

# STEPHEN F. AUSTIN STATE UNIVERSITY

## M.Ed. Special Education Program Handbook

**(7 Online Program Options)**

- **M.Ed in Special Education (Without Certification)**
- **M.Ed. in Special Education with Educational Diagnostician Certification**
- **Educational Diagnostician Certification Seeking Only Plan**
- **M.Ed in Special Education with Visual Impairment Concentration**
- **Teacher of Students with Visual Impairments – Graduate Teacher Certification Program**
- **M.Ed in Special Education with Orientation & Mobility Concentration**
- **Orientation & Mobility Graduate Certification Only**

**Accredited, Accessible & Affordable**



# **STEPHEN F. AUSTIN STATE UNIVERSITY**

## **College of Education**

### **Department of Education Studies - Special Education Program**

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## M.Ed. in Special Education Program Handbook

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# M.Ed. in Special Education Program Handbook

## PCOE VISION

The Perkins College of Education at Stephen F. Austin State University will be the college of choice for students striving to achieve professional excellence through exemplary programs that are recognized at state, national, and international levels.

## PCOE MISSION

The mission of the Perkins College of Education is to prepare competent, successful, caring and enthusiastic professionals dedicated to responsible service, leadership, and continued professional and intellectual development.

To accomplish this mission, the goals of the Perkins College of Education are to:

- Provide programs at both undergraduate and graduate levels based upon sound pedagogical and clinical practice.
- Prepare teachers, support personnel, and educational leaders for Texas.
- Employ and support faculty members who are committed to excellence in teaching, scholarship, and service.
- Provide a variety of teaching venues incorporating the latest technologies to a range of diverse student interests, backgrounds, and aspirations.
- Maintain resources and facilities that allow each program to meet its expected outcomes.
- Collaborate with external partners to enhance students' knowledge, skills, and dispositions, and to influence the ongoing exchange of ideas for mutual benefit.
- Engage in outreach services
  - To address specific needs in the broader community,
  - To enhance student learning,
  - To instill commitment to service, and
  - To promote the reputation of the University, and to
- Conduct research to advance knowledge and to contribute to the common good.

## CORE VALUES

In the Perkins College of Education at Stephen F. Austin State University, we value and are committed to:

- Academic excellence through critical, reflective, and creative thinking
- Life-long learning
- Collaboration and shared decision-making
- Openness to new ideas, to culturally diverse people, to innovation and change
- Integrity, responsibility, diligence, and ethical behavior, and
- Service that enriches the community.

## Special Education Program Faculty



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## Special Education Non-Certification & Educational Diagnostician Overview

### **Professional Standards for Educators**

The term “standard” is used to describe what a teacher must know and be able to do. The special education program at SFA is aligned with both national and state standards for special education teachers. There are two sets of standards that form the foundation of our program. First, are the national standards set forth by the Council for Exceptional Children (CEC) which is the national professional association for special educators. Second, are the Texas State Board for Educator Certification (SBEC) Standards. The SBEC and CEC standards are complimentary to each other and special education programs at SFA are aligned with national and state standards for beginning special education teachers and educational diagnosticians. We share accountability with our candidates for their performance on the Texas Examination of Educator Standards (TEXES) certification exams in the Accountability System for Educator Preparation (ASEP). Based on an outstanding pass rate, our program is fully accredited by the State.

The Initial and Advanced Specialty Standards for Special Education teachers and Educational Diagnosticians may be accessed on the [Council for Exceptional Children](#) web site.

### CEC [Advanced Preparation Standards](#)

The Special Education program further aligns with the mission, goals and values of the Perkins College of Education. Additionally, all Texas educators are responsible for knowing the Texas Administrative Code that defines the [Educator Code of Ethics](#)

A performance-based assessment system is used in which candidate performance is rated on key assessments in various classes in order to provide data for accreditation and for program improvement. The general goal of the master’s degree program in special education is to prepare professional educators and practitioners with advanced competencies related to the field of special education.

### **Program Accreditations**

The College of Education (COE) is fully accredited by the [National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education](#), and the Special Education Program is nationally recognized by the [Council for Exceptional Children](#). All educator preparation programs in the COE are accredited by the State of Texas.



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### STATE BOARD FOR EDUCATOR CERTIFICATION (SBEC) STANDARDS RELATIONSHIP TO TEXES EDUCATOR COMPETENCIES FOR SPECIAL EDUCATION TEACHERS AND EDUCATIONAL DIAGNOSTICIANS

The State Board for Educator Certification (SBEC) has approved Texas educator standards that delineate what the beginning educator should know and be able to do. These standards, which are based on the state-required curriculum for students — the Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills (TEKS) — form the basis for the **Texas Examinations of Educator Standards™ (TExES™)** program. This initiative, administered by Texas Education Agency (TEA), affects all areas of Texas education— from the more than 170 approved Texas Educator Preparation Programs (EPPs) to the more than 7,000 Texas school campuses. This standards-based system reflects SBEC’s commitment to help align Texas education from kindergarten through college. SBEC and TEA’s roles in this K–16 initiative ensure that newly certified Texas educators have the essential knowledge and skills to teach the TEKS to the state’s public-school students. Pearson (2022, November 16). *The TExES Test for Texas Teachers*. Retrieved from:

[https://www.tx.nesinc.com/TestView.aspx?f=HTML\\_FRAG/TX161\\_PrepMaterials.html](https://www.tx.nesinc.com/TestView.aspx?f=HTML_FRAG/TX161_PrepMaterials.html)

#### **SBEC Standards For Special Education Teachers**

##### **Special Education EC-12 Standard I**

The special education teacher understands and applies knowledge of the philosophical, historical and legal foundations of special education.

##### **Special Education EC-12 Standard II**

The special education teacher applies knowledge of professional roles and responsibilities and adheres to legal and ethical requirements of the profession.

##### **Special Education EC-12 Standard III**

The special education teacher knows how to communicate and collaborate effectively in a variety of professional settings.

##### **Special Education EC-12 Standard IV**

The special education teacher understands and applies knowledge of the characteristics and needs of individuals with disabilities.

##### **Special Education EC-12 Standard V**

The special education teacher understands formal and informal assessment procedures and knows how to evaluate student competencies to make instructional decisions.

##### **Special Education EC-12 Standard VI**

The special education teacher understands and applies knowledge of procedures for planning instruction and managing the teaching and learning environment.

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### **Special Education EC-12 Standard VII**

The special education teacher understands and applies knowledge of issues and procedures for teaching appropriate student behavior and social skills.

### **Special Education EC-12 Standard VIII**

The special education teacher understands assistive technology as defined by state and federal regulations.

### **Special Education EC-12 Standard IX**

The special education teacher understands and applies knowledge of transition issues and procedures across the life span.

### **Special Education EC-12 Standard X**

The special education teacher promotes students' academic performance in all content areas by facilitating their achievement in a variety of settings and situations.

### **Special Education EC-12 Standard XI**

The special education teacher promotes students' performance in English language arts and reading.

### **Special Education EC-12 Standard XII**

The special education teacher promotes students' performance in mathematics.

## **SBEC Standards For Educational Diagnosticians**

### **Educational Diagnostician Standard I**

The educational diagnostician understands and applies knowledge of the purpose, philosophy and legal foundations of evaluation and special education.

### **Educational Diagnostician Standard II**

The educational diagnostician understands and applies knowledge of ethical and professional practices, roles and responsibilities.

### **Educational Diagnostician Standard III**

The educational diagnostician develops collaborative relationships with families, educators, the school, the community, outside agencies and related service personnel.

### **Educational Diagnostician Standard IV**

The educational diagnostician understands and applies knowledge of student assessment and evaluation, program planning and instructional decision making.

### **Educational Diagnostician Standard V**

The educational diagnostician knows eligibility criteria and procedures for identifying students with disabilities and determining the presence of an educational need.

### **Educational Diagnostician Standard VI**

The educational diagnostician selects, administers and interprets appropriate formal and informal assessments and evaluations.

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### **Educational Diagnostician Standard VII**

The educational diagnostician understands and applies knowledge of ethnic, linguistic, cultural and socioeconomic diversity and the significance of student diversity for evaluation, planning and instruction.

### **Educational Diagnostician Standard VIII**

The educational diagnostician knows and demonstrates skills necessary for scheduling, time management and organization.

### **Educational Diagnostician Standard IX**

The educational diagnostician addresses students' behavioral and social interaction skills through appropriate assessment, evaluation, planning and instructional strategies.

### **Educational Diagnostician Standard X**

The educational diagnostician knows and understands appropriate curricula and instructional strategies for individuals with disabilities.

## **SPECIAL EDUCATION PROGRAM ADMISSION REQUIREMENTS**

Admission to any of the graduate Special Education Programs is contingent upon admission to the Graduate School; therefore, a student applying to Special Education graduate program must meet the criteria for admission to the graduate school. Criteria for admission to the Graduate School include a 2.5 GPA overall for Provisional admission, and a 2.8 overall GPA for Clear Admission. The GRE is waived for individuals who hold an M.Ed. in a related field or for individuals with an undergraduate (overall or last 60 hours) GPA of 3.0 or higher.

Before you complete an application to the Graduate School at Stephen F. Austin State University, please contact Dr. Summer Koltonski ([koltonsksl@sfasu.edu](mailto:koltonsksl@sfasu.edu)) for a shared folder invitation that will allow you to electronically upload the pre-admission items listed below for your chosen M.Ed. or certification seeking only track. Each applicant's pre-admission items will be reviewed by the program faculty members. Please do not submit a Graduate School application before completing these requirements, as the \$50 application fee is non-refundable.

### **PRE-ADMISSION ITEMS: M.Ed. in Special Education without initial teacher certification.**

1. Copy of undergraduate transcript and, if applicable, a copy of graduate transcript
2. Three letters of recommendation (two of a professional nature and one can be a community member who has known you for some time). Please make sure these letters are signed.
3. Current resume
4. Essay – a typed, double-spaced written statement (minimum 3-5 pages in length) describing your experience in the field of special education, your philosophy on educating students with special needs, and how personal qualities and educational experience would make you an exceptional candidate for the special education graduate program.

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5. A video-recording introducing yourself to program faculty in a professional manner. This video is to be no longer than 5 minutes in duration. A free video recording resource may be found at <https://screencast-o-matic.com/> Please include the following information in your video.
  - Name
  - Current employment
  - Years of teaching experience and/or types of teaching experiences
  - Teacher certifications (if applicable)
  - Qualities and competencies you possess that would make you a good candidate for our program and a future professional in the field.
  - Statement regarding your ability and motivation to participate in a rigorous program.

All pre-admission items will be uploaded to a shared folder (via invitation email sent by Dr. Summer Koltonski). When the above items have been completed and submitted, you may be asked to participate in a short, online video-conferencing interview session in which you will be asked up to five additional questions. You will access this interview via a provided web link. Once this process is completed and you been notified of your acceptance to the program, you may apply to the Graduate School. The application can be accessed and submitted electronically from the following website: <https://www.sfasu.edu/academics/orgs/graduate-admissions>. Please complete the application as an M.Ed. seeking student. Please do not submit a Graduate School application before completing these requirements, as the \$50 application fee is non-refundable.

