (a) the characteristics of students with disabilities (SPED 524, 526, or 540), (b) methods of teaching students with disabilities (SPED 563, 583, or 586), (c) assessment of students with, or suspected of having, disabilities (SPED 572, SPED 573, SPED 574 and Psy 635), and (d) research (SPED 605, SPED 518 or SPED 595). Prior to enrolling in a course, consult with your major advisor for the certification standard.

Your master's degree program may include electives from special education as well as approved electives outside the department. It is recommended that you consult with your advisor and carefully select your electives to ensure that they complement your overall graduate education. See **Appendix B** for the degree plans associated with each Program of Study option.

## **Graduate Study is a Serious Endeavor:**

Graduate studies and the attainment of a graduate education are designed to be challenging. Successful students must be dedicated, not to the degree, but to the process. The continual pursuit of knowledge is what separates the graduate from the undergraduate student. The superior graduate student seeks knowledge through a variety of means:

- ✚ Coursework (readings, assignments, and discussions);
- ✚ Independent reading, research, products; and
- ✚ Opportunities provided through the department, college, university and system.

As a graduate student in the Department of Psychology and Special Education, you have been invited to be part of a highly screened and carefully selected learning community. We encourage you to be an active member and contributor to the community. Knowledge gained through involvement

and contribution cannot be replicated through independent readings or simply completing course assignments. Through your active participation in graduate studies, you will become a more complete problem solver, basing your decisions on reliable and valid information supported by the professional community. The department provides ample opportunities for the graduate student to learn through involvement.

### Academic Integrity

Many graduate courses in special education require students to develop original products to meet specific criteria provided in the course syllabus. Some examples of these products include papers, abstracts, models and paradigms, curricula, etc. Graduate students are encouraged to familiarize themselves with the *Publication Manual of the American Psychological Association, 7<sup>th</sup> Edition*. This is the style manual which will be used for graduate assignments, theses, papers, etc.

A concern frequently facing graduate students and faculty is **plagiarism**. Plagiarism is using another person's words or ideas and representing them as your own. Occasionally, plagiarism is intentional. A student copies, verbatim, something another person has done and passes the work on as original. Frequently, plagiarism occurs when a student discovers important information and paraphrases the information without citing the original source. This, too, is plagiarism.

In this, the electronic age, plagiarism can also occur through the internet. Services are available which will develop papers for students on a variety of topics. Using someone's work as your original work constitutes plagiarism.

The consequences for plagiarism are serious and severe. Students can fail the assignment or the course. Students may be dismissed from the University for committing plagiarism. Be sure you understand plagiarism and become familiar with the Student Handbook, the Graduate Catalog, and the APA publication manual. See **Appendix D** for the department's Retention/Dismissal Procedures.

APA Style: **All work should be submitted using APA style.** If you are unfamiliar with APA, it would benefit you to purchase the *Publication Manual of the American Psychological Association* (7<sup>th</sup> ed.) or to access one of the internet sites that provides a summary of this information. All work produced outside of class must be typed unless otherwise noted.

APA Formatting Guidelines: <http://www.psywww.com/resource/apacrib.htm>. This website is offered as a companion to the APA style manual. However, it should not be considered a substitute for directly consulting the APA manual, 6<sup>th</sup> edition for standard of procedures for applying APA style.

### Attendance and Participation:

Students are expected to attend class and actively participate in all assignments, group activities, class discussions, and online activities. Active participation includes the asking of questions and the presentation of one's own understanding with regard to the readings and lectures as well as interactive discussion and participation in activities with other class members. Active participation also includes listening and respectful consideration of the comments of others. This will require all students to complete the required readings, activities, and assignments for that specific class meeting in advance.



Students should email the professor before or on the day of class meeting if you will not be able to attend. If a student is absent, it is the *student's* responsibility to acquire notes, work, handouts, etc. It is recommended that students pair with another classmate as a class partner.

