SPECIAL EDUCATION PROGRAM
UNDERGRADUATE STUDENT HANDBOOK

2026 – 2027 Academic Year

College of Education and Human Development Department of Special Education & Disability Research
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Welcome to Mason's Special Education Program! You are embarking on an exciting path, and we are here to help you develop the knowledge, skills, and professional dispositions needed to achieve academic success and to graduate fully prepared to begin a rewarding and successful career.

We developed this handbook to guide you through the program and to help you better understand the policies and procedures related to it. This handbook contains important information regarding the Special Education Program. *Please read this handbook and use it as your first reference point should questions arise during your time in the program.* If you cannot find the information you need or if you have any questions or concerns, contact your advisor or the academic program coordinator.

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Mason Special Education Preparation Program

Vision Statement

Every student with disabilities has a special education teacher who can use data to provide effective instruction under varying conditions, collaborate effectively with others, and advocate for student and staff needs.

Mission Statement

Graduates of our program will be licensed *beginning* special educators who effectively:

1. Provide individualized, intensive, explicit instruction and/or behavioral interventions that are equitable, affirming, and culturally sustaining for students with disabilities;

2. Participate in collaborative teams with other professionals and families from diverse backgrounds;

3. Use data to plan, deliver, and monitor individualized and specialized explicit instruction and/or behavioral interventions across a continuum of service delivery models;

4. Develop safe and productive learning environments;

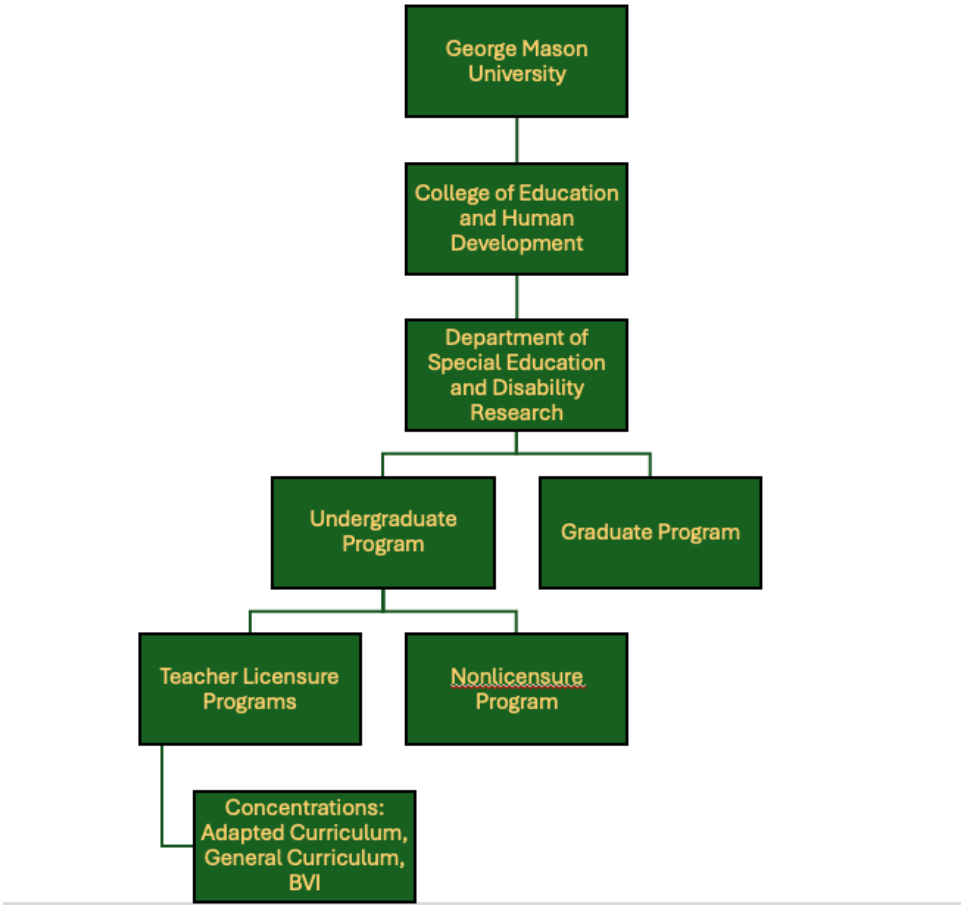
5. Take initiative to solve problems in a professional manner;

6. Articulate their strengths, areas of expertise, and positionality as special educators; and

7. Use reflection and feedback to further develop their practice.

Important Terms

As a student in our special education program, you are a part of multiple communities within George Mason University. This graphic should help you understand how the communities are related.



Program or major—The term program is used to mean the same thing as major in other colleges and schools. The programs within special education are the licensure programs or the nonlicensure program.

Licensure—In order to teach in the Commonwealth of Virginia, an individual must have a teaching license issued by the Virginia Department of Education. Successful completion of one of the special education teacher licensure programs at Mason makes a student eligible for licensure and, therefore, a teaching position in Virginia.

