Handbook for Teacher Candidates

EDSP 406:

Field Placement I: Special Education

Special Education

UNIVERSITY OF MARYLAND

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Introduction

Welcome to Special Education. We are very glad that you have chosen to become a special educator. We believe that you will find the administration, faculty, and staff in the Department of Special Education to be dedicated to helping you become the best educator you can be, and a special educator who will help to change the future of children with disabilities.

The University of Maryland provides a Combined B.S./M.Ed. program, a Master’s Certification program, a Master’s program for teachers already certified and Doctor of Philosophy degree. We are unique in that each program that includes a special education teaching credential provides an intensity of field experiences. Each semester you will be involved in working directly with children and youth in the public schools. This program is one of the best in the nation, and the faculty is known nationally for their contributions in the field of special education.

The Department of Special Education will provide you with the coursework you need to become a highly trained and skillful teacher. The Department plans the field experiences that complement your coursework. We consider the opportunity to combine theory and practice an essential ingredient in the preparation of a master teacher.

This manual has been prepared to explain the field portion of your preparation (find details about coursework in Department of Special Education Student Handbook). You will be referred to as a “teacher candidate” not as a student as you begin your work in the schools. We will provide you with information about the requirements and responsibilities in your field placements and give you useful advice on how to make this component of your preparation a meaningful and successful experience. This handbook is the textbook for this seminar class, EDSP 406, but you may find it useful as a reference throughout your program.

Please feel free to call or email if you have questions, suggestions, or concerns.

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Part I
Teacher Preparation

- The Special Education Major in Brief

The Combined B.S./M.Ed. Special Education Program at the University of Maryland is a five-year program in three phases: Liberal Arts Foundation, Professional Foundation, and Professional Concentration.

The Liberal Arts Foundation is completed during the first two academic years and ends in selective admissions to the Special Education Department.

In this third year, you will be in the second phase, Professional Foundation, a two-semester sequence of special education coursework. The information you will accumulate through your coursework and your field placement activities this year, will be considered appropriate for all who will specialize in programs for children with disabilities. This fall, you will be asked to choose an age-based area to study further in the third phase.

The fourth and fifth year of your preparation, the third phase, Professional Concentration, includes coursework and fieldwork in one of three areas:

- Early Childhood Special Education
- Elementary Special Education
- Secondary/Middle School Special Education

Within each area, candidates will be prepared to work with students with low incidence to high incidence disabilities. For more information regarding coursework and requirements, please refer to the Special Education Student Handbook for the Combined B.S./M.Ed. Program.

- Field Placements During the Professional Foundation Phase

Each semester, university coursework is coordinated with a particular field experience in a public school classroom. For example, students will attend classes dealing with infants and toddlers at the same time as they are in a field sites with those populations. For most of your classes, you will have assignments that must be completed in your field site. This provides you with a laboratory in which you can directly apply newly learned information. Further, you will have the support and guidance of the college professor, the university supervisor, and a master teacher while developing the “hands-on” skills of your profession.

Each field placement is accompanied by a general Friday seminar that serves as an integration point for the university coursework and field-based program components. The seminar offers a place to discuss issues and concerns that come up in placement and a place to hear about topics that directly relate to practical aspects of teaching.
Field placement days, hours, and requirements vary as the program progresses. Generally, the level of responsibility and involvement increase gradually from observing several times a semester, to active teaching two to three days per week, to doing most of the teaching everyday during student teaching.

**Field Placement I** will primarily consist of Friday seminars and tours geared towards helping you choose an age-based area. Faculty representatives from each age-based area will present information on the coursework and preparation in that area. Teachers from the field will present information from their perspective and fourth and fifth year students may be asked to interact with you regarding their coursework and practice in the specialty. Mandatory tours will be set up in schools representing students with a wide range of ages and disabilities.

**Field Placement II** will be your first opportunity to spend time in a classroom in this program. You will be under the direction of a general education teacher in an elementary school classroom that also contains students with exceptional learning needs, though some of the students will not be officially labeled as disabled.