### Email Policy

To provide a framework for professional communication, emails must contain the following:

- Subject Line: Course (e.g., SPED 595); additional information if desired (e.g., Study Guide – Chapter 1)
- Address the reader: Open with Dr. when addressing faculty.
- Adhere to writing mechanics rules; use correct punctuation, capitalization, spelling, and grammar.
- If asking for assistance with an issue, please list **at least 3 things** you have done to try and remediate the issue prior to contacting faculty (these should probably include looking at the syllabus/course rubrics/eCollege, contacting a friend and checking your text, etc.).
- While faculty do expect an email or phone call when you will be missing class, please **do not** send an email when you have missed class asking what you missed or what you need to do. Please take the initiative to read your syllabus and contact two peers to find out what occurred during class.
- Close with your name; E-mails sent through eCollege, especially, need to contain identifying information.

Please send emails from your University accounts and it is your responsibility to check your University account for correspondence regarding your program. Faculty will not discuss grades over email. If you would like to discuss your grade, please make an appointment during office hours.

### Student CEC and Other Student Organizations

Involvement in professional organizations provides the opportunity to continue learning throughout one's career. Membership is often accompanied by journals and opportunities to participate in workshops and conventions. Texas A&M University--Commerce strongly recommends that graduate students become an active member of professional organizations. The department sponsors a variety of student organizations so that students can enjoy the benefits of full membership while a student. Many organizations offer reduced student rates as well as affordable rates for professional liability insurance.

#### *Student Council for Exceptional Children (SCEC)*

The *Council for Exceptional Children (CEC)* is the #1 source for comprehensive, cutting edge information on reaching and teaching individuals with exceptionalities. Student CEC at Texas A&M-Commerce (TAMU-C) is composed of a diverse group of graduate and undergraduate students studying special education, school psychology, elementary and secondary education, social work, and more. SCEC at TAMU-C provides students with opportunities (1) for professional development, (2) to advocate for individuals with exceptionalities and (3) for avenues to increase awareness. Contact the faculty sponsor, Dr. Belinda Rudinger, for more information.

### Excellence in Research: Thesis vs. 595/605

Although most of the graduate degree plan is set, graduate students are able to make some choices. One of the most important choices is "SPED 518-Thesis vs. SPED 595-Research, Literature Techniques".

Many students ask “why write a thesis?” A thesis is a superior way to demonstrate graduate level education. A thesis may also serve as a springboard for students planning to continue their education through doctoral study. The thesis may also serve as the foundation for additional scholarly inquiry. Graduate students who elect to write a thesis are fortunate in that they are able to work closer with their thesis advisor and often develop higher levels of expertise in a subject area. The sense of achievement associated with conducting research that contributes information to the professional literature cannot be matched. A publication, often the result of the thesis, is a tremendous addition to the educator’s resume or vitae. Many school districts and other entities, focusing on individuals with exceptionalities, need educators who can design, implement, and interpret research. The thesis communicates to prospective employers that the applicant can understand and conduct research. A thesis accompanied by a publication in a professional journal is, undoubtedly, one means of demonstrating this ability.

Many graduate students elect not to write a thesis due to its perceived difficulty and time commitment. It is true that writing a thesis is not an easy task. However, students would not have been admitted into the department had the faculty not believed they were capable of making a contribution to the field. Graduate students should understand that a thesis is not an individual activity. Rather, the thesis is a process occurring with significant involvement of the student’s thesis advisor and committee members. A thesis advisor, who may or may not be the student’s overall advisor, is intricately involved from the conception of the study to the final product and defense. The thesis advisor provides guidance in selecting the topic, suggesting committee members, designing and implementing the research, interpreting the results, and writing the thesis.

Research Literature Techniques (SPED 595) also offers significant challenges to students. SPED 595 is frequently completed in one semester. SPED 595 emphasizes special education research, basic statistics, literature review, proposal and report development, research implementation, needs assessment, program development, and ethical and legal considerations regarding research through the presentation of a formal research proposal and/or presentation of a completed research report. Many students choose to work with their professor to develop a professional publication or presentation.

The selection of thesis or SPED 595 must be the student’s choice. In addition to time and convenience, the decision to select either option must be determined by your immediate and future needs. For those students considering future doctoral studies and other advanced degrees and positions, clearly the best choice is the thesis.

Before making the final choice, students are encouraged to discuss the thesis option with any faculty member. It is recommended that graduate students read a thesis. Becoming acquainted with a thesis often alleviates any fears or concerns the graduate student may have. At the time the degree plan is developed, the graduate student’s advisor will thoroughly discuss both options, both thesis and non-thesis.