Concentration—Concentrations are the areas within the licensure programs that are identified by the students for whom the teaching license is being sought. For example, students with disabilities who access the adapted curriculum (or adapted) is a concentration within the teacher licensure program.

Non-licensure—The nonlicensure program prepares students to work with individuals with disabilities outside of school settings. This may be as an adult service provider, a consultant, or in other capacities.

Program core requirements—Program core requirement courses are required of all students in the special education program, regardless of concentration. These include courses such as EDSE 352 *Assessment* and EDSE 354 *Collaboration and Consultation*.

Concentration credit requirements—Concentration credit requirement courses include those that are required in the chosen concentration. For example, the students with disabilities who access the general curriculum concentration requires EDSE 441 *Methods in Reading and Writing* which is different from the students who access the adapted curriculum EDSE 467 *Foundations of Language and Literacy for Individuals with Severe Disabilities*.

Academic Program Coordinator (APC)—The faculty member who coordinates and oversees the BSEd special education programs; currently this role is held by Dr. Margaret Weiss for the Undergrad Core; Dr. Marci Kinas-Jerome for Adapted Curriculum, Dr. Sharon Ray for General Curriculum, and Dr. Kim Avila for B/VI.

Field Experience/Internship Coordinator—The faculty member who coordinates student placements (field experience and internship) in our schools; this position is currently held by Dr. Kristen O'Brien.

Mentor Teacher (MT)—a classroom teacher who has been recommended by the school principal to oversee a teacher candidate in the school and has at least three years of teaching experience

Curriculum Details

The *BSEd in Special Educatio*n program at Mason combines coursework and field experiences to help the student develop the knowledge, skills, and dispositions of a special education teacher or professional.

The 120-credit *BSEd in Special Education* program has four paths. Three paths lead to initial licensure (licensure programs) in the state of Virginia for teaching (a) K-12 students with disabilities who access the adapted curriculum, (b) K-12 students with disabilities who access the general curriculum, and (c) PK-12 students who are blind/visually impaired. These paths provide students with the specialized knowledge, skills, and professional dispositions needed to meet the educational needs of these students with disabilities.
The program also includes a non-licensure path for those interested in working with individuals with disabilities outside of a school setting.

The *BSEd in Special Education* program can be completed in four years if students: (a) enroll full-time, (b) follow the course sequencing requirements, (c) meet minimum grade requirements, (d) follow all program and college policies, and (e) complete all program and licensure requirements by the established deadlines.

Full-time transfer students may be able to complete their upper-level coursework and

internship within two years of transferring to Mason in a fall semester, provided they have already completed the Mason Core and foundational education classes at the time of transfer.
Full-time transfer students who begin at Mason in the spring will be able to complete the program within two and a half years.

Students who start at Mason as freshmen can expect the following structure:

- *First two years:* Students work on completing the Mason Core and a small number of foundational education classes.
- *Last two years:* Students complete the program, taking a prescribed list of courses each fall and spring semester. At the beginning of their senior year, students apply to be placed for internship for their final semester, and must meet testing (licensure paths only), CPR/First Aid/AED (licensure paths only), and internship application (all paths) deadlines.

Students who are unable to follow the prescribed four-year sequence for any reason will need to work closely with a program Academic Advisor to create an individual completion plan.

Note: Students who are not available for daytime courses should consider our Bachelor's/Accelerated Master's (BAM) program for more flexible options since the Special Education (SPECED) coursework will be offered primarily during the day.

General University Requirements

All bachelor's programs at Mason must contain at least 120 credits, 45 of which must be upper-division (300-level and higher). Special Education (SPECED) students will meet this upper-
division requirement by completing their major coursework. The university's general education curriculum is called the *Mason Core* and consists of 37 required credits.

A few education courses fulfill Mason Core categories, and students are encouraged to choose those:

- EDEP 110, EDEP 350, EDSE 203, PSYC 211 or EDUC 200 for Social and Behavioral Science,
- EDSE 204 for Global Contexts,
- EDRS 220 for Quantitative Reasoning,
- ELED 257 for Information Technology, and
- ELED 258 or SEED 370 for Literature

The majority of Mason Core classes should be finished prior to the fall semester of a student's senior year.

Program Course Requirements

There are four program paths or concentrations within the BSEd in Special Education program:

(a) licensure to teach K-12 students who access the adapted curriculum (adapted),
(b) licensure to teach K-12 students who access the general curriculum (general curriculum),
(c) licensure to teach PK-12 students who are blind/visually impaired, (B/VI) and
(d) no concentration.

There are 45 *Program Core* credits required for all program paths. Each path has additional concentration credit requirements:

(a) adapted has 21 credits,
(b) general curriculum has 18 credits,
(c) B/VI has 26 credits, and
(d) no concentration has 15 credits.