- **Friday Seminars**

  All teacher candidates are required to attend Friday seminars. Seminars have a specific purpose. In seminar, you have general contact with your supervisor, you discuss issues about your placements, and information is presented which will help you in your new teaching role. For the most part, the assignments and content in seminar are quite different from what will be delivered in your general coursework. Every effort is made to be sure that information in coursework and seminars is integrated and that the emphasis in seminar is on applied knowledge. General issues that have relevance to the public school classroom such as IEP process, lesson planning, and collaboration will be presented along with specific, practical topics such as conflict resolution, and county hiring practices. You should always plan to attend your seminars.

- **Major Goals for Field Placement in Professional Foundation Phase**

  - To develop successful professional habits and attitudes
  - To develop or enhance communication and rapport with children in appropriate adult-child relationships
  - To begin the development of collaborative professional adult relationships
  - To begin to develop the skill of reflecting on and self-evaluating teaching performance

  The remainder of this handbook contains information that may help you achieve these goals.
PART II
SUCCESSFUL PROFESSIONAL HABITS AND ATTITUDES

Making the transition from student to teacher via the role of teacher candidate requires attention to basic habits and attitudes that make up professionalism. You will be expected and evaluated on your performance in the following areas (See performance evaluation form in the Appendix) as observed on school tours and in the seminar as indicated.

For this practicum, on tours and in seminar as noted, students will demonstrate the following performance competencies:

**Work Habits:**

- **On time, follows through on work schedule, and contacts when absences occur**
  - On time and stays until the tour ends
  - On time to seminar.
  - Assignments complete and handed in on time
  - Leaves voice or email messages when absent

- **Takes initiative and actively participates in the classroom**
  - On tours: asks questions, makes comments, listens actively, takes notes
  - In seminar: Asks questions, makes comments, listens actively, takes notes, initiates participation

- **Dress-grooming are appropriate**
  - In schools, dresses appropriately and professionally

**Reflection**

- **Receives feedback appropriately**
  - Responds appropriately if suggestions are offered
  - Considers alternatives
  - Asks for clarification

- **Changes as the result of feedback**
  - Incorporates feedback as appropriate
  - Inquiry Summaries improve
  - From midterm to subsequent activities

- **Reflective about her/his own practice**
  - Comments in seminar related to decision-making show self-awareness
- Written and verbal self-evaluation shows progress towards goals

**Professional Practice**

**Practices within one’s own skill limit and obtains assistance when needed**

- Listens and observes with an open mind
- Interacts on tour in a non-judgmental manner
- Asks questions, makes comments and takes notes on tours
- Asks questions, comments, takes notes in seminar

**Engages in professional activities that benefit students, their families, and one’s colleagues**

- Pursues professional development through reading, joining organizations (CEC)
- Develops attitudes that enable advocacy (a good basic knowledge with a passion for helping)
- Shows respect for teachers, parents and children

**Maintains confidential communication about students and families**

- Does not discuss personal observations of students except in seminar or in teacher-led discussions
- Uses pseudonyms or general descriptions of students in writing
- Discusses students in professional manner, as if parent were listening

**Demonstrates energy, enthusiasm and positive attitude toward teaching**

- Observes teaching and class/school environment
- Comments on tours reflect respect and interest
- Questions and comments in seminar reflect enthusiasm for the field
- Shows genuine interest in working with children
- Participates attentively in all aspects of tour
- Attentive to all class activities
- Participates in small and large group discussions

As a profession, special educators have developed standards of performance that direct efforts of practitioners to the benefit of students. Development of Professional and Ethical standards is the basis and beginning of excellent teaching.
PART III
COMMUNICATION AND RAPPORT WITH STUDENTS

There are many areas in which you will need to demonstrate professional competency. None is more important than your ability to develop and maintain positive working relationships with students, teachers, school staff, administrators, parents, and university personnel.

Knowing your subject matter, knowing how to manage behavior and how to build a creative lesson are essential skills for a teacher. All the understanding of content and instruction you can bring to teaching have little value unless the children want to learn. The ability to create a strong bond with those you want to influence is what makes the difference between the adequate teacher and the great teacher.

Teaching is relationship building. If a student wants to please you, he or she will do whatever is necessary to work with you rather than against you. Building relationships with students takes time, energy, and consistent efforts. Your ability to make the students understand that you have an interest in them as human beings increases the likelihood that you will be able to teach them well.