### Comprehensive Examination:

All students seeking a graduate degree in special education must complete one of two options. The first option is to develop, write and defend a thesis (SPED 518). Option two consists of developing the research paper (SPED 595). Both options require passing a comprehensive examination. Graduate students selecting the SPED 595 option are required to take the written comprehensive

examination. This written examination is a summative evaluation that measures the pertinent and professionally relevant knowledge students have gained from their participation in the program. Students selecting the thesis option will take an oral comprehensive examination as part of their thesis proposal.

The examination is not simply a cumulative examination of the material presented in all classes. Rather, questions are chosen to reflect one's attainment of a graduate education. The examination is designed to measure the graduate student's knowledge of their certification field and of special education. Those students seeking a master's degree with no certification are expected to pass a comprehensive examination developed from the core courses and other coursework taken. The department's comprehensive examination requires students to respond to case studies and essays. All are equally important. Comprehensive examinations are specific to the degree and certification sought.

Students should plan to sit for the *comprehensive examination* when the majority of coursework is completed. At the very least, students must have completed a minimum of two-thirds of their coursework in special education before taking the examination. For students on the Master of Special Education Plan, this is at least 24 semester hours. Students on the Educational Diagnostician Plan should have completed 24 hours including, but not be limited to, the prerequisites for Psy 691. Examinations are given once in the fall and spring semesters and once during the summer term (October, February, and June, typically). If a student fails the comprehensive exam on the first attempt, the student must meet with his/her advisor or other special education faculty member to develop a plan of study that will help the student be successful on the next attempt. Should a student fail on the second attempt, the student must petition the department to take the comprehensive examination a third time. The Dean of Graduate Studies and Research must provide the final approval to take the comprehensive examination a third time.

**Students wishing to take the comprehensive examination must register with Dr. Beth Jones (Beth.Jones@tamuc.edu) by the established due date each semester. NO EXCEPTIONS WILL BE MADE. YOU WILL NOT BE ADMITTED TO THE EXAM IF YOU HAVE NOT PREVIOUSLY REGISTERED WITH DR. JONES AND MS. FISK. All comps information is located on our website. Students typically take their exam the semester they enroll in practicum.**

#### Graduate Minors:

A minor in special education at the graduate level is available. Comprehensive minors in special education are available for students seeking a Doctorate degree and who are majoring in supervision, curriculum and instruction, educational administration, counseling, psychology, and other related areas. A minor consists of a minimum of 12 semester hours in special education.

#### Background Checks/Criminal History:

##### **19 TAC §227.1(b)**

##### **Notifications: Required Background Check**

Educator preparation programs (EPPs) shall inform all applicants that:

(1) pursuant to the Texas Education Code (TEC), §22.083, candidates must undergo a criminal history background check prior to employment as an educator; and

(2) pursuant to the TEC, §22.0835, candidates must undergo a criminal history background check prior to clinical teaching.

Individuals who have been convicted of an offense may be potentially ineligible for the issuance of a certificate upon program completion. You have the right to request a criminal history evaluation letter from TEA if you would like to. Go to this webpage from TEA for more information on this topic and the form to request a preliminary criminal history evaluation: <https://tea.texas.gov/texas-educators/investigations/preliminary-criminal-history-evaluation-faqs>

## Appendix A

Department of Psychology and Special Education  
**Special Education Faculty**  
(Commerce and/or Mesquite Campuses)

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Dr. Kelly Carrero <a href="mailto:Kelly.Carrero@tamuc.edu">Kelly.Carrero@tamuc.edu</a>	Hen 227	903-886-5490
Michelle Hanks <a href="mailto:Michelle.Hanks@tamuc.edu">Michelle.Hanks@tamuc.edu</a>	Hen 204	903-468-6062
Dr. Beth Jones <a href="mailto:Beth.Jones@tamuc.edu">Beth.Jones@tamuc.edu</a>	Hen 228	903-886-5934
Dr. Belinda Rudinger <a href="mailto:Belinda.Rudinger@tamuc.edu">Belinda.Rudinger@tamuc.edu</a>	Hen 235	903-886-5940