Once admitted to a concentration, students spend the final two years taking a prescribed sequence of classes. The sequence below is subject to change based upon instructor availability and other factors, but the chart gives students an idea of what to expect. Students will create an academic plan with program Academic Advisors and refer to it each semester to know what they should register for in the following semester. Failure to follow the plan outlined with the Academic Advisor may extend the time for completion of the program

Special Education Core courses are taken in a similar sequence for all paths. Four year plans can be found here:

- Adapted Curriculum
- General Curriculum
- Blindness and Visual Impairments
- Non-concentration

Electives

Depending on the concentration, there are 12-23 credits of electives in the program that students must complete to reach the 120 minimum required credits for graduation. Students are encouraged to use those electives to complete courses, and if interested, a minor that may complement their education coursework. Minors will require eight unique credits. Some minors to consider are American Sign Language, Assistive Technology, Educational Psychology, Human Development and Family Science, or a minor in an additional area of special education. A complete list of minors at Mason can be found in the catalog.

Experiences Outside of Coursework

The Mason Special Education Program includes many faculty who conduct research and do professional development in local schools. They welcome student interest and involvement outside of specific coursework. See the list of faculty in Appendix A.
In addition, there are many other opportunities that students can consider exploring to get more experience in teaching and supporting learning throughout their program. See

Appendix C and D for professional experiences and organizations that might be of interest.

Progression in the Program

Program faculty have developed a coherent and systematic course sequence to prepare students for their professional careers. Progressing through the program as advised is helpful in building the knowledge, skills, and dispositions expected of a Mason graduate.

Admission to Licensure Concentration

Students interested in entering the special education teacher licensure pathways (General K-12 Licensure, Adapted K-12 Licensure, or Blindness and Visual Impairments PK-12 Licensure) declare their concentration in EDSE 381. Students must meet GPA and credit hour requirements prior to declaring a licensure concentration.

- Students who enter Mason as Freshman must have at least 45 credits completed and have a minimum cumulative GPA of 2.50.
- Transfer students must have a minimum of 45 credits completed, and they must have either a cumulative GPA of 2.50 from their previous institution or completed at least 12 credits at Mason with a minimum 2.50 GPA

Students who wish to pursue a concentration but do not meet the above criteria will not be admitted to the concentration and will need to work with their advisor to develop a plan to meet the criteria or discuss non-licensure career options.

Course Sequencing

Upper-level courses are intentionally sequenced so students will build upon their knowledge and skills as they prepare for internship; therefore, some courses require specific prerequisite coursework to be successfully completed prior to taking the class. Students who become off-track in their program sequence may delay their graduation by a full year. This can occur if a student does not take the prescribed list of courses for a semester or if a student does not earn the minimum required grade for a required class (see policies below). Meeting regularly with an academic advisor can help prevent delays and ensure the student is adhering to the correct course sequencing.

Information for Transfer Students

Transfer students should ideally meet with Mason's pre-education advisors before their transfer. If a student has not done this, they should meet with the Academic Advisor in the very beginning of their first semester, ideally before the add/drop deadlines.

- *Pre-education Advisor:* Assists students who are considering a career in education but are not yet sure which program and licensure area they want to choose.
- *Academic Advisor:* Assists students with understanding the course content area

(endorsement) requirements for their licensure area and creating a plan to complete them. This person also assists Bachelor's to Accelerated Master's (BAM) students with the application, course mapping, and transition process.

More information about the advisors listed above along with a link to their appointment scheduling system can be found on the website HERE.

Transfer students who have completed education classes at a prior institution will often see that these classes have been transferred in as elective credits (i.e., EDUC---). Students can request that program faculty review a specific transfer course to see if it can be counted as one of their required classes.

This process begins by the student submitting the Transfer Credit Re-Evaluation Appeal Form (available on the Transfer Admissions website) along with the catalog course description and the syllabus for that course to the SPECED Academic Advisor. This review process can take several weeks.

If a student wants to appeal the way a non-education class has transferred into Mason, they should follow the steps above but should submit the form and supporting documents to the department at Mason that offers the course in question.

All transfer credits are brought into Mason with a letter grade of "T" because grades earned at previous institutions will not count toward a student's Mason GPA. However, they are factored into the number of students' attempted credits which impacts financial aid eligibility and retention status.

Academic Advising and Professional Guidance

All students have access to multiple sources of support and should take advantage of this valuable resource.

The *Academic Advisor* assists all current Mason students in BSED status with staying on track to graduate within their intended time frame by helping them understand the program requirements and Mason's academic policies. Additionally, this advisor assists students with identifying campus resources to aid students in their success. Students should meet with this advisor at least once per semester and should use the Navigate Mason system for appointment scheduling.

The advising team can also assist students with the process of discerning if this program and career path are a good fit for them. Being a special education professional is rewarding work, but it is demanding and often challenging. Field experiences during the foundational education classes will give students exposure to the classroom environment to help them confirm that this is the right path for them, and in addition to this, students should reflect by asking themselves the following questions:

- Do I find it difficult to participate in and lead class discussions?
- Do I find myself incompatible with my fellow SPECED classmates?