### **PRE-ADMISSION ITEMS: M.Ed. in Special Education with the educational diagnostician certification and the educational diagnostician certification seeking only track.**

1. Letter from your Special Education Director indicating permission for you to complete a 160-hour practicum experience over the course of two semesters at the end of your certification program. An information letter that you can provide to your special education director may be obtained from Dr. Summer Koltonski (koltonsksl@sfasu.edu). The practicum letter is not completed at this time but rather serves to inform your director of experiences we would like for you to have during your last two semesters in the program.

**Note: Please know that school districts are not required or obligated to grant permission for practicum experiences to prospective SFA program students. Your request for practicum experiences must be done respectfully and with the full knowledge that your first priority to the district/school are your teaching responsibilities or other currently held position in the district. You will have 2 semesters in which to earn 160 hours of practicum experience. The majority of our students continue to work full-time in a district while completing these hours.**

2. Copy of your official Teacher Service Record (TSR)
3. Copy of undergraduate transcript and, if applicable, a copy of graduate transcript
4. Copy of your teacher certifications, which may be obtained from the following website: <https://tea.texas.gov/texas-educators/certification/certificate-lookup>

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5. Complete and return a provided advanced certification seeking tracking form. This certification tracking form will not be submitted until you are admitted to the program and enrolled in your first semester of coursework.
6. Three letters of recommendation (two of a professional nature and one can be a community member who has known you for some time). Please make sure these letters are signed.
7. Current resume
8. Essay – a typed, double-spaced written statement (minimum 3-5 pages in length) describing your experience in the field of special education, your philosophy on educating students with special needs, and how personal qualities and educational experience would make you an exceptional candidate for the special education graduate program.
9. A video-recording introducing yourself to program faculty in a professional manner. This video is to be no longer than 5 minutes in duration. A free video recording resource may be found At <https://screencast-o-matic.com/>. Please include the following information in your video.
  - Name
  - Current employment
  - Years of teaching experience and types of teaching experiences
  - Teacher certifications
  - Qualities and competencies you possess that would make you a good candidate for our program and a future quality educational diagnostician in the field.
  - Statement regarding your ability and motivation to participate in a rigorous certification program.

All pre-admission items will be uploaded to a shared folder (via invitation email sent by Dr. Summer Koltonski or the Special Education Graduate Program admission representative). In order to receive the shared folder invitation, you will need to create a free Microsoft account that uses your current email account. When your Microsoft account has been created and you are ready to upload your pre-admission items, please email Dr. Summer Koltonski ([koltonsksl@sfasu.edu](mailto:koltonsksl@sfasu.edu)) to request a shared folder invitation.

When the above items have been completed and submitted, you may be asked to participate in a short, online video-conferencing interview session in which you will be asked up to five additional questions. You will access this interview via a provided web link. Once this process is completed and you been notified of your acceptance to the program, you may apply to the Graduate School. The application can be accessed and submitted electronically from the following website: <https://www.sfasu.edu/academics/orgs/graduate-admissions>. Please complete the application as an M.Ed. seeking student. Please do not submit a Graduate School application before completing these requirements, as the \$50 application fee is non-refundable.

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### **GRE**

A GRE score is not required for special education program candidates that have an undergraduate (overall or last 60 hours) GPA of 3.0 or above or for those who currently hold and M.Ed. For individuals who do not meet the undergraduate or M.Ed criteria, a satisfactory GRE score must also be obtained. See GRE details below.

The General Test of the GRE is an objective and written essay examination requiring approximately three to four hours and yielding three scores-Verbal Factor (vocabulary and reading comprehension); Quantitative Factor (logical mathematical reasoning); and Analytical Writing. All 3 scores are required. GRE Verbal and Quantitative scores are reported on a 130-170 scale. GRE Analytical Writing scores are reported on a 0-6 scale in half-point increments. Minimum passing score ranges for each GRE area are reported below:

**Verbal Reasoning 143-157      Quantitative Reasoning 140-155      Analytical Writing 3.0 - 4.5**

If the GRE requirement applies, applicants have the individual responsible for making arrangements for taking the General Test of the GRE and for having the scores sent to the Graduate Office, P.O. Box 13024, SFA Station, Nacogdoches, Texas 75962. All of the Graduate Record Examinations, of which the General Test is merely one, are prepared and scored by the Educational Testing Service, P.O. Box 6000, Princeton, N.J., 08541-6000. Information about the GRE and registration instructions is available from the Educational Testing Service. For general inquiries, the Educational Testing Service can be contacted by phone (1-609-771-7670), by Fax (1-610-290-8975), by e-mail <https://www.ets.org/contact.html> or by Internet <https://www.ets.org/gre>

The General Test of the GRE is available through the Computer-Based Testing (CBT) Program of the Educational Testing Service. There are CBT test centers located throughout the United States, U.S. territories, Puerto Rico and Canada. The CBT Program also is being offered outside the United States. Stephen F. Austin State University is a designated CBT site. The applicant may register for the GRE by calling the CBT test center directly (at SFA, the number is 936-468-3958) or the GRE registration number, 1-800 473-2255 to schedule an CBT examination date. Under the CBT Program, the examinee is able to view the scores of the verbal and quantitative sections immediately. Paper score reports are available to the examinee and the designated score recipients approximately 15 days after the test date.

### **Three Types of Graduate School Admission**

#### **1. Clear Admission**

This admission status allows students to work toward a graduate degree. Generally, if you have an undergraduate grade point average (GPA) of 2.5 on a 4.0 scale and a 2.8 on the last 60 hours of undergraduate work, you are a candidate for clear admission. You'll also need recommendations from the department you're interested in and the appropriate academic dean.



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### 2. Probationary Admission

This admission status allows you to work toward a graduate degree, but you must earn a B average on coursework in your first twelve semester credit hours of study (or the number of hours set by the graduate advisor). Probationary students who do not meet that objective will be placed on academic suspension.

To be considered for probationary admission, you must have an overall GPA of 2.3 and the consent of a program advisor, and you must be recommended by the major academic department and the appropriate academic dean.

Probationary admitted students aren't eligible for financial aid.

### 3. Post-baccalaureate Admission

This status allows students who already hold a bachelor's or master's degree to take graduate courses on a limited basis. This may be a good option if you want to take courses to qualify for a graduate degree program, professional development or personal enrichment.

#### **Graduate School Application Fees**

A \$50 application fee is to be included with the application materials. A fee of \$75 must accompany the application of all foreign applicants, except those under university-sponsored exchange programs.

#### **Appeal Process**

An applicant may appeal an admission decision to the Graduate Council. The appeal should be made in writing and routed through the Dean of Graduate School. The Graduate School web site may viewed at <http://www.sfasu.edu/graduate/100.asp> A copy of the graduate school application may be completed and submitted electronically for a fee from <https://www.sfasu.edu/apply>.

#### **PROGRAM COSTS**

Stephen F. Austin State University reserves the right to change tuition and fees in keeping with acts of the Texas Legislature or the University Board of Regents. All charges are subject to correction. For the most current information regarding tuition and fees, go to [http://www.sfasu.edu/controller/businessoffice/students/exp\\_fees.asp](http://www.sfasu.edu/controller/businessoffice/students/exp_fees.asp). A tuition calculator is located on this site or you may access it from the following link: <https://www.sfasu.edu/sbs/tuition-fees/plans-rates>.

#### **DEGREE REQUIREMENTS**

A minimum of 36 hours of specified coursework is required for the M.Ed. in Special Education degree. An additional 3 hours may be required for students who do not have the prerequisite course SPED 4339 or SPED 5339 or an equivalent.

## **M.Ed. in Special Education Program Handbook**

### **M.ED. IN SPECIAL EDUCATION NON-CERTIFICATION & EDUCATIONAL DIAGNOSTICIAN PROGRAM OPTIONS**

**There are five online program options for candidates seeking a M.Ed. with a major in Special Education. Each of these programs will be described below. Technology requirements for courses within these programs include the following:**

Access to a computer that has the following components: webcam/microphone, Powerpoint viewing and creating capabilities, Microsoft Word and Excel, video recording capabilities (e.g. iPhone or digital-video camera).

#### **PROGRAM OPTION:**

##### **M.Ed. in SPECIAL EDUCATION (without certification)**

The M.Ed. in Special Education program provides graduate level preparation in the area of disability awareness, instructional strategies, formal and informal assessment, and law. Individuals who typically choose this type of M.Ed. are certified teachers who desire to expand on his or her knowledge base and/or individual who works for a state agency such as Early Childhood Intervention, Mental Health Mental Retardation (MHMR), other state facilities, hospitals, or like agencies. Required courses for the M.Ed. in Special Education

Required courses for the M.Ed. in Special Education:

- SPED 5332, 5338, 5339, 5361, 5362, 5364, 5365, 5366, 5367, and 5315
- ECED 5350, 5355

#### **PROGRAM OPTION:**

##### **M.Ed. in SPECIAL EDUCATION WITH EDUCATIONAL DIAGNOSTICIAN CERTIFICATION**

The Educational Diagnostician program provides graduate level preparation in the area of disabilities, instructional strategies, formal assessment, and law. An educational diagnostician is a master's level professional who works within the public school system to ensure that special education services are provided to eligible students in accordance with all applicable federal laws, regulations, state statutes, Texas Education Agency, and the Commissioner of Education. The program consists of master's level coursework and preparation for certification as an Educational Diagnostician.

Required courses for the M.Ed. in Special Education with Educational Diagnostician Certification:

- SPED 5315, 5361, 5362, 5367, 5371, 5364, 5366, 5345, 5344, 5354, and 5355
- ELED 5350

**Note:** SPED 5354 and SPED 5355 will be taken as one of the last courses due to preparation for the #153 Educational Diagnostician TExES and 160 hours of required practicum experience.



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### PROGRAM OPTION:

#### **CERTIFICATION SEEKING ONLY FOR THE EDUCATIONAL DIAGNOSTICIAN CERTIFICATION**

To be eligible for a professional certification as an educational diagnostician, an individual must have a master's degree from an accredited institution of higher education and have two years of classroom teaching experience in a public or accredited private school. An individual possessing a master's degree in a related field and teacher certification may be eligible for the option of seeking certification for the Educational Diagnostician certificate. If you meet these criteria, please submit the following information to Dr. Summer Koltonski for review before completing the pre-admission process:

- copy of your undergraduate transcript
- copy of your graduate transcript
- copy of your teacher certifications (<https://secure.sbec.state.tx.us/sbeconline/virtcert.asp>)

#### **COURSE DESCRIPTIONS FOR M.ED. IN SPECIAL EDUCATION PROGRAMS**

- **SPED 5332. Educational Appraisal of Exceptional Children.** Fundamental concepts in measurement with emphasis upon the utility of various test and assessment procedures.
- **SPED 5338 Transition.** This course is for instruction in transition assessment and instruction from birth through young adulthood for individuals with disabilities. It includes individual education planning strategies for functioning, independent living, and post-secondary education/work life for young adults with disabilities. Focus is on family, school, community and related services supports and collaboration with an emphasis on transition supports for culturally and linguistically diverse families, self-determination skills, and independent living.
- **SPED 5339. Principles of Behavior.** Management for classroom and community use with students with disabilities.
- **SPED 5361. Educating Students with Physical and Health Impairments.** The development of basic sensory discrimination and perceptual processes and abnormalities manifested by exceptional children.
- **SPED 5362. Instructional Strategies for Exceptional Learners.** Methods of evaluation and remediation of sensory and perceptual deficiencies.
- **SPED 5364. Early Childhood Special Education.** A comprehensive overview of the field including medical aspects of serving young children with disabilities, methods, technology, transition, and interagency coordination.
- **SPED 5365. Educational Programming for Students with Autism.** Etiology, research, characteristics, and program components related to children and youth with autism. Traditional and current causation will be discussed with subsequent implications drawn for providing appropriate educational interventions.
- **SPED 5366. Assistive Technology.** Assistive technology for individuals with disabilities.