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Administrative Coordinator Marlena Fisk <a href="mailto:Marlena.Fisk@tamuc.edu">Marlena.Fisk@tamuc.edu</a>	BIN 201	903-886-5940
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**To reach the Navarro Campus, you may call (903) 875-7617.**

**To reach the Mesquite Campus, you may call (972) 613-7591.**

**To reach the Midlothian Campus, you may call (972) 775-7232.**

## **Appendix B Programs of Study**

### Plans of Study:

1. MS/MEd of Special Education
2. MS/MEd of Special Education with Educational Diagnostician Certification
3. Educational Diagnostician Certification Only (with existing master's
4. Post-baccalaureate with initial teacher certification

All MS/MEd degree plans have a thesis and non-thesis option. Students on the non-thesis option will be required to take a written comprehensive exam.

Please refer to the Graduate Catalog for most current information:

<http://coursecatalog.tamuc.edu/grad/colleges-and-departments/education-human-services/psychology-counseling-special-education/special-education-ma-ms-med/>

## Appendix C SPED 691 Information

Students may fulfill SPED 691 (Educational Diagnostician Practicum) requirements through placement at a **district field** site with sufficient opportunities to meet direct and indirect course requirements must be scheduled. Securing a field-based Practicum site is the responsibility of the enrolled student. Signed authorization by the Director of Special Education of the participating school district is required for field-site placements.

Generally, districts welcome participation by Practicum students fulfilling direct and indirect Psy 691 requirements. Communicate early in your program with district and campus personnel about a tentative time period in which you expect to enroll in Psy 691. Required field-site supervision is provided by a district employee who is a certified educational diagnostician in the State of Texas with a minimum of three years full-time post-certification experience. Prior to final approval for Psy 691 enrollment, the field-site placement site is approved by Psy 691 faculty. Enrollment in Psy 691 during your preferred semester is not guaranteed. Admission is based upon numbers of students requesting enrollment each semester and other factors.

Completed and signed paperwork must be submitted a minimum of 2 weeks in advance of the Practicum semester. You will not be able to enroll in class until all paperwork has been received.

Steps in the application process are as follows:

### Step 1: Eligibility for Practicum

Enrollment in SPED 691 may only occur during the last 6 semester hours of coursework in your Educational Diagnostician Certification/Degree Plan. Each Psy 691 prerequisite, as included in Educational Diagnostician Certification/Degree Plan, must be completed prior to Psy 691 enrollment. A GPA of 3.5 or greater and grades of B or better in SPED 572, 573, and 574 are required. Permission for submitting a SPED 691 application is granted by the Director of the Educational Diagnostician Program.

Step 2: Verify Center for Educator Certification & Academic Services (CECAS) requirements are completed prior to submission of PSY 691 application. Click: <https://www.tamuc.edu/educator-certification-academic-services/>

### Step 3: Submission of Completed Application

Completed applications must include:

- Official letter from TAMU-C confirming full admission to Master's Degree Program in Special Education or to Educational Diagnostician Certification Program
- Current official transcript
- Curriculum vita and/or professional resume
- Documentation of professional or student liability insurance providing coverage for an educational diagnostician in training with limits of 1 million/3 million (Dyer Insurance Agency,

Inc. [800-338-2413] is an option. Inform Agency personnel you are submitting a SPED 691 application.)

- Signed Degree Plan on file
- Verification of Dyslexia and Mental Health Trainings
- Background Check Completed with Cooperating District
- Verification of Site Supervisor Qualifications Form
- All completed documents provided to eligible students on the University website at: <https://inside.tamuc.edu/academics/colleges/educationHumanServices/psychologySpecialEducation/Practicum%20and%20Internship/Diagnostician%20Practicum.aspx>

Application for Admission to SPED 691

Site Approval

Site Contract

TEA Form

FERPA Form

Handbook Acknowledgement

Prerequisites Form

\*Must Include all required signatures 2 weeks in advance.

- Student Agreement Form
- Agreement to Maintain Confidentiality

Final approval to enroll in SPED 691 is contingent upon submission of all of the aforementioned information within established timelines and meeting the grade requirements.

