



FLORIDA ATLANTIC UNIVERSITY

Department of
Special Education
College of Education

Master's Degree Handbook

August 2026

Department Chair

Joseph C. Gagnon, Ph.D.

josephgagnon@fau.edu

Department Faculty

Sharon M. Darling, Ph.D.

sdarlin4@fau.edu

Charles Dukes, Ed.D., Ph.D.

cdukes@fau.edu

Lisa Finnegan, Ph.D.

lfinnegan@fau.edu

James Forgan, Ph.D.

jforgan@fau.edu

Kelly Kearney, Ph.D.

kbrown65@fau.edu

Katie Miller, Ph.D.

millerk@fau.edu

Rangasamy Ramasamy, Ph.D.

rmasam@fau.edu

Jack Scott, Ph.D., BCBA-D

jscott@fau.edu

Department Instructors

Kaley Adams, Ph.D.

krobinson2014@fau.edu

Amy Bukszpan, Ph.D., BCBA-D

abukszpan@fau.edu

Gwendolyn Carey, Ed.D.

gcarey@fau.edu

Elisa Cruz, Ed.D., BCBA-D

ecruz4@fau.edu

Angelica Downey, Ed.D.

downeya@fau.edu

Peggy Goldstein, Ed.D.

pgoldsetin@fau.edu

Brianna Miller, Ed.D.

bjosep28@fau.edu

Gregory Taylor, Ph.D., BCBA

taylorg@fau.edu

Department Staff

Mrs. Ellen Ismalon

eismalon@fau.edu

Mae Posadas, PMP

posadasm@fau.edu

Florida Atlantic University
Department of Special Education
Master's Handbook

Welcome to Your Master's Program!

The Department of Special Education (DSE) at Florida Atlantic University (FAU) offers a fully online master's in special education (M.Ed.) that is carefully crafted to meet the needs of a variety of professionals seeking to expand their knowledge of the field of special education. We focus on preparing highly qualified professional educators and personnel to work with special populations.

The master's program is a fully online 36-39 credit-graduate degree program that provides students with the knowledge and skills for working with students with disabilities. Full-time students may complete this degree program within 16-24 months. The intensive, fast-track special education coursework is designed to allow teachers, administrators, or related field personnel to concentrate in various special education fields.

Students completing our master's in special education complete courses comprising (a) Special Education Core, (b) Research and Statistics Core (not for the ABA concentration), and (c) courses in one or more of four concentration areas. Concentration areas include Applied Behavior Analysis (ABA), Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD), Early Childhood Special Education (ECSE), or Special Education Intervention Specialist (SEIS).

Program Requirements

Program Prerequisite

The MEd degree program requires a program prerequisite of an introductory course in special education or disability studies. Students who have not completed such a course must fulfill this program's prerequisite requirement within the first two semesters in the program, or before enrollment, as applicable.

Acceptable program prerequisites are EEX 2010, 2091, 4070, 5051, or as approved by the advisor. Note: (a) Financial aid does not cover this program prerequisite course. If cost is a factor, consider one of the undergraduate courses to fulfill this requirement, as the tuition cost is lower. (b) The program prerequisite course does not go onto the graduate college's electronic program of studies (ePOS).

Special Education Core

The Special Education Core includes courses designed to broaden understanding of the interventions and strategies for working with populations with specific learning or behavioral needs. The required core courses are:

- EEX 5622 Enhancing Collaborations between Schools, Communities, and Families of Students with Special Needs
- EEX 6225 Assessing Students with Disabilities
- EEX 6320 Program Evaluation of Special Education Programs, Supports, and Services
- EEX 6480 Instructional Design in Special Education, and
- EEX 6515 Special Education Leadership, Policy, and Ethics

Research and Statistics Core

The Research and Statistics Core provides a foundation for examining, designing, and understanding educational research. The required research and statistics courses are:

- STA 6113 Educational Statistics
- EDF 6481 Educational Research

Note, this core is not required for students pursuing the ABA concentration.

Concentration Areas

Concentration areas offer preparation in a specific study area(s) or preparation for a specific teaching endorsement or certification area.