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Instruction in the use of technology that enhances learning, functioning and independent living for individuals with disabilities. Focus on both "low-tech" and "high-tech" with emphasis on new technologies.

- **SPED 5367. Trends in Educating Exceptional Children.** An advanced survey course. Emphasis on current research.
- **SPED 5368. Seminar in Special Education.** Problems in special education, current research, implications for teaching.
- **SPED 5371. The Educational Diagnostician.** The roles and responsibilities of the educational diagnostician.
- **SPED 5344. Psycho-educational Assessment.** The administration and interpretation of tests designed to measure achievement, adaptive and maladaptive behavior, and social/emotional behavior for use in educational planning and interventions with disabled students.
- **SPED 5345. Individual Intelligence Testing.** The administration and interpretation of intelligence tests, report writing, selection and interpretation of assessment batteries including measures of social/emotional behavior.
- **SPED 5354. Practicum in Professional and Ethical Practice.** Supervised experience in administration and interpretation of various psycho-educational instruments resulting in written and electronic diagnostic evaluation reports and/or supervised practicum experience providing instruction and services to children with disabilities.
- **SPED 5355. Practicum In Diagnostic Evaluation.** Supervised experience in administration and interpretation of various psycho-educational instruments resulting in written diagnostic evaluation reports or supervised practicum experience providing instruction to children with disabilities. Prerequisites: SPED 5371, 5344, 5345 and consent of instructor.

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### Optimal Course Sequence Map

(Course availability and offerings may vary based on enrollment.)

Year One M.Ed. Educational Diagnosticians			
Fall	Spring	Summer I	Summer II
SPED 5367.501 Ed. Except. Child.	SPED 5344: Psychoed. Assessment PM	SPED 5366.501: Learn/ Assist Tech.	SPED 5345.501: Intelligence Testing if not taken previously
SPED 5371.501 The Educational Diag.	SPED 5315 Programs and Services for VI	SPED 5361.501 Phy. Health Impair.	SPED 5344.501 Psychoeducational Assessment if not previously taken
SPED 5345.501 IQ Testing.	SPED 5362.501 Instr. Strat/Except Learners		SPED 5367.501 if not taken previously
<b>Total: 6 hours</b>	<b>Total: 6 hours</b>	<b>Total: 6 hours</b>	<b>Total: 6 hours</b>
Year Two M.Ed. Educational Diagnosticians			
Fall	Spring		
SPED 5354.501 Practicum Part 1	SPED 5355.501 Practicum Part 2		
SPED 5364.501 Early Childhood Spec. Ed.	ELED 5350 Research and Analysis of Teaching		
<b>Total: 6 hours</b>	<b>Total: 6 hours</b>		

For M.Ed. seeking individuals, financial aid requires 6 hours of coursework each fall and spring. A total of 6 hours over the course of the summer is needed for financial aid purposes. The graduate advisor will create a schedule of coursework based on course availability and current enrollment. Course permits will be issued each semester and the student notified by email when the permits have been issued. It is important that students adhere to their provided schedule due to the testing courses (SPED 5345.501, SPED 5344.501, and SPED 5371.501) needing to be successfully completed prior to the practicum courses. If the testing courses are not taken as advised, it could delay graduation by one academic year. If you are in need of a schedule change due to your personal responsibilities or unforeseen circumstances please contact the graduate advisor as soon as possible so that a new course schedule can be developed and your place reserved in the course

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<b>Year One Ed. Diagnostician Certification Seeking Only – Summer Start</b>			
<b>Summer I</b>	<b>Summer II</b>	<b>Fall</b>	<b>Spring</b>
SPED 5345: Individ. Intelligence Testing	SPED 5344.501: Psychoeducational Assessment	SPED 5354.501 Practicum Part 1	SPED 5355.501 Practicum Part 2
SPED 5371.501: The Ed. Diag.	SPED 5345.501 IQ Testing	Other SPED course needs based on transcript review.	Other SPED course needs based on transcript review.
SPED 5344.501 ACH Testing	SPED 5371.501 The Educational Diag.		
* Some students may need SPED 5361. If so, one of the above courses would be moved to Summer II.	SPED 5367.501 Trends in Ed. Except. or other needed courses based on transcript review.		
<b>Total: 6 hours</b>	<b>Total: 3-6 hours</b>	<b>Total: 3-6 hours</b>	<b>Total: 3-6 hours</b>

**A graduate advisor will create a schedule of coursework based on current enrollment. Course permits will be issued each semester and the student notified by email when the permits have been issued. It is important that students adhere to their provided schedule due to the testing courses (SPED 5345.501, SPED 5344.501, and SPED 5371.501) needing to be successfully completed prior to the practicum courses. If the testing courses are not taken as advised, it could delay graduation by one academic year. If you are in need of a schedule change due to your personal responsibilities or unforeseen circumstances, please contact the graduate advisor as soon as possible so that a new course schedule can be developed and your place reserved in the courses.**

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Year One M.Ed. in Special Education (without certification)			
Fall	Spring	Summer I	Summer II
SPED 5366.501 Assistive Tech or Elective	SPED 5338.501 Transition	SPED 5339.501 Applied Behav. Anal	SPED 5365.501 Autism
SPED 5332.501 Ed. Appraisal Except (SPED 5344 may be substituted)	SPED 5362.501 Instructional Strategies	SPED 5361.501 Phy./Health Impairments	SPED 5367.501 Trends in Ed. Exceptional Children
		SPED 5366.501 Assistive Tech if not taken previously	
<b>Total: 6 hours</b>	<b>Total: 6 hours</b>	<b>Total: 6 hours</b>	<b>Total: 6 hours</b>
Year Two Non-Teacher Certification			
Fall	Spring		
ECED 5350 Research 1	ECED 5355 Research 2		
SPED 5364.501 Early Child. Spec. Ed	SPED 5315 Programs and Services for VI		
<b>Total: 6 hours</b>	<b>Total: 6 hours</b>		

**A graduate advisor will create a schedule of coursework based on course availability and current enrollment. Course permits will be issued each semester and the student notified by email when the permits have been issued. It is important that students adhere to their provided schedule so that graduation is not delayed due to enrollment or course offering issues. If you are in need of a schedule change due to your personal responsibilities or unforeseen circumstances, please contact the graduate advisor as soon as possible so that a new course schedule can be developed and your place reserved in the courses.**

### **SCHOLARSHIPS AND FINANCIAL AID**

#### **Financial Aid**

Stephen F. Austin State University Office of Student Financial Assistance is committed to helping graduate students meet their financial needs. SFA provides graduate students traditional financial assistance in the form of state grants, work-study programs and student loans. To be considered for these funds, an applicant must complete a Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) online at <https://studentaid.gov/>.

For priority consideration, applications should be received by the Office of Student Financial Assistance by April 1; however, applications received after this date will be accepted and processed. Once this information is received, graduates will be evaluated for all available funds. Electronic notification of awards will be made within two weeks after receipt of all required documentation. Typically, graduate students qualify for grant funding through the state

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TPEG and institutional Lumberjack Grant programs, and benefit from elevated federal loan eligibility. For more information or to speak with a counselor, contact the Office of Financial Aid and Scholarships at (936) 468-2403 or visit the website:

<https://www.sfasu.edu/admissions-and-aid/financial-aid/applying-for-aid>.

Dropping courses may result in a reduction of financial aid funds for the current term. In order to receive financial assistance for future terms, you must make Satisfactory Academic Progress and dropping courses will affect your Satisfactory Academic Progress standing. For information concerning this policy, visit the office's Web site at

<https://www.sfasu.edu/admissions-and-aid/financial-aid/maintaining-aid>.

### **SFA LIBRARY RESOURCES**

The Ralph W. Steen Library is the main library at Stephen F. Austin State University and is the university's primary library and learning resource environment. Steen Library houses almost 1.9 million volumes, subscribes to 47,414 and provides access to 66,585 serials, (27,263 are unique), both print and electronic, and subscribes to 58 over 200 databases, through library subscriptions and consortia participation. The library catalog is available for

use on campus and remotely online. Sixty-five percent of the serials collection is available in full-text online. Over 25,000 e-books are listed in the online catalog. Steen Library encompasses 245,000 gross square feet, is ADA-compliant, and has a wireless network throughout. The library is open 106 hours per week when classes are in session.

Steen Library is home to the LINC Lab (Library Information and Networking Center), a 135-seat open-access computer laboratory featuring both PC and Macintosh platforms. A total of 200-plus computers are available within the library for open use. Steen Library is home to the Academic Assistance and Resource Center (AARC), a state-of-the-art tutoring center, which is open to all SFA students free of charge. The library also is home to the

East Texas Research Center (ETRC), an archive featuring cultural materials indigenous to East Texas and is a designated Federal and State Document Depository. The library also is responsible for the university's Web site.

The library is a member of TexShare, a Texas State College and University Library Consortium. As a member, the library provides students with free in-house and remote electronic searching of almost 100 databases of full-text articles and more than 27,000 e-books. Students can request a TexShare library card, which gives them borrowing privileges when they visit other TexShare participating Texas state college and university libraries.

### **UNIVERSITY AND PROGRAM POLICIES**

#### **STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES**

To obtain disability related accommodations and/or auxiliary aids, students with disabilities must contact the Office of Disability Services (ODS), Human Services Building, Room 325, (936) 468-3004/ (936) 468-1004 (TDD) as early as possible in the semester. Once verified, ODS will notify me and outline the accommodation and/or auxiliary aids to be provided. You will then need to schedule a

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time to meet with me, discuss your accommodations, and I will sign the Special Accommodation Request Form. For more information, visit [Disability Services](#).

### **ACADEMIC INTEGRITY**

Academic integrity is a responsibility of all university faculty and students. Faculty members promote academic integrity in multiple ways including instruction on the components of academic honesty, as well as abiding by university policy on penalties for cheating and plagiarism.