#### Completion of 691:

Your supervisor will provide you a list of documentation you will need to submit by the end of your 691 semester. In addition, to fulfill requirements and receive a grade for 691, students must submit a completed exit survey and progress monitoring form (Academic Progress Report shown in Appendix F).



## TAMUC Educational Diagnostician Practicum Observation Procedures

At the beginning of the field experience, the student is asked to complete the self-assessment form prior to the initial meeting along with field agreement forms, see Syllabus for more information regarding field agreements. The site supervisor training will occur prior to the initial meeting as well.

Observation	Timeline	Paperwork Required	Content Discussed
Initial Meeting	Within the first 4 weeks of practicum	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Self-Assessment - pre</li> <li>2. Consultation Form</li> </ol>	Discuss self-assessment (strengths, weakness, areas of concerns), practicum goals, caseloads, required paperwork, and any questions
Direct Observation Feedback	Completed throughout, mid-practicum	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Mentor Observation Form</li> <li>2. Consultation Form</li> <li>3. Formal Field Supervisor Observation Forms</li> <li>4. Pre-conference and Post-conference meetings</li> </ol>	Discuss completed mentor observation form, discuss assessment procedures and results pages, strengths and weaknesses
Final Meeting	Within the last week of practicum	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Self-Assessment - post</li> <li>2. De-identified reports</li> <li>3. Consultation Form</li> <li>4. Practicum Work Review Form <i>(must be completed when all hours are done)</i></li> </ol>	Discuss practicum experience, review protocols, evaluate written reports, feedback on experience overall

**Upon completion of practicum, students must submit their hour log totaling at least 160 hours, with 1/3 being direct hours. Additionally, upon successful completion of practicum requirements, the site and field supervisors must both sign a form recommending candidates for certification.**

## Appendix D

### ***Department of Psychology and Special Education*** **Status of Concern/Dismissal Procedures** **Special Education Graduate Program**

#### **Rationale: Department Correspondence Addressing Status of Concern/Dismissal**

**If any or all of the following occur, it is reason for student dismissal from the program:**

1. Documented attempts (3) by Advisor to contact student for three (3) consecutive semesters about status of concern in designated program
2. Lack of reciprocity from student to inquiries of concern for three (3) consecutive documented attempts by Advisor
3. One or more courses in Plan exceeding six-year timeframe for completion of all coursework
4. Lack of enrollment in courses in Plan for three (3) consecutive semesters with no communication from student as to plans to reenroll
5. Grade Point Average (GPA) less than 3.25 (Note: Students obtaining Educational Diagnostician certification must maintain a 3.5 in order to be eligible for Practicum)
6. Three grades of C on coursework in Plan
7. Student has (2) disposition reports/conduct referrals placed in their file by a faculty member for any of the following reasons (including, but not limited to):
  - failure to observe the stated e-mail policy/inappropriate communication with faculty and/or other students, plagiarism, cheating, or inappropriate behavior in the classroom or Practicum setting

#### **Frequency: Department Correspondence Addressing Status of Concern/Dismissal**

1. **Letter of Concern #1** when any criteria in **Rationale** is met
2. **Letter of Concern #2** during next semester after **Letter of Concern #1**
3. **Letter of Dismissal** during next semester after **Letter of Concern #2** if **Concern** has not been rectified by student

#### **Readmission Procedures**

1. After **Letter of Dismissal**, the student may initiate a readmission application into the special education degree and/or certification program through re-applying to the Graduate School and Center for Educator Certification & Academic Services.
2. Re-admission will only occur with special education faculty approval to do so.
3. Upon approval, Plan will be developed by Advisor based upon current catalog year criteria.

### Program Suspension:

In accordance with Texas A&M University-Commerce Procedure 13.99.99.R0.10 (Academic Honesty), a student may be suspended or expelled for academic dishonesty, including, but not limited to, cheating, falsifying assignments, and plagiarism. If the student disagrees with the charge or level of penalty related to academic honesty, University procedure 13.99.99.R0.10 provides the appeals process. *University Procedure* 11.04.99.R0.16 (Graduate Academic Probation, Retention and Suspension) states “individual departments may reserve the right to suspend from their programs, students who, in their judgment, would not meet the professional expectations of the field for which they are training” (Revised April 2004). Therefore, a student who fails to demonstrate appropriate communication, interpersonal, or professional skills as identified by a faculty member may be required by the department to seek remediation including, but not limited to, repeating a clinical skills course and/or receiving counseling. In addition, a student who demonstrates personal limitations that impede professional performance, who is harmful to clients, or who violates ethical standards, may be removed from the program.