Applied Behavior Analysis

The Applied Behavior Analysis concentration prepares students for the certification exam administered by the Behavior Analyst Certification Board. The required courses for this concentration are:

- EEX 5612 Applied Behavior Analysis
- EEX 6602 Behavior Change and Management Strategies
- EEX 6609 Behavior Analytic Teaching
- EEX 6615 Behavior Assessment and Intervention Selection
- EEX 7618 Advanced Applied Behavior Analysis
- EEX 6747 Ethics in ABA
- EEX 6626 Behavior Analytic Supervision & Management

Autism Spectrum Disorder

The Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) concentration prepares teachers to work with students with ASD and related disorders. The required courses for this concentration are:

- EEX 5612 Applied Behavior Analysis
- EEX 6095 Nature and Characteristics of Autism Spectrum Disorders
- EEX 6602 Behavior Change and Management Strategies
- EEX 6210 Diagnosis, Assessment, and Instructional Decision-Making for Students with Autism Spectrum Disorders
- EEX 6298 Intervention for Social, Communication, Academic, and Functional Skills for Students with Autism Spectrum Disorders

Early Childhood Special Education

The Early Childhood Special Education concentration prepares students for the add-on Pre-Kindergarten Disability teaching endorsement and the Infant Toddler Development Specialist certificate. The required courses for this concentration are:

- EEX 5015 Survey & Assessment in Early Childhood Special Education
- EEX 5017 Atypical Development Early Childhood ESE
- EEX 5245 Methods in Early Childhood Special Education
- EEX 5755 Family & Community Resources in Early Childhood Special Education
- EEX 6707 Early Intervention Services

Special Education Intervention Specialist

The Special Education Intervention Specialist concentration is designed to deepen knowledge of special education intervention strategies. This concentration is appropriate for individuals who wish to earn a master's degree while gaining the knowledge and skills needed to be an effective special education teacher. The required courses for this concentration are:

- EEX 6027 Seminar in Special Education
- EEX 6259 Cognitive Metacognitive Strategies
- EEX 6609 Behavior Analytic Teaching*
- EEX 6290 Mathematics Remediation & Intervention for Students with Disabilities
- EEX 6292 Literacy Remediation & Interventions for Students with Disabilities

***Note:** The course EEX 6609 is being discontinued, please see your advisor for an approved course substitution.

Thesis or Field Project

As a culminating option for the master's degree, students may add a thesis or field project to engage in practical or applied research in their concentration area. The Field Project is an individually designed, practical learning experience. The Field Project will extend and integrate the student's professional knowledge and experience. The thesis is recommended for students considering furthering their education with a specialist or doctoral degree. The field project is recommended for students who wish to conduct applied research in educational settings. Students should discuss these options with their faculty advisor.

- EEX 6942 Field Project
- EEX 6971 Thesis

Teaching Certification

Upon program completion, students have the option of seeking teacher certification/endorsement in ASD, ESE K-12, Pre-K Disabilities (PreK-Grade 3); Early Intervention Infant Toddler Developmental Specialist training (ITDS); or preparation for the Board-Certified Behavior Analyst (BCBA) exam.

Students in the master's degree program who have not previously earned Special Education teaching certification may wish to pursue certification through the Florida Department of Education. *Teaching certification is not linked to the Department of Special Education Master's degree at FAU.* Given the various and changing routes to teaching certification in Florida, students who wish to gain teaching certification will have numerous options and are advised to seek the most current information from the [Florida Department of Education Bureau of Teacher Certification](#).

Program Entry

Online Orientation ("Master's Boot Camp")

Once admitted to the DSE Master's degree program, students are to complete the "Master's Boot Camp," which is our online Master's Orientation Training. The training is a self-study module conducted via Canvas, FAU's web-based learning management system.

"Master's Boot Camp" is intended to orient students to varied aspects of graduate education and our department. After receiving a letter of acceptance into the program, students can access the site at <http://canvas.fau.edu> and log in using their FAU credentials. The site will show as a pending course. Upon completing the "Master's

Florida Atlantic University
Department of Special Education
Master's Handbook

Bootcamp” modules and assessments, students should save the grade report and share it during the first advising appointment with their Department of Special Education faculty advisor.

Mandatory Orientation Session

The department will host a live orientation session for incoming students each semester, typically conducted via Zoom. Attendance for this session is mandatory for incoming students; dates/times will be conveyed in your department welcome email.