- Do I have difficulty expressing my thoughts and ideas verbally?
- Do I find it difficult to talk in front of a group?
- Do I have difficulty meeting deadlines and time constraints?
- Do I struggle with time management and organization to the point that it negatively impacts my performance in classes?
- Do I tend to procrastinate and not take my schoolwork seriously?
- Do I have strong personal biases against any specific group or population?

If you answer "yes" to any of these questions, you should discuss this with your advisor and/or faculty and consider that you may not be ready to enter the field of education at this time.
Students who find themselves in this situation are strongly encouraged to take advantage of Mason's University Career Services to explore their options and learn about other potential career fields.

Important Program Policies

Accommodations

Students who may need academic accommodations for class must go through Mason's Disability Services office to make this request. The first step in this process is to fill out the intake online form.

University Academic Policies

All University policies governing students can be found in the University Catalog, and it is the responsibility of each student to be aware of and abide by these policies. You can find the most frequently encountered policies in the CEHD Student Guide. Any policy-related questions can be directed to your Academic Advisor.

Grades in Courses Impact Continuation in the Program

Students in both the licensure pathways and nonlicensure pathways are limited in course repeat attempts and must maintain minimum GPA requirements to continue in the program. Failure to meet minimum GPA requirements or excessive course repeats can lead to termination from the licensure concentration and/or termination from the major.

- Students in a licensure pathway must maintain at least a 2.5 GPA and must earn a C or better in all SPECED CORE and CONCENTRATION coursework.
- Students in the nonlicensure pathway must maintain at least a 2.0 GPA and earn a D or better in all coursework and meet course-specific pre-requisites which may require C or better in courses.

SPECED courses have a limit of two attempts to earn the minimum required grade. If the minimum grade is not earned in the first attempt, they will be required to repeat the

course the next time the course is offered. If the minimum grade is not earned in the second attempt, they will be contacted by their Academic Advisor and asked to meet to develop a success plan. After the second attempt, students must submit an official request in writing to their Academic Advisor asking to be allowed a third attempt, providing a justification for the exception, and a description of what they will do differently in a third attempt. The Academic Advisor, in consultation with program faculty, will notify the student of the program decision.

Students in licensure pathways who are unable to complete a SPECED CORE or CONCENTRATION course with a C or higher grade after two attempts (or 3 if allowed) will be terminated from the concentration and will be unable to continue in a SPECED licensure path.

Students who do not meet grade and GPA requirements for the licensure pathways (C or higher in all SPECED CORE courses and 2.5 GPA) but who meet requirements for the nonlicensure pathway (D or higher in all courses and 2.0 GPA) may continue in the major without teacher licensure concentration.

Students who do not meet the minimum grade requirements for the nonlicensure pathway will be terminated from the major but may declare a different major within the university to complete their undergraduate degree.

If a student does not complete a second required course with the minimum required grade OR if they fail to earn the minimum required grade in multiple courses in the same semester OR their GPA drops below the required minimum, an Advisor Hold will be placed on their account until they meet with their Academic Advisor to develop a success plan.

If a student is struggling or is concerned about their progress in a course, they should seek help from their course instructor, Academic Advisor, Academic Program Coordinator, and the CEHD Student and Academic Affairs office.

Dispositions Impact Continuation in the Program

Education professionals are held to the highest standards of ethics and professional dispositions. As part of our program, we help students understand and practice these expected behaviors. In addition, student dispositions are assessed regularly, both in the classroom and in field placements. Failure to exhibit the dispositions required of education professionals will result in development and monitoring of success plans and possible termination from the program. See the Dispositions policies described below.

Incomplete Grades

If circumstances beyond the control of a student prevent them from being able to complete coursework during the semester, the student may request an incomplete grade from the instructor. The instructor is not obligated to grant this request. Per university policy (AP.3.3), an incomplete will only be granted if the student is passing the course at

the time an incomplete is requested.

Any time a grade of incomplete is given, the student and faculty member should complete and sign an Incomplete Grade Cntract and provide a copy of the contract to the Program APC. All course requirements must be complete and submitted to the instructor by the end of the 9th week of the following semester (not including summer), or earlier if specified in the contract. (See the catalog for the full policy.)

Withdrawing from a Course

The university's withdrawal deadlines for each semester are found in the academic calendar. Undergraduate students are eligible for up to 3 selective withdrawals during their entire undergraduate career.

If a student experiences circumstances that prevent them from being able to successfully complete their courses, they can request a late withdrawal after the university withdrawal deadlines have passed. Late withdrawals will not be granted for academic reasons, and generally, they will not be granted for one class but not others unless the student can clearly explain why the circumstances have affected one class but not others. See the Withdrawal from Classes section of the CEHD SAA policy webpage for complete information.