The following suggestions may help in building relationships with students:

- **One Liners**
  
  Make brief comments (congratulations on a sport, talk about a favorite hobby) or questions to students (ask about their health, if they like a popular movie or show) that shows your interest in them and allows you to make a personal contact.

- **The Extra Mile**
  
  As a teacher candidate you have almost as little extra time as a teacher, but there is nothing of greater consequence to students than to know that you would make the extra effort to help them figure something out or help them with a difficulty.

- **A Nod or a Smile**
  
  A nod or smile that indicates “You got it!” nonverbally can be very reinforcing. It takes no time, it is individual, and if reserved for significant achievement, is very powerful in building relationships with students.
• **You Too Are Human**

  It is natural to like some students more than others. Like a good parent, however, it is essential that this does not become obvious. Sometimes you may have to work very hard to find something positive that you like about a student, particularly one who misbehaves, but it is essential to find ways to give equal treatment to all those for whom you are responsible.

• **Take Time to Form Your Own Opinions**

  Don’t let other people’s judgments about a child influence you. Make your own evaluations based on your experiences and begin with a positive attitude. This may give students a chance to try out new, more positive behaviors. Our assumptions about the kind of person s/he is, seem to have potential for influencing who s/he becomes.

• **Don’t Be a Buddy**

  Often beginning teacher candidates who want to be liked by their students, take on the role of “buddy” to the students. Most professionals believe that forming “friend” relationships with students may be problematic. Being buddies suggests a relationship based on parity and equal status, which conflicts with the teacher role of helping students to learn, change, and grow by providing leadership and challenges. This doesn’t mean that you have to be a sober authoritarian, or that you can’t sometimes laugh together with students. Being in charge, however, carries with it certain responsibilities – those are not carried off very well when students see you as their “buddy”. Being in charge gives children and young people confidence that you know what you are doing. An educator once made this concept very clear. She said that she was sure that in some cases, she didn’t help students to learn algebra because they wanted to, it was because she wanted them to that they acquired the skills.

• **Be Who You Want Them to Become**

  Perhaps the most important things you want students to learn are taught by who you are, as much as what you teach. Often we think that our responsibility as a teacher is to teach children to read, to calculate, or to grasp American History. Along with these important skills, we also teach some very important lessons about becoming a decent human being. Think about the model you provide.

• **Listen Carefully**

  Listen to students. Make them believe that you have given their ideas full consideration and that you value their willingness to share their ideas with you. Sometimes you may not finish the spelling lesson, but you have let students feel important by having their ideas heard by a teacher.
● **Don’t Use Sarcasm**

Though you might see sarcasm as humor, students may feel wounded at playful verbal jabs. Your intent is to build students up, not tear them down. Think about how you would want to be treated. Sarcasm is negative and should be avoided.

● **Beware of using sexual stereotypes**

Your ability to model a lack of sexism in your attitudes and language is absolutely necessary for you to teach. Avoid stereotypes in dealing with the activities and potentials of boys and girls.

● **Recognizing Diversity**

As a teacher, it is part of your responsibility to help students develop positive attitudes about the cultural diversity in our world. The fundamental ingredient to making this happen is to demonstrate your own positive attitudes and lack of bias. You should be able to direct students’ attention to contributions made by both sexes, and all races and cultures. Reading materials, bulletin boards, etc. should not demonstrate the values of a single culture, but make each child believe that he or she is represented in how your classroom looks and how inclusive you try to be.

As a teacher candidate, in some situations, it is particularly difficult to create the kind of relationship you would want with the students for whom you are responsible in an environment where you are the “second” teacher. Your mentor may have created a tone in the classroom that is different from the one you would create. Remember, this is “practice” and begin by creating your own tone with individual students and small groups.
PART IV
COLLABORATIVE PROFESSIONAL ADULT RELATIONSHIPS

In addition to rapport with students, relationships that you build with the adults in your environment will go a long way in making your preparation as a teacher a rewarding and successful experience. In the coming field placements, please take advantage of the opportunity to learn from:

1. A veteran teacher with whom you will work either daily or several times a week
2. A university supervisor with years of experience in mentoring students
3. College professors whose interest it is to make you a successful teacher

With all three working together you can receive excellent preparation for your career.