#### **Definition of Academic Dishonesty**

Academic dishonesty includes both cheating and plagiarism. Cheating includes but is not limited to (1) using or attempting to use unauthorized materials to aid in achieving a better grade on a component of a class; (2) the falsification or invention of any information, including citations, on an assigned exercise; and/or (3) helping or attempting to help another in an act of cheating or plagiarism. Plagiarism is presenting the words or ideas of another person as if they were your own. Examples of plagiarism are (1) submitting an assignment as if it were one's own work that has been purchased or otherwise obtained from an Internet source or another source; and (2) incorporating the words or ideas of an author into one's paper without giving the author due credit.

Please read the [Academic Integrity Policy](#).

#### **Withheld Grades Semester Grades Policy (A-54)**

Ordinarily, at the discretion of the instructor of record and with the approval of the academic chair/director, a grade of WH will be assigned only if the student cannot complete the course work because of unavoidable circumstances. Students must complete the work within one calendar year from the end of the semester in which they receive a WH, or the grade automatically becomes an F. If students register for the same course in future terms the WH will automatically become an F and

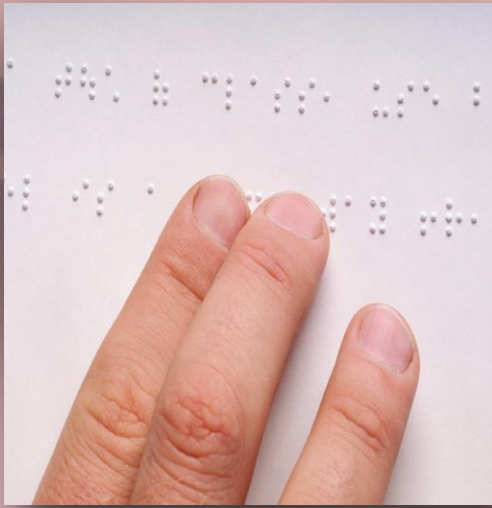
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will be counted as a repeated course for the purpose of computing the grade point average.

### **Grade Appeals**

If you believe there is an error in your final grade, contact me immediately so that your concern can be resolved in a timely manner. The procedure for formal appeals is detailed in the [Academic Appeals by Students Policy](#).





# Visual Impairment Preparation (VIP) Program

Training Program for Teachers of  
Students with Visual Impairment

*Visual Impairment Preparation Program*

Stephen F. Austin State University  
PO Box 13017 SFA Station  
Nacogdoches, TX 75965  
936-468-1145

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We are so delighted that you are interested in the Visual Impairment Preparation (VIP) program! We are very proud of the program and its many facets, and we very much hope that we will be able to provide the kind of pragmatic, comprehensive academic program that will best empower you to serve the needs of individuals who are blind or visually impaired across the nation. As part of that training, we are philosophically committed to:

- Providing you with the kind of training that will give you the knowledge and skills necessary for serving students in a practical, real-life educational setting.
- Ensuring that you feel supported in your academic and practicum experiences.
- Giving you opportunities to form relationships with your instructors through open door policies that encourage questioning and exchanges with our faculty and staff.
- Ensuring that you have a meaningful and positive practicum experience.
- Making every effort to be sure that you find our classes interesting and enjoyable, as well as relevant.

We truly look forward to having an opportunity to work with you and get to know you as a person as well as a fellow professional. Please feel free to contact us if we can provide any additional information.

## M.Ed. in Special Education Program Handbook

### *Preface*

The faculty and staff of the Visual Impairment Preparation (VIP) program would like to thank you for taking an interest in our program. This handbook will serve as a guide that will provide you with the vital information that pertains to our program.

The VIP program is composed of two parts; the Orientation and Mobility (O&M) program, and the Teacher of Students with Visual Impairment (TSVI) program in which you can earn certification. In addition to these programs, we also offer a Master of Education in Special Education with a concentration in Visual Impairment or Orientation & Mobility.

The Orientation and Mobility program is accredited by the Association for the Education and Rehabilitation of the Blind and Visually Impaired (AER) University Review Committee. Students are trained to complete the national certification as an O&M Specialist that is provided by the Academy for Certification of Vision Rehabilitation and Education Professionals (ACVREP), which is the national accreditation authority. The Teacher of Students with Visual Impairments (TSVI) program is associated with the Texas Education Agency. It is accredited through the Council for the Accreditation of Educator Preparation (CAEP)\* and by the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools (SACS).

This document will provide vital information regarding our TSVI. The Program Handbook is intended to:

- (a) assist candidates in planning each phase of their studies;
- (b) familiarize candidates with the faculty's general educational policies, expectations, and standards; and
- (c) assist faculty in their advising of candidates and in assuring that the program's policies are applied systematically and fairly.

The policies and regulations included in this Handbook apply to all our candidates. It is expected that the candidates have read and is familiar with the policies and procedures included here.

The VIP program welcomes any feedback on the content of this handbook!

**PLEASE KNOW THAT IT IS ABSOLUTELY CRITICAL THAT THE CANDIDATE READ THIS HANDBOOK AND BE FAMILIAR WITH ITS CONTENTS BEFORE CLASSES BEGIN.**

**Welcome to SFA and Axe'em JACKS!!!**

\*The Council for the Accreditation of Educator Preparation (CAEP) formerly known as the National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education (NCAT)

## ***Program Mission Statements***

### **Visual Impairment**

It is the mission of the Visual Impairment Preparation (VIP) program to train Teachers of Students with Visual Impairments (TSVIs) who are practically and pragmatically prepared to meet the needs of persons with visual impairments across the state of Texas and in the nation as a whole. We believe that candidates who complete our program should be equipped to effectively deliver instructional services that provide opportunities for students and clients with visual impairments to be more independent, lead more meaningful lives, and participate to a greater extent in society at large. In order to meet these goals, we believe that it is our responsibility to mentor and educate our graduates in the importance of exhibiting caring and compassionate approaches to instruction and positive beliefs about the worth of all individuals regardless of age, gender, race, sexual orientation, level of disability, religion, class, or political affiliation.

## ***General Program Description***

The VIP program provides training which lead to TSVI. Additionally, candidates can seek Master of Education in Special Education with a concentration in visual impairment. Each of the tracks shares common courses and common faculty. Applicants who already have a valid teaching credential in the state of Texas are eligible to work toward a TSVI certification. Once the candidate has completed the TSVI certification program they are eligible to begin training in the master's program. Here are the basic options for the programs:

### ***1. Teacher of Students with Visual Impairments (TSVI) certification only***

In order to participate in the TSVI program, candidates must already hold a valid State of Texas teacher's certification. The TSVI training program typically covers a 12-month period and requires 21 semester hours. Candidates who are working toward the TSVI certification must also pass two Texas Examinations of Educator Standards™ (TExES™) tests – one in braille (TExES™ 283) and one in visual impairment (TExES™ 182). Completers of the TSVI program are eligible to work with students 0-22 years old.

### ***2. Master of Education in Special Education with Emphasis in Visual Impairment***

The M.Ed. requires a total of 36 hours. In most cases, the total hours will include some of the hours required for obtaining a certification in either one or both programs offered in the VIP program. Candidates on the track to a master's degree are required to complete 30 hours of coursework, followed by completion of

a 6-hour independent research project, where they will be working one-on-one with a faculty supervisor. In addition, master's candidates are required to successfully complete Comprehensive Exams during their final semester.

### ***Things You Should Know About SFA's Visual Impairment Preparation Program***

Visual Impairment is a very small field. There are approximately 40 programs in the United States that offer master's degrees/certification in our field. SFA is one of two programs in the state of Texas. We prepare candidates for certification to work as Teachers of Students with Visual Impairments. Several things make our program distinctive:

While we offer all our graduate programs through distance learning, we emphasize contact with the candidates through either interactive television or online meeting via Internet platforms. In every class that the candidate takes, there will be some sort of direct interaction with the instructor.

Practicum Instructors visit TSVI candidates who are beginning their career multiple times to provide hands on, onsite support with the teacher's individual caseload.

Candidates in all of our programs interact with faculty from both the COMS and the TSVI programs. This provides them with a broader understanding of the field and their responsibilities in it. **ALL Texas candidates who complete the SFASU Visual Impairment/Orientation & Mobility program are eligible for a mentor support for up to two years from TSBVI Outreach.**

### ***How Classes Are Delivered***

We do our best to meet our candidates' needs and train them in the best possible way. One of the challenges in training to becoming a TSVI is the scarcity of programs and the requirements that candidates leave their homes for extended periods of time or travel long distances to participate in training programs. Most of the SFA programs are offered online. Our certification programs have been fortunate enough to have consistent state and federal support in providing programs that require the least possible amount of interruption in our candidate's lives. SFA's VIP program is dedicated in providing high quality instruction for the candidate with a minimum amount of time away from home by using distance education techniques.

For the rest of the program, our goal is to provide the maximum amount of candidate support possible through a variety of distance learning technologies.

Basically, you can expect your training to be provided in the following ways:

- SPED 5317 – Communication Skills for Persons with Visual Impairment (Braille course) is currently offered using two formats. Our primary delivery option is over Interactive Television (ITV). In ITV classes, the candidates will gather at their local Education Service Center. The instructor will be at Stephen F. Austin, at one of the Texas ESC sites, or at a prearranged satellite location. The mode of instruction is similar to video conferencing and allows for real-time interaction between candidates and instructor. This platform is used primarily for class discussions, project sharing, and question and answer sessions. For candidates who cannot access their local ESC the Braille course is also offered in a fully online format. If this style of delivery meets your needs contact program faculty.
- Distance instruction for all other courses currently uses D2L and Zoom: Zoom is an online learning platform used to share presentations and facilitate classroom discussions between and among faculty and students. This includes the summer class SPED 5316 – Structure and Function of the Visual System (Eye course). Through the use of a computer and microphone, class members meet together to share ideas and develop knowledge. You will receive the bulk of the information for your training courses from faculty websites and/or D2L pages. You will access this material on your own computer, at your own home or office, whenever you choose to work on the class. Many of your assignments and tests will also be administered over the Internet. We, as a class, might also use discussion boards to further instruction. In general, discussions are used either to review for exams or to discuss material, which is covered, on assignments.
- Several of the undergraduate courses are provided in a face-to-face format.

## ***Financial Support***

For several years, the VIP program has been supported by both a federal and a state grant. We have been the recipient of a grant to help provide support to candidates who pursue training in visual impairment or orientation and mobility.

The state grant is provided from the State of Texas through the Texas School for the Blind and Visually Impaired. The grant provides support to candidates in Texas who are pursuing training as a TSVI. Texas residency is required.

The federal grant is provided through the Rehabilitation Services Agency (RSA) of the US Department of Education. This grant supports graduate candidates who are pursuing training in orientation and mobility. This grant is open to candidates across the US but is limited to post-baccalaureate (graduate) students. We are, therefore, able to offer full stipends to candidates entering the program. This support is awarded on a competitive basis. These stipends will be sufficient to cover tuition and fees to the university. Books and supplies are the responsibility

of the candidate. Stipends will be paid to selected candidates who are working on initial certification in either visual impairment or orientation and mobility. The candidate must pay for extra classes needed to earn a master's degree in the program (if they so choose).