A withdrawal will result in a grade of "W" for the course. The W will not affect a student's GPA but it will count toward attempted credits which can affect academic standing and financial aid eligibility. Therefore, students should consult with their advisor prior to withdrawing from any courses, and with the Financial Aid Office, if applicable.

Grade Appeals and Grievance Procedures

If a student feels their final grade is not reflective of their work for the semester, they can follow the steps for a grade appeal that are listed under Academic Appeals on the CEHD Student and Academic Affairs (SAA) website.

Grievances against faculty or staff of a non-academic nature should, ideally, first be directed to the faculty or staff member involved. If the grievance cannot be resolved with the faculty member, students should discuss the issue with the Program APC.

In the case of an issue related to field experience, a student should begin with the Mentor Teacher. If the issue cannot be resolved at that level, contact the Special Education Field Experience/Internship Coordinator before escalating the conversation to the APC.

Any grievance that remains unresolved after meeting with the Program APC can go through the CEHD Grievances process, found on the SAA website.

Program Expectations

The Special Education Program has adopted policies and holds expectations for students that align with the university, the College of Education and Human Development, PK-12 schools, and the Virginia Department of Education.

Attendance

As described in the University catalog, "students are expected to attend the class periods of the courses for which they are registered" (see section Attendance Policies). Much of the learning that takes place in this program is done within the class sessions, so missing class will negatively impact your ability to succeed in the course and master the course objectives.
Simply attending is not enough; students are expected to be active participants in class discussions and activities, and to come to class prepared to engage with the material, their instructor, and their classmates.

In the Special Education Program, every instructor includes a participation/attendance policy and associated points in their syllabus. This policy can vary from losing points, no matter the reason for the absence, to failing the course after a specified number of absences. The purpose of these policies is to help you develop the professional habit of being present, on time, and engaged. Developing a professional expectation for being present and communicating effectively when emergencies arise is critical to success as a special education professional.

Revision of coursework

Correct grammar, spelling, and mechanics are expected on all coursework and within all course-related communication (e.g., emails), as they are important expectations for special education professionals. All work should be of the highest quality in the first submission and original work. Written work that is not of high quality may be returned before it is accepted for grading. Additional points will not be given on resubmissions for writing, spelling, or grammar corrections. While the faculty may allow resubmissions, they are *not required* to do so. If you experience difficulty with writing standards, the Writing Center on campus is always available to assist.

Assignment Extensions and Late Work

Students should carefully read each course syllabus early in the semester and plan accordingly for due dates. Meeting deadlines is a key skill for special education professionals. Thus, throughout your coursework in the program, it is expected that all assignments or course requirements will be submitted on time.

In extenuating circumstances, extensions may be granted by the instructor, but must be approved *in advance*. Requests for extensions for work that you simply were not able to finish will seldom receive a positive response. Further, all students may be asked to submit their requests for extension and new due date in writing. While the faculty tries to be helpful, they are under no obligation to grant extensions. Should a student submit work past the original or extended deadline, the assignment may have points deducted or may not be counted. Each course syllabus will include the instructor's policy for late

work.

Attire

As a future special education professional, your dress while at a school site should reflect the highest caliber of professionalism. Dress in modest, business professional attire at all times (slacks/skirts and a dress shirt, or dresses). No one should wear jeans, shorts, t-shirts, extremely form-fitting clothing, or outfits that show undergarments to a school. Some schools celebrate "dress down" or "dress up" days; you can dress as they do on those days. Parents should be able to recognize you as a teacher. To understand the appropriate attire for your assigned field experience or internship site, read the school's faculty handbook for policy guidance, ask your Mentor Teacher, observe what other teachers are wearing, and/or ask your instructor.

Communication

Excellent communication skills are the hallmark of an effective teacher. If you have questions related to classes, course requirements, program requirements, field experience/internship, or anything else, you are expected to seek answers from provided materials, the faculty, or the staff in charge. Students are expected to take advantage of all forms of information that are available to them to answer their questions first. Become familiar with the CEHD and Special Education websites, read the Mason catalog for curriculum and academic policy information, review your syllabi thoroughly, and be proactive in planning your new career as well as managing your time. Should you have questions that cannot be answered through these resources, please contact your instructors for coursework questions, your advisor for program issues, or your mentor teacher for school-based concerns.

Email Communication

Students are expected to check their Mason email daily and to read carefully all email communications from your instructor, your mentor teacher, the program, and the College. All email correspondence with Mason faculty and staff and with your mentor teacher or other personnel at the school site should be done via your Mason email account.

Email is a professional means of communication. When you receive a program-related email that requires a response, you should provide one within two business days. Emails to program faculty and staff or school personnel should include a greeting, a concise message that has been spellchecked and contains correct grammar, sentence structure, and punctuation, and a signature at the end that includes your full name and any other pertinent information like your program name.
In fact, you may want to add an automatic email signature to your Mason account. Example:

Taylor Teacher
George Mason University

Special Education BSEd Program, (insert licensure/no concentration here) tteacher@gmu.edu

Social Media

It is critical that you embrace your role as a special education professional in all of your public interactions and in written and oral communication. This includes, but is not limited to, your use of social media — both personal accounts and those that you create to support your program completion. Now is the time to take stock of your internet presence and make sure that your use of social media aligns with the professional dispositions required of classroom teachers.