Keep in mind the following relationship building suggestions:

- **Be a Listener and a Looker**
  
  Input comes before output. Watch what is going on in your school, classroom or community. Be a careful observer, take notes, gather information, and strive for understanding.

- **Be a Learner**
  
  We never stop learning about the nature of teaching and learning. Begin the process of learning all that you can from professional educators so that you can be the best possible teacher.

- **Reserve Your Personal Judgments**
  
  The practice you observe in the field may not always conform to what you have learned in your formal coursework. If you have some concerns about a specific practice, ask questions in a non-judgmental manner to gain further insight about a teacher or student’s behavior. You could also bring your questions into seminar and pose them in a professional way.

- **Practice Confidentiality**
  
  Information shared in the school setting is not usually appropriate for other audiences. Respect the information you have about children and their families and use professional discretion in discussing the experiences you encounter in the classroom or in the school.
Know Your Own Verbal and Nonverbal Communication Habits

Recognize that you communicate as much to people with nonverbal (gestures, facial, body language) as with verbal. Try to be consistent in your messages to say what you intend. If you get feedback from another person suggesting that he or she may have misunderstood your intent, ask for clarification. It doesn’t hurt to check and you may have avoided a serious relationship hazard.

Consider How Others Perceive You

Recognize that others judge you and make decisions about you based on your appearance and actions. Take cues from the standard or norms established within your school building.

Don’t be the Expert

There may be times when what the teacher does in the classroom is diametrically opposed to what you have learned in university coursework. Tact is the order of the day – both in dealing with your mentor and back in your college classroom. Make the disagreement a learning opportunity.
PART V
EVALUATION

Evaluation is an important part of both teacher preparation and teaching in general. Mentors and supervisors evaluate teacher candidate performance in each practicum placement. You will be asked to self-evaluate your performance and to give feedback about your university supervisor, practicum site, and your seminar experiences.

We are in a continual process of evaluating our teacher candidates. Your mentor will be observing you, evaluating your performance, and giving you constructive feedback frequently. Your university supervisor will evaluate you during the semester on both practicum and seminar participation. A mid-term and final evaluation will be a combination of self-evaluation, input from mentor, and university supervisor. The major purpose of all of this is to help you to become reflective about your own performance and to help you see your own strengths and needs from another perspective. The central purpose of evaluation is not about grades or determining what you can’t do. It is about identifying what experiences and knowledge you need in order to be successful at each step of the assessment, planning, instructional delivery, data gathering, and evaluation process of teaching.

- Practicum Evaluation in the Third Year

During the fall semester of the third year, you will be evaluated on professionalism as exhibited in tours of educational sites and in seminar. Seminar feels like any other class, but we will be looking for teacher candidates to show enthusiasm and participation when we have speakers and activities that can be translated into professional skills. Actively listening and asking questions, shows a positive attitude. Performance on assignments and improvement over the course of the semester are important indicators of learning. Letting us know through email or phone messages when you can’t attend class or tours shows responsibility. At midpoint time, we ask you to self-evaluate your professional skills and have individual conferences to discuss areas in which to improve. See Part 2 in this manual for more explanation of the categories of evaluation and the Appendix for the evaluation form.

You will be in a classroom for two mornings per week during the spring semester. The performance assessment form will be the basis for mentors’ evaluation. In addition to Professional and Ethical Practices, you will be evaluated on Collaboration. These two areas are crucial to good teaching and will continue to be a part of future evaluation in addition to instructional competencies. At mid-point and final evaluations, teacher candidates will meet with mentors and university supervisors (if needed) to discuss the performance assessment. The evaluation will be turned in to the university supervisor.
● **Practicum Evaluation after the Third Year**

In the fourth and fifth years, you will be evaluated on the same categories as previously stated, in addition to the following categories:

- Individual Learning Differences
- Characteristics of Learners
- Assessment
- Instructional Planning
- Instructional Strategies
- Learning Environments and Social Interactions

● **Grading**

The grades you will receive in your field placements are based upon three elements:

1. The mentor’s final evaluation of the field placement
2. The university supervisor’s evaluation of field placement and seminar participation (40 points)
3. Points earned from seminar assignments (10 points)

The university supervisor’s evaluation is composed of his/her own evaluation as well as information provided to him/her by the mentor about performance in the field. The university supervisor’s evaluation can equalize differences among mentors.
PART VI
PROFESSIONAL AND ETHICAL QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

There are always questions about a teacher candidate’s responsibilities to the profession – to children – to their school – to parents – and to their colleagues. The following questions and answers deal with such issues.