Because stipends are paid by a grant, you need to know that there is a mandatory payback of funds if the candidate does not both (1) complete the program and (2) serve in a capacity covered by the grant (working with students who have visual impairments in the area trained-- TSVI) after the program here at SFA is completed. The goal is that you enter the field and that you work in a capacity in which you are trained. Candidates must work (in a VI) approximately **two** years for every **one** year that stipends were received.

- For the 21-hour TSVI program, candidates are expected to teach as a TSVI in Texas for 2 years to pay back the grant support /satisfy requirements.
- Candidates receiving federal or state grant funding may have time-sensitive payback periods specified by each grantor.

## ***Employment Demand for Vision Professionals***

The demand for professionals in the field of visual impairment has always been high in the state of Texas. The problem that most school districts have had is that certified TSVIs are not available. Today, more and more opportunities are open for VI professionals. Mary Shore, Professional Preparation Coordinator in TSBVI's Outreach Programs, regularly gathers data regarding job availability. The following are a few of the statistics that she has provided:

### **Current Demographic Information for Texas**

Since 1996, the Texas School for the Blind and Visually Impaired has conducted an annual survey of the Visual Impairment (VI) consultants at the Education Service Centers (ESCs), university VI programs, and TSBVI to assess the characteristics of and need for VI professionals in Texas. "VI professionals" includes teachers of students with visual impairments (TVIs) and certified orientation and mobility specialists (COMS). The most striking findings of the September 2019 survey include:

- In 2019, the total number of VI professionals, including leadership positions, increased from 956 to 992 individuals. The increase was seen in both the total number of TVIs and COMS across the state with the majority of the increase in the part-time category.
  - The number of part-time TVIs providing direct service grew by 14, from 154 to 168.
  - The number of full-time TVIs did not change significantly, adding only one for a total of 526 individuals this year.
  - There are 306 COMS providing direct service, an increase of 18 individuals.

The parttime category increased by 15 and 3 were added to the full-time category.

- Sixty-three VI professionals are dually certified, providing both TVI and O&M services.
- Approximately 19% of the total number of individual VI professionals providing direct service are contract service providers.

**Cultural diversity** of VI professionals showed signs of growth in the number of VI professionals who are Hispanic and African-American. The number of TVI and COMS who are fluent in Spanish dropped by 1% this year.

- The number of VI professionals who are Hispanic increased by 10.5 percent.
- The number of VI professionals who are African-American increased by 10 percent.
- Ten percent of the VI professionals statewide are fluent in Spanish.

**Attrition in the previous year increased** from 39 to 44 individuals.

- Last year's total of 39 matches the 10-year average, increasing by 5 in 2019.
- ESC consultants anticipate 92 TVIs and 40 COMS, or 12% of existing VI professionals, will retire or otherwise leave the field over the next 3 years.

**The number of students with visual impairments continues to grow.** In 2019, the number of students reported to the Annual Registration of Students with Visual Impairments increased by 332 students, or approximately 3.2%, bringing the total number of students to 10,753. This is significant growth, well over the 2.5% average increase typically seen from year to year. An increase in caseloads reported by many of the VI consultants could be seen as a direct effect of this student growth, however, only 13 individuals (6 FTE) were added to the number of TVIs available in 2019 to support them.

**Anticipated Need for VI Professionals**

- It is projected that Texas will need up to 72 additional full-time equivalent TVIs and 48 full-time equivalent COMS by 2022 to accommodate student growth alone.
- Texas is estimated to need an additional 150-164 full-time equivalent TVIs and 80- 97 full-time equivalent COMS in the next 3 years to replace those who are likely to leave the field and respond to anticipated student growth.

The statewide total number of new professionals entering and completing the programs at **Stephen F. Austin State University and Texas Tech University** declined this year. This could cause future shortages of VI professionals to work with students with visual impairments across Texas.

- There are 152 future VI professionals in a program leading to certification as either a TVI or COMS. Ninety-six are working toward their TVI certification and 56 are enrolled in an orientation and mobility program. Total enrollment was down approximately 7% from last year.



- Fifty-seven individuals (36 TVIs and 21 COMS) completed a VI certification program in 2019, 30% fewer than in 2019.
- The majority of students enrolled in SFASU and TTU TVI and O&M certification training programs receive funding support for coursework. As tuition continues to rise, existing funding will provide less support to students than in previous years. This will in turn create a greater challenge of meeting the need for an adequate number of VI professionals.

## ***What it means to be a Vision Professional***

### **Teacher of Students with Visual Impairments (TSVI)**

If you're thinking of pursuing a career in working with students who have visual impairments, you might like to know a little more about the roles and responsibilities of the Teacher of Students with Visual Impairments (TSVI). Unfortunately, candidates often have a skewed notion of this profession. They've seen plays or movies about persons who have visual impairments, and they assume that most of us are like Helen Keller's teacher, Ann Sullivan. Of course, that is not an accurate look at the types of jobs the TSVI performs. The duties we DO perform, however, have been outlined very comprehensively in a position paper developed by our professional organization, the Council for Exceptional Children Division on Visual Impairment. The paper was actually written by two leaders in the field of visual impairment, Dr. Susan Spungin and Dr. Kay Ferrell.

### **The Role and Function of the Teacher of Students with Visual Impairments**

#### **A Position Paper of the Division on Visual Impairments and Deafblindness Council for Exceptional Children 2017**

**Susan Jay Spungin, Kay Alicyn Ferrell, and Martin Monson**

Infants, children, and youth with visual impairments receive special education and related services in a variety of settings that bring them into contact with a range of personnel. A critical member of this team of professionals is the teacher of students with visual impairments (TSVI), whose specialized training and experience establish him or her as the individual best qualified to address the unique learning needs created by a visual impairment. Because legislation mandates highly qualified general and special education teachers, however, there is often confusion about the role, functions, and responsibilities of the TSVI.

The TSVI is a special educator trained and certified to provide direct instruction, accommodations, and modifications that provide access to the general curriculum for children who are blind or visually impaired. TSVIs are employed in the full continuum of placement options, serving as part of the team providing free appropriate public education to infants, children, and youth with visual impairments

in local education agencies, regional collaboratives, and specialized schools. Their role varies from teacher-consultant, to specialized skills instructor, to classroom teacher. TSVIs work with a wide range of students with a wide range of abilities (Correa-Torres & Howell, 2004; Spungin, 1984; Spungin & Taylor, 1986; Suvak, 2004; Wolffe et al., 2002). They teach the alternative skills that facilitate access to general education, and they teach the expanded core curriculum that supports students in and allows them to benefit from the general curriculum (Hatlen, 1996; 2003). In some cases, the TSVI is the primary educator working with the infant, child, or youth with a visual impairment, while at other times the TSVI acts as a consultant to those providing instruction. The roles and responsibilities of the TSVI are unique and varied and require a broad base of professional knowledge and the ability to respond with flexibility to changing conditions and student needs (Correa-Torres & Howell, 2004).

Parents and educators overwhelmingly report that administrators are not well-informed about appropriate services for students with low-incidence disabilities (Correa-Torres & Howell, 2004; Ferrell & Correa, 2004; Rude et al., 2005). Where students with visual impairment are concerned, administrators often must be reminded that:

- The primary issue when educating students with visual impairments is access to the visual environment and opportunities to learn. Quite simply, students with visual impairments learn *differently*, through senses other than vision. They benefit from the skills of a TSVI with knowledge of non-visual instructional strategies, regardless of the severity of visual impairment or the number of additional disabilities that may be present.
- The role of the TSVI varies from child to child and school to school, depending on individual student needs, general educator requests, school resources, and curriculum content (Ferrell, Bruce, & Luckner, 2014; Marder, 2006)
- All students with multiple disabilities that include visual impairments are entitled to the services of a TSVI. The focus of their educational program may include instruction in core content areas, such as literacy and mathematics, but the way these content areas are addressed may differ.
- Responsibilities and time commitments are variable and sometimes unpredictable, because they are adjusted according to student and team needs at any given point in time (Ferrell et al., 2014).
- Each addition to the caseload increases time commitments exponentially. Paraprofessionals are helpful additions to the educational team, but they do not supplant TSVIs (Conroy, 2007; Ferrell, 2007; Forster & Holbrook, 2005; Griffin -Shirley & Matlock, 2004; Koenig & Holbrook, 2000b; Lewis & McKenzie, 2010; McKenzie & Lewis, 2008).
- Students with visual impairment may demonstrate gifts and talents, although identification is often complicated by low expectations, poor self-concept, non-challenging environments, and/or lack of learning opportunities imposed by the visual impairment. TSVIs have the ability to distinguish gifts and talents from typical learning because of their experience with a greater number of children with visual impairments.
- TSVIs also support the instruction of children with visual impairments who are second language learners (Milian & Pearson, 2005; NBPTS, 2001).

Depending on the approach to bilingual instruction, this support includes at least preparation of materials in both English braille and in the student's native language. The second language learner has the same educational needs as all children with visual impairments, and the TSVI contributes to the educational team in much the same way.

- Education is more than academic skill; it is a whole range of behaviors that prepares students for life *after* school. What typical students learn incidentally cannot be assumed to occur for students with visual impairments unless deliberately taught (Ferrell, 1997, 2004, 2011; Huebner, Merk-Adam, Stryker, & Wolffe, 2004; Lowenfeld, 1973; Warren, 1994).

## **Recommendations**

### **Assessment and Evaluation**

Visual impairment occurs so infrequently in the school-age population (Adams, Hendershot, & Marano, 1999; Jones & Collins, 1966; Wenger, Kaye, & LaPlante, 1996) that few school psychologists are able to obtain adequate experience evaluating students with this disability. TSVIs are trained not only to conduct formal and informal assessments, but to assist other educational professionals in understanding and interpreting testing results. TSVIs therefore:

1. Participate in the multidisciplinary assessment of infants, children, and youth with visual impairments and assume the primary responsibility to:
  - a. Conduct and interpret functional vision assessments for all students with visual impairments regardless of the severity or multiplicity of impairments (Musgrove & Yudin, 2013).
  - b. Obtain and interpret all ophthalmological, optometric, and functional vision reports and explain the implications of these reports for both distance and near vision in educational and home environments, to families, classroom teachers, and other team members.
  - c. Modify existing assessment measures and procedures and develop new informal instruments as needed to assess and evaluate disability-specific skills (Musgrove & Yudin, 2013; National Board of Professional Teaching Standards [NBPTS], 2010).
  - d. Conduct and interpret communication skills and learning media assessments in reading, writing, and listening, as well as assessments that identify the most appropriate technology configurations for individual students (Musgrove & Yudin, 2013).
  - e. Recommend and collaborate in appropriate specialized evaluations as needed, including clinical low vision, orientation and mobility, physical therapy, occupational therapy, behavioral, physical education, speech and language, augmentative communication, independent living skills, and vocational skills assessments.
  - f. Identify and assist in making individualized accommodations for state- and district-wide assessments; and