The importance of this cannot be overstated. Potential employers search social media and the web to ascertain information about potential employees. The media is filled with examples of how seemingly private items from individuals' social media accounts have made their way into the public spotlight. The ramifications of these missteps are serious and can include removal from the program, removal from internship, termination of employment, and/or loss of certification.

Dispositions

The Virginia Department of Education (VDOE), PK-12 school divisions, and our preparation program promote maintaining high standards of professionalism. Students must meet grading standards and course requirements as well as demonstrate professional dispositions in all areas of their work.

1. Students will participate in two dispositions ratings cycles: (1) the CEHD cycle and (2) the special education program cycle. The ratings will occur in specific courses and field experiences, as indicated in these charts: CEHD Dispositions Evaluation Cycle:

CEHD Dispositions	GENERAL	ADAPTED	BVI
Initial self-rating	EDSE 241	EDSE 361	EDSE 311
Mid-point self-rating	EDSE 445	EDSE 465	EDSE 419
End-point instructor-rating	EDSE 482	EDSE 483	EDSE 484

2. Special Education Dispositions Evaluation Cycle:

Special Education Core Dispositions	CORE
Instructor Ratings	EDSE 352 EDSE 353 EDSE 354

Instructor and Mentor Teacher Ratings	EDSE 381

Faculty, Mentor Teachers, and other personnel assess students on professional dispositions in classwork and in field experiences/internship at multiple points across the program. Students can also expect to rate and reflect on dispositions themselves. In addition to the evaluation cycles listed in the charts above, students in a licensure concentration program may have additional courses with dispositions assessments. Instructors and Mentor Teachers may complete observer-rated disposition assessments other times throughout the program, as needed. The CEHD dispositions assessment forms are here. The Special Education dispositions assessment forms used in classes and in fieldwork are located here. Please review and be familiar with these forms.

For an overview of the Dispositions process, click here.

In the event where the behavior is egregious and/or puts others at serious risk, the student will be reported to the university's Student Conduct office.

Field Experiences and Internship

Being in schools and other educational environments is critical to the learning process. The special education program has built multiple field experiences into our coursework. The internship is the capstone experience for all programs and requires full-time participation in either a school or other program placement.

Field Experience

Before internship, students will participate in a variety of field experiences within local schools. Many program courses include a field experience or activity component.

Students are required to complete these hours in a school placement assigned by the program; students may not arrange their own field experiences. These hours must be completed during the normal school day (typically 7:30 am-4:00 pm) and during an agreed upon time that works for the Mentor Teacher (i.e., the special education teacher who is hosting and mentoring the Mason student). Students will need to include these requirements in their planning for activities or work outside of course schedules.

To access field experience sites, students must complete Human Resources (HR) requirements (e.g., fingerprinting procedures, background check procedures) for the assigned school division or organization, which may vary. Students must be cleared by the school division or organization before they can begin their field experience. You will learn more when assigned to a specific placement. See the section below on Fingerprinting and Background Check

In courses that include a field experience, students can expect to be in the school-based

field experience site for 5-40 hours, depending on the course. Additionally, a student may be taking several courses in one semester that require a field experience, which would increase the hours in the field experience for that semester. Thus, as students are creating their program plan, they should plan accordingly for the hours they will need to be in schools during school hours for that semester. For some courses, faculty may arrange for the entire class to complete their field hours together at a designated site and time. These innovative efforts are to ensure that students have robust, supported opportunities to make course-to-field connections.

Expectations of students doing field experience:

In EDSE field experiences, there are three broad expectations for professional behavior and dispositions, which are outlined below. At the beginning of each field experience, students in an EDSE field experience course will watch the field experience overview video to learn more about these expectations, and they will then sign to verify that they have watched the video. The EDSE field experience video is linked here, and the verification form to sign after watching is linked here. Below we describe these three expectations and list a few examples of behaviors for each expectation.

1. **A**ct Professionally

   • You are a guest at the school. Set a schedule with your Mentor Teacher for the best days and times. *When you say you will show up, do so, and be punctual; remain for the duration of the pre-arranged visit.* Consider this appointment a serious commitment. The expectation is that you are an active member of the classroom. Teachers plan special lessons or activities based on your presence.

   • Please consider each and every visit as part of a long job interview. Dress and act professionally and respect the school's rules.
   • You should check with your Mentor Teacher regarding school procedures and policies that pertain to absence from school, tardiness, leaving school during the day, attire, confidentiality, suspected child and/or substance abuse reporting protocols, and the crisis management plan. *You are expected to abide by all school rules and procedures while on site.*

2. **B**e Responsible

   • Complete all Human Resources (HR) requirements needed to access the school site *in a timely manner*. Any delays in completing your responsibilities may impact your ability to complete your field experience requirements.

