

***School of Teaching and Learning***

***Special Education Graduate Program***

**A Handbook of Procedures**

**2008**

**Minnesota State University Moorhead**

Special Education  
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Moorhead, MN 56563

[http://www.mnstate.edu/graduate/special\\_education.cfm](http://www.mnstate.edu/graduate/special_education.cfm)

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## Graduate Programs and Courses

In the School of Teaching and Learning there are three master's degree programs: Master of Science in Curriculum and Instruction in Education (C&I,) Master of Science in Reading (Reading,) and Master of Science in Special Education (SPED.)

Each program and set of courses which lead to graduate certificates has many common requirements as well as requirements specific to the individual program or set of courses. This manual is to speak to the Special Education students.

### Admission to a Master's Degree Program

Complete requirements for admission into MSUM Graduate Programs are available online at [http://www.mnstate.edu/graduate/admission\\_req.cfm](http://www.mnstate.edu/graduate/admission_req.cfm). You must meet graduate school admission requirements as well as admission requirements for the Master of Science degree in special education, which can be found online at [http://www.mnstate.edu/graduate/special\\_education.cfm](http://www.mnstate.edu/graduate/special_education.cfm). Please refer to these sites for questions regarding academic information, admission, assistantships, courses, faculty/staff, forms, the Graduate Bulletin, and programs & certificate.

### Advisor

An advisor is assigned at the time of admission. This advisor will assist in planning the student's courses and with completing and filing Form One, "Proposed Graduate Course Plan" with the Graduate Studies office.

### Graduate Student Files

Each student has a permanent file in the Records Office. Items are placed in this file by sending them to the Graduate Studies Office. Each student also has a working file in the School of Teaching and Learning (STL.) STL working files are stored in a locked environment in compliance with FERPA. Currently STL working files are stored in the side room in Lommen 209. A file folder and check-out sheet is located in this room. Faculty or staff needing to work with STL working files should check them out so that there is a record of who has a file at any given time. This allows us to ensure files are secure and also to readily locate a file when a question arises.

### Forms

There are seven basic forms, as well as some supplemental and other forms, that are utilized to manage passage through the Special Education program. Each should be completed, with required signatures, and submitted to the Graduate Studies Office, in order, and at the required points in the student's program.

- **Form 1** Proposed Graduate Course Plan
- **Form 2** Thesis/Project Committee Appointment and Approval
- **Form 3** Comprehensive Examination

- **Form 4** Thesis/Project Topic Approval and Human Research
- **Form 5** Preliminary Graduation Notice
- **Form 6** Announcement of Oral Defense
- **Form 7** Application for Graduate Degree
- **Supplemental Graduate Application Forms**
- **Other Graduate Forms**

## Form 1

Form 1 is completed by the student and the student's advisor. An appropriate course of study is laid out to meet the degree requirements. It is the student's responsibility to obtain the required signatures and to make sure the completed Form 1 is forwarded to the Graduate Studies Office to be placed in their permanent file. A copy should be placed in the student's working file in the School of Teaching and Learning.

### Chair and Committee

At some point, often after completing some courses in the program, the student will select a Chair to help them with the final portions of their program. This may be their advisor. The student will select a committee of members of the Graduate Faculty, in addition to the Chair.

<b>Special Education</b>
One Chair
Three Committee Members
Plan A - Thesis Option
Plan B - Project Option

## Form 2 Thesis/Project Committee Appointment and Approval

Upon selection of a Chair and Committee the student should complete Form 2. This form identifies the student's chair and committee. All faculty on the committee must have current Graduate Faculty status. Form 2 is submitted to the Graduate Studies Office, signed by the Dean and placed in the student's permanent file. A copy of Form 2 should be made and placed in the student's STL working file before sending it to Graduate Studies.

The chair of the committee will assist you with this form.

## Comprehensive Examinations (Comps)

Comprehensive examinations are taken when the course work for the degree is essentially completed, if required. Members from the student's committee oversee the composition of the written exam, read and assess the written comprehensives.

<b>Special Education</b>
Written Essays
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Take home Exams (48 hrs)</li> <li>▪ 3 questions</li> </ul>

Former comprehensive exam questions are kept by the administrative assistant in LO209. Students should check with their program chair for practice questions.

<b>Special Education</b>
2 times per year
1 time per summer

## Thesis / Project Topic and IRB

For SPED, the student must decide to complete either a thesis or project. The committee works with the student about the nature and form for the thesis or project. They review and approve the thesis or project proposal before the student begins serious work.