- g. Assist families to assess their own strengths and needs regarding their children's visual, sensory, academic, functional, and social-emotional development.
2. Participate in multidisciplinary and transdisciplinary teams that develop Individualized Family Service Plans (IFSPs), Individualized Education Programs (IEPs), Individual Transition Plans (ITPs), and other planning documents, for infants, children, and youth with visual impairments, and assume the primary responsibility to:
    - a. Interpret instructional implications of evaluation results (Riley, 2000).
    - b. Contribute to statements of present levels of performance by discussing how performance is affected by the visual impairment (IDEA, 2004, § 614(d)(1)(A)(i)(I)(aa)) and by providing information on students' learning styles, use of visual information, tactual abilities, and other strengths unique to infants, children, and youth with visual impairments.
    - c. Inform other members of the educational team about how additional disabilities and prescribed medications may impact visual performance (Council for Exceptional Children (CEC), 2016).
    - d. Identify goals and objectives in academic or developmental areas that require alternative approaches because of the student's visual impairment.
    - e. Identify goals and objectives in areas of the expanded core curriculum (Allman & Lewis, 2014a; Hatlen, 1996).
    - f. Identify instructional methods and materials for meeting goals and objectives.
    - g. Recommend appropriate service delivery options, including placement, physical education and related services, specialized equipment, accommodations and modifications to testing procedures and classroom instruction, and time frames for implementation.
  3. Recommend as early as possible appropriate reading and writing media for children with visual impairments regardless of the severity or multiplicity of impairments. TSVIs base such recommendations on the specific needs of individual students, as demonstrated by a thorough learning media assessment that considers such factors as reading distance, reading rates and accuracy, portability of reading skills, visual fatigue, and tactual sensitivity, as well as assessment of communication skills (Spungin, 1996). IDEA (2004) requires the IEP team to specifically consider braille instruction for each student (§ 614(d)(3)(B)(iii)).

### **Educational and Instructional Strategies: Learning Environment**

While the Every Student Succeeds Act of 2015 requires regular education teachers to provide instruction to *all* students including those with special learning needs, the TSVI acts as the primary mediator of the learning environment for *all* children with visual impairments (Davidson & Simmons, 1984; Simmons & Davidson, 1984). The TSVI implements various strategies to facilitate students'

assimilation into the classroom, school, community and work environment (NBPTS, 2010). In order to accomplish this integration, the TSVI takes steps to:

1. Assure that the student receives all educational materials in the appropriate format, including textbooks, workbooks, handouts, periodicals, multimedia materials, and teacher-prepared supplements, at the same time as peers without disabilities.
2. Assure that the student is trained in the use of, and has available, all optical, non-optical, and electronic technology devices necessary for learning in all environments where learning takes place (i.e., at school, home, and community).
3. Instruct the student in developmental skills, academic strategies, and other activities that require modification, adaptation, or reinforcement as a direct result of the visual impairment.
4. Recommend seating and other environmental modifications that maximize students' use of visual information and facilitate movement of the student with visual impairments within the class.
5. Assure that the educator providing direct instruction fully understands the unique learning needs of infants, children, and youth with visual impairments.
6. Suggest accommodations needed for assignments or testing procedures.
7. Collaborate with teachers and other professionals regarding methods for including students with visual impairments in classroom activities, by promoting, modeling, and demonstrating the use of concrete, active, and structured learning experiences (Musgrove & Yudin, 2013; NBPTS, 2010) that do not leave learning to chance.
8. Act as a catalyst to develop an understanding of visual impairment by classmates and peers without disabilities.
9. Assist family members to understand the impact of visual impairment on family systems and the possible effects on children's self-esteem (CEC, 2016).
10. Assist in the smooth transition of infants, children, and youth with visual impairments and their parents from one placement to another, by working with other team members, including parents, to identify appropriate options, preparing new teachers to accept students with visual impairments, and providing ongoing consultation. Such services regularly occur at the transition from early intervention to preschool programs, from preschool to school-age programs, from elementary to secondary programs, and from secondary to post-secondary and adult services, but may also be necessary when a major change in placement occurs (e.g., from regular class to special class, or from residential school to regular class placement), or even in the regular grade level progression within the same educational facility.

### **Educational and Instructional Strategies: Accessing the General Curriculum**

Students with visual impairments have the same curriculum needs as all children, but their visual impairment often imposes restrictions on their ability to access curricula when presented in the typical method of teaching by the classroom teacher. Students with visual impairments must be taught the necessary

skills to obtain access to information (Riley, 2000), particularly in the high-stakes environment of a standards-based curriculum.

The TSVI is responsible for providing direct or collaborative instruction in the following areas that are directly related to classroom instruction and to students' access to the curriculum:

**Literacy (braille, print, aural, electronic).** Literacy includes alphabetic, fluency, comprehension, phonemic awareness, phonics, technology, and writing skills, in either braille or print, according to the student's needs and as specified in the IEP. For the braille student, these skills usually require introduction to the mechanical aspects of reading and writing, including spatial orientation to the page and use of the braillewriter, slate and stylus, and electronic devices, and include application and reinforcement of decoding, comprehension, encoding, writing, and composition strategies taught by the classroom teacher. "For a child to be proficient in braille, systematic and regular instruction is essential" (Riley, 2000, p. 36589), ranging from one-half to two hours per day (Koenig & Holbrook, 2000a).

Computer technology is essential for students to access the general curriculum and is an important component of the expanded core curriculum (Smith, Kelly, & Kapperman, 2011). Furthermore, Bickford and Falco (2012) and D'Andrea (2012) have shown that electronic forms of braille and hard copy (paper) braille are mutually reinforcing, not confusing, and promote overall learning. The TSVI is responsible for collaborating with the teacher of computer technology and the classroom teacher to assist the student with visual impairments to use computers. The TSVI remains current with the variety and range of adaptive technology available (such as hardware and software applications that provide screen access through speech or magnification; refreshable braille displays, electronic notetakers, "off the shelf" tablets, embossers, scanners, printers, braille translation software, etc.), in order to match technology to individual student characteristics. Given technology's potential to facilitate braille instruction and learning generally (McCall, McLinden, & Douglas, 2011), the TSVI is able to identify the most appropriate technology for a particular student at any point in that student's educational career.

When print is the medium indicated for a particular student, the TSVI creates accommodations to regular print (e.g., font size, acetate sheets, font color, background color, contrast) that enable print to be more easily and comfortably read. TSVIs also introduce learning aids (e.g., reading stands, signature guides, digital recorders) and low vision devices (CCTVs, magnifiers, telescopes) that allow students to participate independently in regular classroom activities. There is evidence that instruction in the use of low vision devices increases comprehension and reading speed (Ferrell et al., 2014), and TSVIs are trained to provide that instruction to children with visual impairment. In addition, technology implementation is as important for print readers as it is for braille readers (McCall et al., 2011).

Instruction to develop listening skills is important to students with visual impairments as a foundation for aural learning and reading, as well as for mobility clues, social conversation, and interpretation of a variety of auditory signals received from the environment. Listening becomes particularly important in the

secondary grades, when reading assignments increase dramatically and the student turns to recorded and digital forms of text that can shorten the time to complete assignments. TSVIs are familiar with a variety of devices that can convert text to speech and that allow students to control the speed of recorded and digital speech. Listening skills are sequentially and deliberately expanded during the school years by TSVI instruction.

For most students with visual impairments, keyboarding may be the major means of written communication between the child and his or her peers, family members, and teachers. Touch-typing and keyboarding skills are carefully and thoroughly taught by the TSVI as soon as the student has sufficient fine motor skills. For students with low vision, certain aspects of both manuscript and cursive handwriting (e.g., size, configuration, place-keeping, proofreading, reading aloud) are the responsibility of the TSVI. The TSVI teaches signature writing and additional handwriting skills that may be needed by students who are blind.

TSVIs also perform a variety of tasks that facilitate students' integration into classroom routines by transcribing, proofreading, and interlining brailled assignments to facilitate review by classroom teachers, as well as producing brailled materials for students to use in classroom activities (CEC, 2016). The TSVI also provides instruction in other expressions of literacy, such as braille music and foreign language braille codes.

**Mathematics.** Mathematics skills emerge based on visual observations and develop into advanced graphical and spatial relationships. Children with visual impairments thus need specific instruction with concrete materials that promote the acquisition of mathematics skills, tactile graphics, and educational aids (such as the abacus and talking graphing calculators) to understand and reproduce these relationships in a non-visual format. TSVIs use these materials to supplement and enhance the classroom teacher's instruction and increase the student's understanding of mathematical concepts.

**Tactual Skills and Tactile Graphics.** The development of tactual skills is not confined to the reading of braille. The TSVI provides instruction in tactual skills in a variety of environments and functional applications, assisting children with visual impairments from infancy to use their fingers and hands to explore, identify, discriminate, and interpret all tangible materials in the environment. TSVIs are skilled in describing photographs and drawings to convey meaning and in creating tactile representations of graphical images, including maps, to assure access to the same information available to classmates (NBPTS, 2010).

**Organization and Study Skills.** Skimming braille or print materials, outlining in braille or large print, searching for significant information in electronic and recorded materials, and other note taking, report-writing, and reference methods are fundamental study skills that require instruction by the TSVI because of the unfamiliarity of the media to most classroom teachers.

## **Educational and Instructional Strategies: Collaborating to Assure Instruction in the Expanded Core Curriculum**

The TSVI is also responsible for a number of areas that support student access to the general curriculum (Allman & Lewis, 2014a). Often referred to as the expanded core curriculum (Hatlen, 1996; 2003), acquisition of these skills facilitates students' participation in a variety of educational activities by developing skills usually acquired incidentally by children without visual impairments.

**Social Interaction Skills.** Reduced vision often interferes with human interaction. Not only is the amount of shared experience reduced, but the inability to use facial expressions and other forms of nonverbal communication to both receive and convey information can lead to misperceptions and misunderstandings. Some research indicates that children with visual impairments have difficulties initiating interactions with peers and spend much of the school day in isolation (Erwin, 1991). The TSVI creates opportunities for children with visual impairments to interact with others and instructs students in appropriate behaviors and conversations (Sacks, Lueck, Corn, & Erin, 2005; Sacks & Wolffe, 2006).

TSVIs, parents, and others share the responsibility for gradual, sequential instruction in human sexuality for students with visual impairments. Because school-based programs addressing instruction in human sexuality assume that much visual information has previously been attained, students with visual impairments may need a specialized curriculum that includes tactile instructional materials, taught by appropriate, well-prepared professionals.

The TSVI is knowledgeable about areas of motor development for infants, children, and youth with visual impairments that may be affected by visual impairment (for example, body image, body in space concepts, visual motor coordination, abnormal reflex patterns, locomotion, balance, rotation, weight transfer, gait, and posture). The TSVI works collaboratively with early interventionists, physical education teachers, O&M specialists, and occupational and physical therapists to develop and enhance motor skills in infants, children, and youth with visual impairments.

**Compensatory or Alternative Access Skills.** TSVIs must support students with visual impairments in acquiring special skills for optimal development and learning. These special skills include communication, concept development, and higher order cognitive skills, as well as ongoing support for all ages of students as academic and independent living skills require evolving age-appropriate skills.