- Keep a log of your hours and update the log after each visit to ensure accuracy, as your mentor teacher will need to verify those hours.
- Stay engaged in your field experience tasks. If you do not have a specific assignment or are unsure what to do, ask the teacher how you can be helpful. Do not sit in the back of the room checking your email or text messages.

3. **C**ommunicate Appropriately

- Communicate with your teacher the specific tasks you must complete during your field experience so that you can plan together. At the beginning of each semester, ask for a few minutes of the teacher's time to explain your assignments for the semester. If you have to teach a particular lesson, discuss what they will be teaching during the timeframe you need to complete the assignment and ask how you might teach a part of what is being planned.
  Remember that communication is key and you need to work with the teacher's schedule and plans in order to fulfill your assignment requirements. Note that communicating your field experience needs to your Mentor Teacher requires that you are fully aware of your requirements. Thus, be attentive in your courses to what you need to complete and seek clarification early from your instructor(s) as needed.
- Your Mentor Teacher will expect you to be at your field experience site as scheduled. If you are unable to attend a scheduled visit due to illness or an emergency, communicate *immediately* with your teacher.
- Use professional language during all communication.

During your field experience, you may discover an activity or technique used by the teacher that interests you; we suggest you use the *Experiences to Seek out and Explore Form* (Appendix C) to keep a record of your observations, any questions you may have, and topics you'd like to bring into a class discussion. This will be your personal reference sheet, and we recommend you refer to it during your classes and your internship.

Accommodations in the Field

If you utilize academic accommodations for your classes, please be aware that accommodations in the field require a separate process. Disability-related field experience and internship accommodations are made on a case-by-case basis. Advance notice is required so Disability Services can work with the instructor, field placement coordinator, and field site personnel to develop an appropriate accommodation plan. More information is available on Mason's Office of Disability Services website.

Fingerprinting and Background Check

Local school systems require students to complete a criminal background check through their Human Resources office (not through Mason) before beginning fieldwork. Detailed instructions
on the process will be sent to you from either the school system or Mason. When applying for the background check/fingerprinting, you should disclose any legal incidents that may appear on your record. School divisions can and will withhold access to field experience or internship placement if discrepancies are found between your disclosure and your official judicial record. Students must assume the risk that classes may be deferred and program progress delayed or altered due to the individual severity of notations on such a check and review by individual agencies.

Removal from Field Placement

School divisions have the right to request that a student be removed from their assigned location for field hours or internship for behaviors that do not reflect the professional dispositions required of educators. If a school division requests a student's removal from the placement:

- The student will be informed by the Program APC or Field Placement/Internship Facilitator and be expected to participate in a concern conference to discuss the matter.
- During the concern conference, program leadership will determine if a second placement during the same semester is feasible and/or appropriate.
- Students may be required to initiate a monitored individualized improvement plan, in which they are required to participate in interventions or meet additional criteria before being cleared for a second placement.
- Students removed from an internship site who do not satisfy the terms of the improvement plan within two internship application cycles will be recommended for academic termination due to failure to make satisfactory academic progress.

Placement in a new location is *not* guaranteed and depends largely on the severity of the circumstances involved in the removal. *If a placement for fieldwork is terminated prior to the end of the semester, all assignments requiring fieldwork that are not yet completed at the time of removal may be scored as a 0.*

Internship

We use the terms internship and student teaching interchangeably to describe the semester-long, capstone experience in the BSEd program. This begins in the spring semester with a 12-credit internship course. During the internship semester, students in the Adapted or General teacher licensure tracks complete two internships: one in an

elementary setting and one in a secondary setting. Students in the B/VI teacher licensure track complete all internship hours with a teacher of the blind and visually impaired and gain experiences across PK-12 settings. Students in the non-licensure track can complete internships in a variety of disability-related, non-school settings. Regardless of licensure or non-licensure, all internships are full-time throughout the spring semester and require at least 300 hours. For those in licensure tracks, the internship schedule is based on the school's calendar—NOT Mason's calendar.

During your internship, you are expected to maintain the same hours as the teacher with the exception of days in which you may need to attend class at Mason. The course sequence is designed so students do not pair daytime classes with internship. Students should not be taking daytime major, Core, or elective courses during their internship semester. Students cannot be employed Monday – Friday during daytime hours during this final semester because they will be at their school site or in class at Mason. All students will be placed in a local school; currently those are located within the Fairfax, Loudoun, and Prince William County School divisions. While we do our best to place you into one of your top choice school divisions, the reality is that you may be placed into a division or school that isn't one of your top choices. Internship placement is not automatic. Students must complete an application by the application deadline and meet all necessary requirements prior to placement.