“Getting Programmed”

To formalize admission to the degree program, students must “get programmed.” This means meeting with their department faculty advisor and completing the *Department of Special Education’s Master’s Degree Information and Planning Sheet*. This, in turn, will help the student to complete and submit the electronic FAU Graduate College Plan of Study (ePOS). These documents will detail the scope and sequence of courses required for the degree. The department’s planning sheet, combined with the Graduate College Plan of Study, will minimize the chance of confusion as a student progresses toward their degree. The programming meeting will cover additional information on program options, requirements, etc. Department planning sheets and course rotations are available for preview [here](#).

Graduate College Electronic Program of Study (POS)

All degree-seeking graduate students should have an approved electronic Plan of Study (ePOS) on file with the Graduate College no later than halfway through their required coursework. Newly admitted students will have access to their Plan of Study following the successful completion of their first semester. The Department of Special Education requires that students complete their ePOS during their second semester in the degree program.

Students must have an approved Plan of Study on file with the Graduate College before the term they intend to graduate. Learn more about how to submit the POS [here](#).

Program Changes

As a student progresses in a master’s degree program, changes to the degree plan can be made if necessary. Changes should be made in consultation with the student’s faculty advisor. Learn more about how to modify your approved POS [here](#). All Graduate College forms can be found [here](#).

Coursework & Ethical/ Professional Conduct

Course Rotation and Completion

Graduate courses in the master's degree program are offered on a rotation that allows students to plan their programs several semesters in advance. For timely completion of their degree program, it is imperative that students remain in sequence and complete courses as planned. Students should follow the individualized planning sheet and ePOS completed in consultation with their department advisor. General department planning course rotations for each concentration area are available [here](#).

All master's courses are offered fully online. Though online, there is still variation in delivery format (e.g., synchronous, asynchronous) and course length (e.g., semester-long and fast-track/half-term). Do pay close attention to the course delivery mode when registering for courses. When progressing full-time (typically nine credits per semester), students are able to complete this degree program within 16-24 months. If students intend to progress less than full-time, or fail to complete courses in sequence, the degree will take significantly longer to complete.

To help ensure successful progress toward a degree, students should become familiar with this handbook, bookmark and review the [FAU University Catalog](#), and meet regularly with their department faculty advisor.

Ongoing Evaluation

Students in our degree program are expected to adhere to ethical and professional conduct. As such, students must commit deserved time and energy to their studies and professional development. The faculty evaluates students' professional development based on their course performance, professional and ethical conduct in course discussions, and electronic communications. Students who demonstrate behavior inconsistent with the behavior or qualities necessary for success may be advised to reconsider their career and degree decisions. It is essential to note that problems with student performance and behavior may disqualify a student from continuing in the degree program.

Academic Progression

Graduate students at FAU must maintain a 3.0 cumulative GPA. The university will not confer degrees on graduate students with a cumulative GPA of less than 3.00. Policies on academic standing for graduate students can be found in the catalog [here](#). Specifically, review the description of the [Academic Progression Plan](#).

Critical Assignments and Florida Educator Accomplished Practices

Critical Assignments (CAs) are embedded into many of the graduate courses in the master's degree. These assignments are intended to allow students to demonstrate proficiency in department, state, and professional personnel preparation competencies (e.g., Florida DOE Educator Accomplished Practices (EAPs), CAEP competencies, ITDS competencies). Due to the nature of these assignments, students must pass the CA to receive a passing grade in these courses.

Department of Special Education Policy on Critical Assignments

Graduate students must earn a minimum grade of 83% of the points allotted for a Critical Assignment to receive a minimum grade of B in a course. In other words, a student cannot "pass" the course with a B without successfully completing the Critical Assignment.

Remediation Policy for Critical Assignments. If a student is passing the course with a B grade but has *failed* to pass the Critical Assignment with a minimum of 83% of the possible points, the student will receive an "INC" in the course until the Critical Assignment is successfully redone. Only one attempt is allowed. The instructor will determine the conditions and time frame for the resubmission of the assignment. However, the second attempt must be completed within one semester. Upon successfully completing the re-submitted assignment, the "INC" will be changed to a grade for the course, and the student may continue in the special education sequence of courses. The original points earned for the initial attempt at the Critical Assignment will be used to calculate the final grade in the course. If the resubmitted Critical Assignment is not successfully passed, the grade for the course will be B- or below based on the total points earned.