- “What is confidentiality and how does it apply to me?”

  Teacher candidates will abide by the following rules regarding issues of confidentiality, legislation (e.g. IDEA), and the goals of the department’s training program.
  
  o All field-based assignments will be shared and discussed with the mentor(s) prior to implementation. Since the teacher’s first responsibility is to his/her pupils, this is best done when pupils are not present.
  o All activities conducted in the school by the teacher candidate should be appropriate for the child or youth’s functioning level and education needs.
  o All University assignments are for teacher candidate’s learning purposes only. Schools and teachers should not use information generated by the teacher candidate for making decisions regarding a particular student(s).
  o Any personally identifiable information to which the teacher candidate has access should be used for learning purposes only and should not be removed from the school.

  P.L. 94-142 defines “personally identifiable” information as:
  
  a. The name of the student, the student’s parent or other family members.
  b. The address of the student.
  c. A personal identifier such as the student’s social security number or a list of personal characteristics, or other information which would make it possible to identify the student with reasonable accuracy.

  (Federal Register 24 (163):121a500, 1977)

  This means that the teacher candidate should protect the confidentiality of students and families by removing names as well as any other identifiable information (e.g. teacher name, school) from any work samples and from any notes removed from the school. Assignments that require student information should be done in concert with mentor and university professor.
• “What protection from lawsuit do I have as a teacher in training?”

In most states, the laws that apply to teachers also apply to teacher candidates. You are generally protected by and held accountable to the same laws. Whether protected or not, you can be held liable for your actions if you are found to be careless or negligent.

• “What if a child gets hurt while I am in charge?”

During practicum experiences as well as student teaching, you are not to be left alone in the classroom for any extended time period. The truth is, however, that emergencies do arise and being left alone can happen. In determining negligence, the courts have used the standard of exercising reasonable care. Additionally, although parents may have given permission and signed a form releasing a teacher or teacher candidate from liability, if reasonable care has not been exercised, you may still be held liable.

Field trips, animals in the classroom, sexual harassment which occurs in front of you, accidents on the playground, and student fights, all have the potential of liability if you could have done something to avoid student injury.

• “Do I have to report suspected child abuse?”

In most states, teachers are responsible by law for reporting suspected child abuse. As a teacher candidate, we would strongly suggest that any reporting of suspected abuse be done in concert with a teacher. Physical abuse, neglect, sexual abuse, and emotional abuse are all possibilities about which you should be informed. Inform your mentor teacher immediately if such concerns are brought to your attention. Notify your supervisor on the same day.

• “What should I do if asked to participate in a controversial practice such as spanking, search of students’ belongings, physical restraints?”

U. S. and State laws apply in each of these situations as well as school district and school policies. As a teacher candidate, we strongly suggest that you talk to your university supervisor before confronting or participating in any controversial practice. If you become involved in disciplinary actions, or suspect students of wrong-doing, always do so under the direct supervision of your mentor.

• “May I transport students in my car?”

The University of Maryland recommends not transporting students in private vehicles. Transportation is the responsibility of the student’s school.
• “What is my responsibility to administer first aid?”

We strongly suggest that you never administer first aid unless it is a serious emergency. Where time permits, call upon your mentor to decide what is appropriate. You should know what to do in case of extreme bleeding, choking, unconsciousness, etc. Becoming certified in CPR and First Aid will help you feel able to handle emergencies.

• “What if I am asked to give medications to a child?”

School personnel are designated to give medications administered in school. We recommend that you not take on this responsibility while you are a teacher candidate.

• “What are my rights should I need to physically defend myself?”

Situations may arise when a student threatens a teacher, where two students physically endanger each other, or where a student is “out of control”. Try non-physical interventions (e.g. verbal control, proximity control, removal of dangerous objects) and do not become angry or lose control. The courts have upheld a teacher’s right to protect him/herself, other students, or school property, when compelled to do so and without using extreme force. Threats against your person should always be taken seriously and reported to the proper authorities. Any self-defense training that you can take may make you more comfortable in these situations.