Note: The Department of Psychology and Special Education applies the same expectations of all graduates whether special education is a major or minor. Hence, the department reserves the right to suspend from the program any student, who in the judgment of a duly constituted departmental committee would not meet the professional expectation of the field.

## Appendix E



**Center for Educator  
Certification &  
Academic Services**

**A&M-COMMERCE**

### **Educator Preparation Program Complaints, Appeals & Concerns Process**

The Student Complaint, Appeal, and Concern Resolution Matrix is provided to assist students in understanding the procedures and process for addressing common issues. Procedures are usually different for Undergraduate and Graduate students.

#### **Step 1:**

Find your complaint, appeal, or concern on the Student Complaint, Appeal, or Concern Resolution Matrix located in the Student Guidebook and follow the process for resolution.

[www.tamuc.edu/student\\_guidebook/Student\\_Guidebook.pdf](http://www.tamuc.edu/student_guidebook/Student_Guidebook.pdf)

**Student Guidebook with  
Resolution Matrix**



#### **Step 2:**

If your complaint, appeal, or concern is still not resolved, complete the Student Complaint Appeal and Concern Form and return it to the Dean of Students.

[https://commerce-tamu-advocate.symplicity.com/public\\_report/index.php/pid325709?rep\\_type=1008](https://commerce-tamu-advocate.symplicity.com/public_report/index.php/pid325709?rep_type=1008)

**Concern Form:  
Dean of Students**



#### **Step 3:**

After all avenues have been exhausted and not resolved to your satisfaction through the EPP (Educator Preparation Program) then the final step would be to contact TEA (Texas Education Agency). You may view the Complaints and Investigations Procedures on the TAC (Texas Administrative Code) in Title 19, Part 7, Chapter 228, rule 228.70

<https://tea.texas.gov/sites/default/files/ch228.pdf>

and view the complaint process on the TEA website  
<https://tea.texas.gov/texas-educators/preparation-and-continuing-education/complaints-against-educator-preparation-programs>

**TAC 228 Information**



NOTE: TEA may delay addressing the complaint until the proper sequence of complaints have been followed.

**TEA Complaints**



**Appendix F**  
**STUDY GUIDE**  
**COMPREHENSIVE EXAMINATION**

Students seeking a Master 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, 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). Students seeking the Master's degree without certification take a comprehensive exam keyed to required and core courses as well as the other coursework taken in special education. Non-certification Master's degree candidates should consult with an advisor prior to taking the comprehensive exam.

*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 24 semester hours on the Educational Diagnostician Plan including prerequisites for Practicum. The 30 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 SPED 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.

## **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 measurable 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 measurable 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 measurable IEP goals/objectives, and necessary steps/protocol for a student to become eligible for special education services.

### Preparing for the Exam:

A review session is held at the each semester to aid you in preparing for the exam. Specific areas of study, example case studies, and suggestions for assimilating and organizing information from your course work will be covered. **You are encouraged to attend these review sessions beginning two semesters before you plan to actually register 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:** 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 questions will be graded based on the following rubrics:

<b>SPED Comprehensive Exam Essay Question Grading Rubric-DIAGNOSTICIAN</b>	
<b>Response Requirements (Total possible points = 27)</b>	
3	The writer developed each aspect of the question or case study and goes beyond the prompts to address additional related material.
2	The writer addresses each aspect of the question.
1	The writer is off topic or vaguely addresses the topic.
<b>Accuracy of Response (Total possible points = 54)</b>	
6	The details provided by the writer are accurate and sufficiently develop each element of the question. Supporting statements and evidence or examples were accurate and provided to explain or persuade effectively.
3	Details are accurate or partially accurate. The elements of the text are supported with clarity and depth, but additional details, examples or explanations were needed.
0	Answer was not accurate.
<b>Grammar and Mechanics (Total possible points = 18)</b>	
2	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.
1	Minor or few grammatical and mechanical errors exist, but do not affect readability.
0	Multiple grammatical and mechanical errors, obstructing meaning.
<b>Maximum Point Total: 99</b>	

Students must meet minimum standards (a total score of 70) to pass the examination.