If a student is not passing the course with a grade of B or better and has *failed* to pass the Critical Assignment with a minimum of 83% of the possible points, the student will not be allowed to resubmit the Critical Assignment. The student will need to repeat the course and the Critical Assignment.

Watermark (LiveText). The College of Education utilizes Watermark (LiveText) to assess student competency and progress in their program of study, and to comply with program approval /accreditation all in one place. Live Text can also be used by students to track their performance across courses. All students enrolled in any course with a critical assignment must have an active Watermark (LiveText) account within the first four (4) weeks of the full semester course, or within the first three (3) weeks of summer or fast-track session. Learn more about purchasing Live Text [here](#).

Community of Learners Events

The department strives to foster a community of learners within this online degree program. As such, annually, we will host a community of learner events intended to foster engagement and exploration of special education-related content, share values and beliefs, and actively engage in learning from each other. Students are highly encouraged to attend these events, as they are also an opportunity to connect with fellow learners and faculty outside the confines of the course requirements.

Degree Completion Requirements

To complete the master's degree in special education, each student must:

1. Meet all College and University graduation requirements.
2. Earn grades of B or higher in all courses (Students must repeat any courses in which a grade of B- or below is earned. A course may only be repeated once.).
3. Maintain continuous enrollment in the University (1 credit per academic year). FAU requires a re-application (forms and fees) to the University if there is a break in enrollment.
4. Complete the required number of hours specified in the student's Program of Study (POS).

Degree Costs and Financial Assistance

Tuition and Fees

The tuition costs at FAU are among the lowest in the nation. Thus, students can earn their master's degree for less than \$14K in tuition costs. Full details about tuition rates can be found [here](#). The Department has a limited number of competitive graduate research assistantships (GRA) available to assist with tuition costs. Students should contact their faculty advisor or the department to learn more.

Financial Assistance

Students in all stages of their academic careers may be eligible for financial aid. While the process is roughly the same for each kind of student, sometimes there are unique requirements. Students are strongly encouraged to meet with an FAU Financial Aid Advisor to get more information on loans, grants, and scholarships to help finance their

Florida Atlantic University
Department of Special Education
Master's Handbook

master's program. FAU's Office of Financial Assistance is there to help you navigate the financial aid process. Learn more [here](#).

The College of Education also awards scholarships at departmental and college levels each year. Many scholarships are possible through the generous gifts of alumni, friends, and faculty. Learn more [here](#).

Further Assistance

Students needing assistance regarding matters in special education, contact the Department at 561- 297-3280 or Ms. Ellen Ismalon, department secretary, at 561-297-3284.

Appendix A
Program Admission Requirements

Admission Requirements

Applicants to the Department of Special Education must follow the procedures for graduate admissions. Forms, policies, and procedures for the FAU Graduate College can be found at the following website: <http://wise.fau.edu/graduate/>.

Domestic applicants must:

1. Meet College and University requirements.
2. Hold a bachelor's degree from an accredited institution of higher education.
3. Have earned an undergraduate Grade Point Average (GPA) of 3.0. If GPA is below 3.0, applicants may submit one approved rating form from an employer in an education-related field or a current/former university instructor; and,
4. Provide a personal statement not exceeding three double-spaced pages, indicating the applicant's reasons for pursuing a master's degree and career goals.

International applicants must:

1. Meet College and University requirements.
2. hold a bachelor's degree from an accredited institution of higher education.
3. Have earned an undergraduate Grade Point Average (GPA) of 3.0. If GPA is below 3.0, applicants may submit one letter of recommendation from an employer in an education-related field or a current/former university instructor; and
4. Provide a personal statement not exceeding three double-spaced pages, indicating the applicant's reasons for pursuing a master's degree and career goals.
5. Have attained minimum English proficiency scores within the last two years: TOEFL 548 (paper-based test), or 213 (computer-based test), or 79 (Internet-based test); a score of at least 6.0 on the IELTS; or, Duolingo 110.