- **Communication Development.** Infants, children, and youth with visual impairments may experience difficulties in language acquisition and application. TSVIs are knowledgeable about the ways in which a visual impairment can affect receptive and expressive communication and employ specific strategies to encourage use of functional, reality-based language. In addition, TSVIs collaborate with other team members to instruct students



with multiple disabilities in the use of manual communication, communication boards, and other augmentative communication techniques. Visual impairments impose restrictions on the use of these procedures, and the TSVI helps to devise alternative methods to make them accessible to infants, children, and youth with visual impairments.

- **Concept Development.** The TSVI shares with other professionals the responsibility for the development of basic concepts, which are often at risk without vision to mediate and integrate other sensory information. Future learning is dependent upon the student's thorough understanding of basic spatial, environmental, relational, social, and mathematical concepts, which lead to categorization, symbolization, and higher-level thinking skills. The TSVI, in collaboration with the O&M specialist, introduces these concepts systematically and sequentially within the context of other instruction.
- **Reasoning.** The ability to reason, especially in the abstract, may require specific instruction from the TSVI. Like most young people, students with visual impairment may need assistance in the development of thinking, decision-making, and problem-solving skills, and in learning to live with occasional frustration and failure. While most people reason deductively, children with visual impairment learn from parts to wholes, where they must combine discrete pieces of information into a whole concept or idea. Because they learn differently, a TSVI who understands this process can be invaluable as students mature.

**Sensory Efficiency.** For students with low vision, the use of visual information contributes to achievement in every skill area: academic, psychomotor, self-help, vocational, motor, and social skills. The TSVI provides "regular and intensive intervention" (Riley, 2000, p. 36589) to assist children with visual impairments to use and interpret visual information under a variety of conditions. TSVIs also assist students with visual impairment to use and interpret information provided by the other senses (hearing, olfactory, tactile, proprioceptive).

**Independent Living Skills.** Thorough knowledge of the activities and techniques of daily living and personal management skills are needed to create independence so that students with visual impairments may integrate more easily into culture and society. TSVIs share responsibility with family members and other professionals for instruction in such areas as personal hygiene, eating habits, manners, dressing, grooming, verbal and nonverbal communications, and developing a positive self-image.

**Career Education.** Career education curricula that are developed for children without visual impairments may need supplementary explanation and instruction from a TSVI. In addition, students with visual impairment often need more focused instruction from TSVIs to develop career awareness, positive work habits, and to explore vocations that align with their personal interests, strengths, and weaknesses. This instruction may include field trips into the community to explore work opportunities and job requirements, interviews with adults with visual impairments about their various occupations, and assessment of individual abilities. The TSVI assists in the assessment of vocational strengths and

weaknesses and facilitates students' participation in work-study, vocational training, and other appropriate experiences. While career education is often neglected (see Wolffe et al., 2002), it is one area that directly relates to the future employability of individuals with visual impairment. Research has shown that career education and work experiences in high school lead to more positive outcomes for young adults (McDonnall, 2010, 2011; McDonnall & Crudden, 2009; McDonnall & O'Mally, 2012; Wolffe & Kelly, 2011). Additional research indicates that instruction in alternative skills (braille, low vision devices), technology applications, social skills, independent living skills, and orientation and mobility also contribute to better employment outcomes for youth with visual impairment (Botsford, 2013; Cavanaugh & Giesen, 2012; Monson, 2009; Zhou, Smith, Parker, & Griffin-Shirley, 2013). The TSVI is integral to instruction in all of these areas.

**Leisure and Recreation.** The TSVI, parents, and community agencies share a responsibility to expose the student to, and provide learning opportunities in, a wide variety of leisure time activities that have carry-over value to adult life. In addition, TSVIs assist physical education teachers in integrating children with visual impairments into inclusive physical education classes by suggesting strategies for participation in team and individual sports. Visual impairments often unnecessarily restrict movement and may result in poor physical fitness (Oh, Ozturk, & Kozub, 2004), unless systematic efforts are made to include children with visual impairments in physical education and recreational activities (Tutt, Lieberman, & Brasher, 2012). Children with visual impairments who are included in regular physical education classes are more likely to participate in organized sports activities as adults (Haegele, Lieberman, Lepore, & Lepore-Stevens, 2014; Rizzo et al., 2003).

Music, visual arts, performing arts, and dance are common childhood experiences that help to unite members of society through an appreciation of nature, spirituality, and aesthetics. Children with visual impairments are sometimes directed towards music to express their creativity and are often assumed to be unable to participate in other art forms. TSVIs can assist fine arts teachers to include students with visual impairments in class activities by adapting procedures and modifying materials. TSVIs encourage students with visual impairments to express themselves through art, music, and/or dance and help students explore various media, use other senses for expression, and provide braille music when appropriate (NBPTS, 2010).

**Self-determination.** Developing knowledge of oneself and the skills related to self-advocacy, assertiveness, problem-solving, and goal setting are key components of becoming an empowered, self-regulated, and self-directed individual (Wolffe & Rosenblum, 2014). This knowledge and skills set evolves over time. Students who are frequently encouraged to discover their personal preferences; to negotiate for appropriate treatment and services; to set, work toward, and revise goals; and to solve problems and make decisions for themselves are more likely to become adults who can express themselves and have their needs met. In addition to direct instruction of strategies that promote self-determination in students, TSVIs often need to create opportunities for students to practice these components of self-determination in school and

community settings and to assist students to reflect on the success of these efforts as their self-confidence and self-assurance increases.

**Technology.** As mentioned earlier, instruction in the use of assistive technology is critical to access information readily available to peers without disabilities in inclusive settings. The TSVI's role ranges from assessment and identification of the best technology solution for an individual student to instruction in its use. Fulfilling this role requires the TSVI to coordinate with other staff responsible for student technology, to remain current by attending workshops and conferences, and to work with the classroom teacher to make sure that access is occurring in the classroom.

## **Guidance and Counseling**

In collaboration with school personnel, TSVIs, because of their knowledge, training, and experience in visual impairment, provide guidance and counseling perspectives to infants, children, and youth with visual impairments and their families to:

1. Interpret implications of visual impairment for overall development.
2. Facilitate understanding of society's attitudes toward visual impairment and assist students and families in formulating their responses to misconceptions, lowered expectations, and prejudice.
3. Explore similarities and differences in relation to all children.
4. Develop social awareness of self, others, and the community at large.
5. Encourage social interactions with peer groups and adult role models (CEC, 2016).
6. Identify functional, academic, and vocational potential.
7. Encourage home involvement in program objectives.
8. Promote independence and self-advocacy skills in infants, children, and youth.
9. Develop positive evaluations of self-worth by providing opportunities to both achieve and fail (Chang & Schaller, 2002).
10. Plan for adult life by exploring options for college, technical or trade school, job coaching programs, industrial enclaves, and other post-secondary placements, as well as identifying independent living arrangements in the community.
11. Identify other sources for additional guidance and counseling services.

## **Administration and Supervision**

The TSVI, depending on the model(s) of service being utilized (specialized school, special class, resource room, itinerant, early intervention, or teacher consultant) has a variety of administrative roles. In a large program, this responsibility may include supervision of other TSVIs, in addition to working with directors of special education, principals, regular classroom teachers, and other educational and related services personnel. Some of the most common activities in this area may include:

1. *Communication with Administrators.* TSVIs are the student's first and best advocate. In this role, they keep administrators informed concerning:
  - a. Student information (e.g., visual status, grade level, educational needs).
  - b. Program goals and activities.
  - c. Program evaluation.
  - d. Screening and referral procedures.
  - e. Relationships between the program for students with visual impairments and regular and special education programs and support services.
  - f. Funding requirements for consultation, instruction, salaries, benefits, travel time, travel expenses, instructional materials, technology, preparation time, and conference participation.
  - g. In-service needs for TSVIs, as well as for other regular and special education personnel.
  - h. Staff scheduling requirements, including adequate time for planning, preparation, report writing, travel, direct instruction, team meetings, and staff conferences, as well as the need for flexibility in assignments and instruction that may occur outside the school day and building.
  - i. Physical facilities, including design and selection of classroom environments and office space, as well as adequate storage space for instructional materials and equipment.
  - j. Student scheduling, including preparation of a master schedule to be given to the supervisor and principal(s) of the building(s) in which students are served.
  - k. Equipment needs, particularly in the area of technology, but also including materials and learning devices.
2. *Supervision of Paraeducators.* Many schools employ paraeducators to supplement the instruction provided by TSVIs (Forster & Holbrook, 2005). These individuals carry out a variety of roles, as braille transcriber, materials adapter, and sometimes academic tutor. Because these individuals have not received formal training, they may not understand how low vision or blindness affects teaching and learning. It is essential that the TSVI supervise paraeducators assigned to students with visual impairments particularly in braille reading and writing, mathematics, other academic content areas, the expanded core curriculum, and in promoting independence and age-appropriate relationships whenever possible,
3. *Record Keeping.* Teachers indicate that paperwork consumes too much valuable instructional time and thus decreases their effectiveness with students (Correa-Torres & Howell, 2004). Nevertheless, TSVIs must:
  - a. Maintain records of student assessments, IEPs, IFSPs, ITPs, other planning documents, periodic reviews, progress reports, and signed parental release forms.
  - b. Coordinate ordering of textbooks among classroom teachers and

- instructional materials centers.
  - c. Assure that district and statewide standardized tests and supplementary materials are made available to each student with appropriate accommodations, as identified in the IEP.
  - d. Maintain a materials and equipment inventory.
  - e. Exchange information about students with visual impairments with appropriate personnel following school district or agency policies regarding confidentiality.
  - f. Maintain program-wide student census information for purposes of annual count and eligibility for federal quota funds through the American Printing House for the Blind.
  - g. Act as case manager, when and if appropriate.
4. *Case Finding and Student Referral Procedures.* TSVIs' responsibilities also include services to the school at large, including:
- a. Acting as a vision consultant for system-wide vision screening, materials, follow-up, and recommendations.
  - b. Participating in school districts' annual Child Find programs.
  - c. Maintaining a referral/communication system with nurses and other school staff.
5. *Services Development.* In many respects, the TSVI also takes on administrative and public relations duties, such as:
- a. Coordinating ancillary groups and individuals, such as paraeducators, transcribers, readers for students with visual impairments, counselors, O&M specialists, academic tutors, and rehabilitation teachers.
  - b. Assisting in the initiation of new services as well as coordinating existing ones to bring the varied and necessary related services to the educational program.
  - c. Maintaining on-going contact with parents to facilitate understanding of their children's abilities, progress, future goals, and available community resources.
  - d. Attending professional meetings (in and out of the district) concerned with the education of students with visual impairments.
  - e. Pursuing new developments in the education of infants, children, and youth with visual impairments.
  - f. Preparing grants for curriculum expansion and acquisition of materials, equipment, and technology.
  - g. Conducting in-service training for general and special education personnel about the impact of visual impairment on learning.