Application for Internship

All students MUST apply to internship during the fall semester prior to their final spring semester in the program. *The spring internship application deadline is September 15, with the online application available beginning August 1*. This deadline is firm, and *late application materials will NOT be accepted unless an official extension request is approved ahead of time.*

The entire application must be complete and submitted by September 15. Please note that for students in a teacher licensure track (i.e., Adapted, General, or B/VI), internship applications include *passing scores on the VCLA and evidence of hands-on CPR/AED/First Aid training*. More information on the internship application processes can be found at the Office of Teacher Preparation internship website. The deadlines for exams are when the exam scores must be in the Mason system, not when you need to take the exams.

Additional details about the above exam can be found **HERE**.

Important: It takes up to 6 weeks for licensure exam scores to be processed and listed in the university's system, so plan accordingly when scheduling test dates. These are firm deadlines, and students are expected to plan ahead and complete the requirements on time. An extension request form and process does exist for students who experience extraordinary circumstances that prevent them from meeting the established deadlines.

If you have any questions about the above requirements, please contact your

advisor or the Clinical Practice Specialist at internsh@gmu.edu.

Graduation and Beyond

Licensure

For those in a licensure concentration, once you have successfully completed your internship, you will need to work with our licensure coordinator to apply for your license. It is your responsibility to gather all of the materials you will need (test scores, application, fees, etc.) and submit these to the licensure coordinator. View the requirements and application HERE.

Graduation

Graduation from Mason is not automatic! There are a number of steps that you must complete as you near the end of your program in order to participate in graduation activities and receive your degree. It is imperative that you read all communication from Mason carefully as graduation timelines and procedures are updated regularly.

- The steps to initiate the degree conferral process are outlined HERE.
- Students who graduate in spring or summer are welcome to participate in two graduation events: the university commencement ceremony and the College of Education and Human Development degree celebration. The degree celebration is where the graduates will get to walk across the stage as their names are called.

Alumni

There are multiple ways for alumni to stay connected with CEHD and Mason. Check out our alumni webpage for details.

Appendix A — Special Education Faculty and Staff

The Special Education Program is located in Finley Hall, Suite 102, and can be reached at speced@gmu.edu. For more information, including full bios of each faculty member, please visit our website.

Position	Faculty Name	Email
UG Core Academic Program Coordinator	Dr. Margaret Weiss	Mweiss9@gmu.edu
Adapted Curriculum Academic Program Coordinator	Dr. Marci Kinas-Jerome	mkinas@gmu.edu
General Curriculum Academic Program Coordinator	Dr. Sharon Ray	Sray4@gmu.edu
BVI Academic Program Coordinator	Dr. Kim Avila	kavila@gmu.edu
Academic Advisor	Jackie Beck	Jbeck26@gmu.edu
	Jancy Templeton	Jtemple1@gmu.edu
	Crystal Trebing	Cgolden3@gmu.edu

Appendix B – BSEd 4-Year Plans

Four-year plans for each path to licensure and for non-concentration are available on the BSED in Special Education website. Each one is linked below:

Adapted Curriculum

General Curriculum

B/VI

Non-concentration

Appendix C – Experiences to seek out and explore

Use as appropriate to record activities and as a reminder to broaden your experiences.

Activities:

- Field Trip
- Fire Drill
- PTA/PTO meeting
- Back-to-School Night
- Parent Conference
- Calls to Parents
- Parent Newsletter
- Eligibility Conference
- Mock Job Interview
- IEP Meeting
- CLT Meeting

Instruction and Assessment:

- Reading
- Writing
- Spelling
- Oral Language
- Mathematics
- Social Studies
- Science
- Health
- Physical Science
- Music
- Art

Equipment:

- Computer
- Printer
- Copier
- Doc Cam
- Manipulatives
- Listening Station
- Digital Camera
- Smartboard

Observation of Specialists:

- Special Education Resource
- PE
- Music
- Art
- ESOL
- Gifted/Talented
- Reading Specialist
- Speech Clinician
- Extra or Co-Curricular Activities

Records:

- Cumulative Folders
- Work Samples
- Anecdotal Records
- Attendance Records
- Grade Book
- Report Cards
- Accident Report
- Emergency Cards
- Referral Forms

Test Administration or Interpretation:

- Teacher-made
- Cognitive Abilities Test (CogAT)
- Developmental Reading Assessment (DRA)
- Naglieri Non-Verbal Ability Test (NNAT)
- Virginia Standards of Learning (SOL)
- Readiness Test/Inventory
- KTEA (Kaufmann Test of Educational Achievement)

Duties:

- Playground
- Cafeteria
- Bus
- Hall

Appendix D —Professional Organizations

Multiple professional organizations and associations for educators provide student memberships at a discounted rate. Students should consider joining at least one national, state or local organization to take advantage of membership benefits that will aid in their development as professional educators.

Council for Exceptional Children (CEC)

Special Interest Divisions within CEC

Virginia Council for Exceptional Children (VaCEC)

Other professional organizations related to specific disability areas will be provided by program faculty through coursework.