If the thesis or project is to involve human subjects, the student will need to obtain approval by the Institutional Review Board (IRB.) The principal investigator (chair) and co-investigator (student) must complete IRB training prior to submitting the proposal. Information about the IRB, online IRB training, and forms is available online at [www.mnstat.edu/irb](http://www.mnstat.edu/irb) .

**All candidates for an STL Master of Science degree**, whether they opt for Plan A or Plan B, must be aware that they will have to:

1. fulfill all the requirements for courses leading to their final thesis/project
2. have their thesis/project proposal / approved by the committee they have selected, as well as by professors of their courses when that is also required; and
3. present their completed thesis / project /. For SPED this is done before their committees as well as make whatever course presentations are required.

## **Project/Thesis Proposal Meeting**

The Project/Thesis Proposal meeting ordinarily follows successful completion of written exams for SPED. However, depending on the student's own progress and schedule, (s)he may want to get a head start on the independent work. When the student, the student's advisor and / or chair determines the student is ready, the student may call together the committee and present it with their project / thesis proposal.

For SPED, the Proposal includes a literature review leading to a hypothesis or question, and an outline of information about subjects, methodology and analysis.

Although you may want to solidify your proposal before you have passed the written exams, because successful completion of the exams is required before you can schedule the final oral, it is wise to put your efforts into your course work and the written exams rather than expending much time and effort on the project / thesis before you have passed the former.

## **Form 4 Thesis/Project Topic Approval and IRB Approval Verification**

Form 4 is completed **after** the student's topic has been approved by the committee and IRB approval has been obtained. The form is submitted to the Graduate Studies Office, signed by the Dean and placed in the student's file in the Record's Office. A copy of the signed form should be placed in the student's STL working file.

## **Form 5 Preliminary Graduation Notice**

In preparation for graduation the student must file Form 5 six weeks prior to commencement. Form 5 verifies that the student is eligible to participate in commencement. All requirements for the degree must be completed prior to the end of the summer session. Students finishing during fall semester will be eligible to participate in the December graduation. Incomplete degree requirements and completion timeline will be stated on Form 5. Student and advisor will verify these requirements and sign Form 5. The form is submitted to the Graduate Studies Office, signed by the Dean and placed in the student's file in the Record's Office. A copy of the signed form should be placed in the student's STL working file.

## **Project / Thesis Oral, Presentation of Action Research**

At the point when the project / thesis is completed, the student is ready to schedule the oral defense. At least two weeks, before the oral defense or presentation of action research, the student is to file Form Six with the Graduate Studies office. Form Six, the announcement of orals, also requires the signature of all committee members.

Two weeks before the oral the student provides each committee member a copy of the thesis or project, which they will read carefully before the oral.

The student should approach the oral as an expert on the topic conversing with other experts in the field on a subject of interest to all.

### **Oral Defense / Presentation**

Ordinarily the candidate makes a brief presentation, perhaps explaining how (s)he became interested in the topic, a bit about how the study progressed, whether or not the study yielded expected or unexpected results, what may have discovered during the study that was not included in the paper, how the study might be extended or followed up on, what was perceived to be professional interests after having obtained the Masters degree. In short, any information that will enhance committee members' understanding and appreciation of the study they have read should be included in the brief introductory presentation.

The advisor and / or chair will have suggestions. After the brief presentation committee members may ask questions relevant to the study, perhaps suggest substantive or editorial changes that might enhance the study, even share some of their relevant experiences. The candidate, of course, may ask questions of the committee. The ethos is that of a scholarly and professional conversation.

Ordinarily the oral takes 60-90 minutes.

### **Form 6 Announcement of Oral Defense**

At least 2 weeks in advance of the oral defense examination Form 6 must be submitted to the Graduate Studies Office. A copy of the Abstract of the final research should be attached. Committee members should have been contacted and a mutually agreed upon time for the defense confirmed.

The SPED candidate must complete the top section of the form and bring it to the oral defense. When the candidate has successfully completed the final oral, each committee member will sign Form 6 which signifies that the student has fulfilled all requirements for the degree. The form is submitted to the Graduate Studies Office, signed by the Dean and placed in the student's file in the Record's Office. A copy of the signed form should be placed in the student's STL working file.

### **Final Thesis / Project / Action Research Paper**

The student must submit three copies of the thesis to the University Library after all corrections and additions required by the Examining Committee have been completed, at least one week prior to commencement. Students submit project papers to the library if the graduate program requests that they be submitted. The thesis or project paper must be accompanied by Form 7 signed by the advisor verifying that the final copy has been approved. The library staff will examine the format of the final copy and will, upon receipt of the binding fee, verify the thesis deposit by signing Form 7. In programs which do not require a thesis or project paper, the Form 7 may be signed and delivered to the Director of Graduate Studies following the successful completion of the oral examination.