• “How can I best advocate for children with disabilities?”

As a teacher and a teacher candidate, your first priority is for the best interests of the students. Sometimes this comes into conflict with school policy or parental rights. In these cases you may find yourself straddling a line between loyalty to a school (your host and eventual employer) and your responsibility as an advocate for children. Determine your own course based upon your ethical framework, but consider the following:
  - Discuss the situation with your University Supervisor.
  - Together with your Supervisor, discuss the situation with the mentor and principal.

• What are my rights to teach what I think is appropriate?

There is some controversy over what teachers may teach. As a teacher candidate, everything that you will teach must be approved and initialed by your mentor. You will not make the decision about what to teach by yourself while you are preparing to be a teacher. For future reference, however, address the following questions when determining subject matter:
  - Is the material developmentally appropriate for your class?
  - What is your educational purpose? Is it valid?
  - Is there a policy in your school that prohibits the use of such material?
PART VII
CONCLUSION

The information you have received in this manual may seem overwhelming as you begin your practicum experiences. You will find that things will fall into place as you progress from one semester to the next. Whatever circumstances you find yourself in, the faculty and staff of the Department of Special Education are dedicated to making you a successful special education professional.

As a student, you handle pressures from balancing coursework and field experiences. This is in preparation for the greater obligations you will assume when you become a teacher. You may perhaps gain some perspective from considering what faced your predecessors in the field of education:

1872 Rules For Teachers
Oldest Wooden Schoolhouse
St. Augustine, Florida

1. Teachers each day will fill lamps, clean chimneys.
2. Each teacher will bring a bucket of water and a scuttle of coal for the day’s sessions.
3. Make your pens carefully. You may whittle nibs to the individual taste of the pupils.
4. Men teachers may take one evening each week for courting purposes, or two evenings a week if they go to church generally.
5. After ten hours in school, the teachers may spend the remaining time reading the Bible or other good books.
6. Women teachers who marry or engage in unseemly conduct will be dismissed.
7. Every teacher should lay aside from each day pay a goodly sum of his earnings for his benefit during his declining years so that he will not become a burden on society.
8. Any teacher who smokes, uses liquor in any form, frequents pool or public halls, or gets shaved in a barber shop will give good reason to suspect his worth, intention, integrity and honesty.
9. The teacher who performs his labor faithfully and without fault for five years will be given an increase of twenty-five cents per week in his pay, providing the Board of Education approves.
AN ODE TO STUDENT TEACHERS
Anonymous PG Mentor (1975)

You plan an hour lesson and then you discover that
The children finish all the work in seven minutes flat

You’re showing a new movie that the children think is great,
When just at the most crucial part, the film projector breaks

You’re doing an activity the children all adore
When someone in the front of class gets sick upon the floor

You’re having finger painting to build artistic skill
When bells announce that it is time to have a fire drill

You organize a field trip and are picnicking outdoors,
When thunder rumbles, lightening strikes, and suddenly it pours.

At conference time with parents, you welcome them with smiles,
Until you then discover that you’ve misplaced their kid’s files

You fill out forms and records—at least 10 pages long
The secretary calls you in and says you did them wrong

You hand out fifty papers that you marked the day before,
While thinking that at night you’ll have 100 more to score.

You’re working with a group and everything is going fine,
When somebody sets loose the classes’ new pet porcupine.

You’re set to take a break—the class has music down the hall;
You learn the music teacher’s sick and won’t be in at all.

Your teacher leaves you all alone—this time it is the first
The class decides that now is when they’ll act their very worst.

You’re angry and upset and just about prepared to “blow”
When the biggest mischief-maker says he’ll miss you when you go.

You almost decided to give up in dismay
When someone else sends you a note, “I learned a lot today”

SO….

Student teaching’s finally the decision that you reach
That in spite of all the problems, you still really want to teach.
Appendices
(to be distributed in class)

Special Education Field Performance Based Assessment

Foundational Competencies Policy and Documents

Council for Exceptional Children (CEC) Standards

College of Education Conceptual Framework