Essay 1 \_\_\_ + Essay 2 \_\_\_ + Essay 3 \_\_\_ + Essay 4 \_\_\_ + Essay 5 \_\_\_ + Essay 6 \_\_\_ + Essay 7 \_\_\_ + Essay 8 \_\_\_ + Essay 9=

**FINAL SCORE=**

**Fail or Pass? \_\_\_\_\_**

<b>SPED Comprehensive Exam Essay Question Grading Rubric- GENERIC</b>	
<b>Response Requirements (Total points possible = 9)</b>	
3	The writer developed each aspect of the question or case study and goes beyond the prompts to address additional related material.
2	The writer addresses each aspect of the question.
1	The writer is off topic or vaguely addresses the topic.
<b>Accuracy of Response (Total points possible = 18)</b>	
6	The details provided by the writer are accurate and sufficiently develop each element of the question. Supporting statements and evidence or examples were accurate and provided to explain or persuade effectively.
4	Details are accurate or partially accurate. The elements of the text are supported with clarity and depth, but additional details, examples or explanations were needed.
0	Answer was not accurate.
<b>Grammar and Mechanics (Total points possible = 6)</b>	
2	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.
1	Minor or few grammatical and mechanical errors exist, but do not affect readability.
0	Multiple grammatical and mechanical errors, obstructing meaning.
<b>Maximum Point Total: 33</b>	

**Students must meet minimum standards (a score of 70% or total of 23) to pass the examination.**

**FINAL SCORE= Essay 1 \_\_\_\_\_ + Essay 2 \_\_\_\_\_ + Essay 3 \_\_\_\_\_ = \_\_\_\_\_**

**Fail or Pass? \_\_\_\_\_**



## Applying for the exam:

There is a comps registration form on our departmental website, which will need to be returned to Dr. Beth Jones by the deadline set each semester (at least two weeks prior to the exam).

### **IMPORTANT Reminders to Test-takers:**

***As you prepare to sit for your comprehensive examination, remember...***

1. You must be pre-registered for the exam. This includes ensuring you have access to the Comps D2L Shell. ***If you have not pre-registered, you will not be allowed to sit for the exam.***
2. The exam will be given via D2L. ***Students will have access to Microsoft Word to type responses. Please make sure to put your Exam ID on the materials you submit and no name. In addition, put the questions numbers you are responding to in your submission.***

### 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.

#### ***Council for Exceptional Children (CEC) Standards:***

<http://www.cec.SPED.org/Standards>

#### ***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>

## Appendix G Academic Progress Report

**This form is for you to report any evidence of student leadership to the program. This form will be completed via a Google form every spring and included in your practicum application packet. The form below is to give you an idea of the types of things you will be asked to report and wish to be participating in during your graduate coursework in order to build a strong resume.**

### Evidence of Student Leadership

1. Name:

2. If on the Diagnostician Certification Plan, which semester/year are you planning on completing your Practicum (691)? (691 enrollment can only occur when you are within your last 6 hours, with the 3 hours of 691 included in that total; all assessment courses (572, 573, and 574) must be completed prior to 691 enrollment; Overall 3.5 GPA/Grades of B or better in SPED 520, 572, 573, 574 is a prereq for 691). Have you begun the process of securing a site?

3. Presentations

a. Conference Presentations (please specify international, national, regional, state, or local presentation)

Example format:

Lu, S., & Graesser, A. C. (November, 2003). Tutorial dialog in natural language with an animated conversational agent. Paper presented at the 33rd Annual Meeting of the Society for Computers in Psychology, Vancouver, Canada.

b. Presentations or professional development/workshops:

4. Publications and Publications in Press (APA format)

'Publications in press' refers to works that have been accepted for publication.

5. Grant Applications Submitted/Funded (please distinguish)

6. Honors and Awards:

7. Is there any other information that you would like to make Special Education Faculty aware of?