## **Form 7 Application for Graduate Degree**

Prior to the oral defense experience the candidate should complete the first half of page 1 and the coursework section on page 2, bring the form to the oral defense for signatures. The Program Coordinator must sign off on page 2. The candidate must ensure that OFFICIAL transcripts are on file with the Records Office. The form is submitted to the Graduate Studies Office, signed by the Dean and placed in the student's file in the Record's Office. A copy of the signed form should be placed in the student's STL working file.

### **VIII. A few last words:**

All theses, after additions or corrections have been made, are bound, with one copy going to the Livingston Lord Library and one to the individual's advisor to be kept in the STL. Individuals work with the Graduate Office to complete this step and are responsible for all costs incurred.

Although most projects are not bound and kept in the library, individuals must present a clean, corrected copy to their advisor to be kept in the EECE Department. When a project is deemed by the committee to be of special interest to a number of readers and is exceptionally well done, the candidate's committee may recommend that it be bound and a copy placed in the library. Again, individuals who wish to follow their committee's recommendation, work with the Graduate Office to fulfill requirements for this step and are responsible for all costs incurred.

### **Section Two:**

#### **I. Written Comprehensive Examination Procedures**

Written comprehensive examinations should be taken prior to the oral examinations. A minimum of three weeks is required between the written comprehensive examinations and the oral examinations. Ideally, you will plan more time between the two sets of examinations than just three weeks.

At least four weeks in advance of the scheduled date for the written examination, notify the administrative assistant in Lommen Hall 209, of your intention to take the examination. At the same time, notify your advisor of your intent. Attached is the form for "Master of Science Candidate's Application for Comprehensive Examination."

Your advisor, in consultation with the faculty, will prepare your written examination. You will take the exam over a two-day period. Questions for Part I will be a general special education question centering around your coursework, Part II will be a problem solving question, and Part III will be a question related to your chosen research for your thesis or project. You will not be given specific questions for either Part I or Part II to prepare in advance of the examination.

The members of your committee will read and rate your answers to each of the four questions on the basis of the following criteria:

- A. Addresses and answers the question.
- B. Integrates theories, concepts, and experience.
- C. Writes clearly and coherently.
- D. Supports statements with appropriate references.

The quality of your written answers will be rated independently by each committee member. Ratings are indicated by numbers **1** through **5**, with **1** representing very low performance and **5** representing very high performance. The administrative assistant will combine the scores of independent committee members and average them to determine a composite score for each question.

To pass the written examination, you must have a composite score of three (3) or higher on each of the three questions in Part I and on Part II. (A candidate may pass Part I, Part II, or both. If the composite score on **one** question in Part I is lower than three (3), the candidate will be asked to rewrite **one** question. If the composite score is lower than three (3) on **two** questions in Part I, the candidate will be asked to rewrite **Part I entirely**. If the composite score on **Part II** is lower than three (3), the candidate will be asked to rewrite **Part II**.)

The office will send a notice of pass to you, your advisor and to the Graduate Studies Office. Should it happen that you do not pass the written examination or any part of it (as delineated above), the department office will notify your advisor, who, in turn, will notify you and discuss with you your options.

## **II. Dates for the Written Comprehensive Exams**

Dates for the Written Comprehensive Exams, which are set annually by the University, occur once during the Fall semester, once during the Spring semester, and once during Summer Session I.

Fall semester dates are usually early in November.

Spring semester dates are usually before or after Spring Break in March.

Summer dates are usually early to mid June.

When you are ready to take your Written Comprehensives check the dates set to be sure you file for them in due time. Before planning to take Written Exams in the Summer Session, ascertain whether or not your Committee members will be on duty and available during that time.

**APPLICATION FORM FOR COMPREHENSIVE EXAMS  
SPECIAL EDUCATION**

DATE OF APPLICATION: \_\_\_\_\_

NAME: \_\_\_\_\_

STUDENT NUMBER: \_\_\_\_\_

ADDRESS: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

E-MAIL ADDRESS: \_\_\_\_\_

PHONE NUMBER: \_\_\_\_\_

MAJOR: \_\_\_\_\_

DATE FOR COMPS: \_\_\_\_\_

ADVISOR: \_\_\_\_\_

COMMITTEE MEMBERS: (please denote committee chair with an \*)

1. \_\_\_\_\_

2. \_\_\_\_\_

3. \_\_\_\_\_

4. \_\_\_\_\_

TENTATIVE THESIS TOPIC:

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_