### **School Community Relations**

School and community involvement requires the TSVI to be prepared to promote the program to school personnel, boards of education, and other groups within the community, including acting as a liaison for the program for students with

visual impairments with:

1. Parents and families (including extended family members), demonstrating cultural competence with individuals from diverse backgrounds.
2. Private and public agencies and schools, including those serving individuals with visual impairments.
3. Medical specialists and hospitals, particularly neonatal intensive care units and low vision clinics.
4. State department of education personnel (particularly the state consultant for visual impairment) and instructional materials centers.
5. District assessment personnel.
6. Related services personnel.
7. Early interventionists.
8. Recreation resources.
9. Transition and rehabilitation specialists.
10. Parent and advocacy groups.
11. Child Find.
12. Child study teams.
13. Volunteer groups (particularly those producing braille).
14. Other public and private resources within the community.

The role of the TSVI is multifaceted and requires recognition by administrators that responsibilities and time commitments are unpredictable and increase exponentially with each addition to the caseload. The amount of instruction and consultation required varies according to individual student needs and may even change for an individual student from one week to the next. Both administrators and teachers must approach their roles with flexibility and creativity in order to meet the dynamic, complex needs of infants, children, and youth with visual impairments and their families within a rapidly changing service delivery system.

### **Position**

It is the position of the Division on Visual Impairments and Deafblindness of the Council for Exceptional Children that a free appropriate public education (FAPE) for infants, children, and youths who are blind or have low vision, including those with multiple disabilities, requires the special education services of a teacher of students with visual impairments, regardless of the severity of the visual impairment or the presence of additional disabilities. The TSVI participates in the provision of FAPE by taking responsibility for the functions outlined in this document.

***Full article and references are available from***  
***<http://community.cec.sped.org/dvi/resourcesportal/positionpapers>***

## Standards

### ***Teacher for Students with Visual Impairments (TSVI)***

In order to successfully complete the TSVI program offered by the VIP program, candidates must demonstrate mastery of the following Knowledge and Skill preparation standards, which are essential for an entry level TSVI. As such, these standards are essentially the guiding and foundational objectives for our TSVI program. These criteria were developed and approved by the Council for Exceptional Children and are the guiding curricular principles of our program.

#### **Council for Exceptional Children -- Initial Special Education Teachers of Individuals who are Blind/Visually Impaired Specialty Set**

### Specialty Set Blind and Visual Impairments

Initial Preparation Standard 1: Learner Development and Individual Learning Differences	
Knowledge	
BVI.1.K1	Development of the human visual system
BVI.1.K2	Development of secondary senses when vision is impaired
BVI.1.K3	Effects of visual impairment on development
BVI.1.K4	Effects of visual impairment on learning and experience
BVI.1.K5	Psychosocial aspects of visual impairment and cultural identity
BVI.1.K6	Effects of visual impairment on receptive and expressive literacy and communication
Skills	
BVI.1.S1	Select and develop teaching strategies addressing age, visual impairment, and visual prognosis
BVI.1.S2	Use strategies to address the effects of visual impairment on the family and the reciprocal effect on the individual's self-esteem
BVI.1.S3	Select, adapt, and use instructional strategies to address the effect of additional exceptionalities

Initial Preparation Standard 2: Learning Environments	
Knowledge	
BVI.2.K1	Classroom organization to accommodate materials, equipment, and technology for vision loss and other disabilities
BVI.2.K2	Importance of role models with visual impairments

Skills	
BVI.2.S1	Design multisensory learning environments that encourage active participation in group and individual activities
BVI.2.S2	Provide access to incidental learning experience

Initial Preparation Standard 3: Curricular Content Knowledge	
Knowledge	
BVI.3.K1	Relationship among assessment, development of individualized education program, and placement as they affect vision-related services
Skills	
BVI.3.S1	Sequence, implement, and evaluate learning objectives based on the expanded core curriculum for individuals with visual impairments
BVI.3.S2	Obtain and organize specialized materials to implement instructional goals

Initial Preparation Standard 4: Assessment	
Knowledge	
BVI.4.K1	Specialized terminology used in assessing individuals with visual impairments
BVI.4.K2	Alternative assessment techniques for individuals with visual impairments
BVI.4.K3	Basic terminology related to the function of the human visual system
Skills	
BVI.4.S1	Administer and interpret vision-related assessments
BVI.4.S2	Use functional evaluations related to the expanded core curriculum
BVI.4.S3	Select, adapt, and use assessment information when tests are not validated on individuals with visual impairments
BVI.4.S4	Participate in the standardization process for local and state assessments
BVI.4.S5	Interpret and apply background information and family history related to the individual's visual status

Initial Preparation Standard 5: Instructional Planning and Strategies	
Knowledge	
BVI.5.K1	Strategies for teaching new concepts
BVI.5.K2	Strategies for teaching visual efficiency skills and use of print adaptations, optical devices, and non-optical devices
BVI.5.K3	Strategies for teaching organization and study skills
BVI.5.K4	Strategies for teaching tactile-perceptual skills
BVI.5.K5	Strategies for teaching adapted physical and recreational skills
BVI.5.K6	Strategies for teaching social, daily living, and functional life skills
BVI.5.K7	Strategies for teaching career-vocational skills and providing vocational counseling



BVI.5.K8	Strategies to prepare individuals with progressive eye conditions to achieve a positive transition to alternative skills
BVI.5.K9	Techniques for teaching human sexuality
BVI.5.K10	Strategies for responding and understanding the implications of nonverbal communication as a substructure of language
BVI.5.K11	Strategies for teaching listening and compensatory auditory skills
<b>Skills</b>	
BVI.5.S1	Select and use technologies to accomplish instructional objectives
BVI.5.S2	Integrate the individualized health care plan into daily programming
BVI.5.S3	Teach communication through technology and adaptations specific to visual impairments
BVI.5.S4	Select and adapt materials in Braille, accessible print, and other formats
BVI.5.S5	Teach the use of Braille writer, slate and stylus, and computer technology to produce Braille materials
BVI.5.S6	Teach the use of the abacus, talking calculator, tactile graphics, and adapted science equipment
BVI.5.S7	Prepare individuals for sighted guide and pre-cane orientation and mobility instruction
BVI.5.S8	Teach literacy skills to individuals who have vision loss as well as other disabilities

### Initial Preparation Standard 6: Professional Learning and Ethical Practice

<b>Knowledge</b>	
BVI.6.K1	Access rights to specialized equipment and materials for individuals with visual impairments
BVI.6.K2	Historical foundations of education of individuals with visual impairments as related to traditional roles of specialized and public schools around the world
BVI.6.K3	Incidence and prevalence for individuals with visual impairments
BVI.6.K4	Basic terminology related to the function of the human visual system
<b>Skills</b>	
BVI.6.S1	Use strategies to address the effects of visual impairment on the family and the reciprocal impact on the individuals' self-esteem
BVI.6.S2	Select, adapt, and use instructional strategies to address the effect of additional exceptionalities
BVI.6.S3	Articulate an instructional philosophy that responds to the specific implications of visual impairment within the general education curriculum
BVI.6.S4	Articulate a professional philosophy that draws on specialized knowledge of visual impairment within the continuum of instructional options
BVI.6.S5	Participate in the activities of professional organizations in the field of visual impairment
BVI.6.S6	Advocate for educational policy related to visual impairment

### Initial Preparation Standard 7: Collaboration

Knowledge	
BVI.7.K1	Strategies for assisting families and other team members in transition planning
BVI.7.K2	Services, networks, publications for and organizations of individuals with visual impairments
Skills	
BVI.7.S1	Structure and supervise the activities of paraeducators and others who work with individuals with visual impairments
BVI.7.S2	Plan and implement literacy and communication and consultative support within the general education curriculum and the expanded core curriculum

## ***Code of Ethics***

Practitioners in the field of TSVI are bound by strict Codes of Ethics. These Codes outline appropriate behavior and performance in the field of vision. Be sure to familiarize yourself with the Code that applies to you.

### Code of Ethics of the Association for Education and Rehabilitation of the Blind and Visually Impaired: A Guide for Professionals

A code of ethics is designed to represent best ethical practice by stating an agreed upon set of values and principles that can guide behavior. It is recognized that AER members often belong to professional groups that have their own Codes of Ethics or professional practice guidelines. The AER Code of Ethics is not intended to replace those codes. It is instead intended as a general guide that reflects the commitment of professionals within this field to act ethically. In cases where there may be conflicts between the AER code and a member's disciplinary code, the member should adhere to the requirements of his or her own disciplinary code. Members who do not have their own disciplinary code should use the AER Code as a guide to ethical behavior. While there are key principles upon which we agree, at times those principles may prove to be in opposition to one another. In those situations of conflict, the member must select a course of action that does the most good and has the least potential for harm.

### Key Principles

There are several principles that make up the basis of the AER Code of Ethics. They include respect, dignity, beneficence, non-maleficence, justice, fidelity, and integrity.

Respect for Personal Rights and Dignity – Professionals are expected to respect the personal worth of each individual and his or her right to make autonomous decisions. The opinions and choices of individuals must be considered when planning education and rehabilitation programs. Only when choices may be harmful will alternative interventions be considered. When working with persons who have reduced autonomy or diminished capacity there is an obligation to be sure that they have adequate protection.

Beneficence and Non-maleficence – Professionals ensure a consumer’s safety and avoid imposing or inflicting harm upon that person. Beneficence is often defined as providing acts of kindness or charity but for the purposes of this code it is an obligation to do good to the consumer, and to maximize possible benefits as a result of services provided. Professionals strive to facilitate experiences that will be positive for consumers and ensure their rights. It is the duty of the practitioner to avoid personal, financial, social, or organizational conflicts that might be detrimental to the consumer.

Justice – Professionals are obligated to provide consumers with all the services and benefits to which they are entitled. It is an injustice when entitled benefits are withheld without good cause. People are treated equally and favoritism will not be tolerated.

Fidelity and Integrity – Professionals are loyal, honest, truthful, keep their promises to consumers. They establish and maintain trusting relationships with their consumers. They maintain ethical standards of behavior and manage conflicts of interest. They also engage in ethical behavior with colleagues, and employers. Honesty and truthfulness extend into their teaching and research. They accurately represent themselves and their abilities to the consumers they serve.

Definition of Terms - These may be found – at the end of this document and

## ETHICAL GUIDELINES

### COMPETENCE AND ACCOUNTABILITY

1.01 AER Members will provide services, teach, and conduct research with populations in areas only within their scope of practice, based on their education, training, consultation, study, and professional experience.

1.02 AER Members will provide services only within the scope of practice as identified by their professional discipline.

1.03 AER Members who delegate work to employees, supervisees, assistants or who use the services of others, will take reasonable steps to authorize only those responsibilities that such persons can be expected to perform competently on the basis of their education, training, or experience, either independently or with the level of supervision being provided.

1.04 AER Members will claim or will imply only professional credentials possessed and are responsible for correcting any known misrepresentations of their credentials by others. Professional credentials include baccalaureate degrees, graduate degrees, accreditation of graduate programs, national voluntary certifications, government-issued certifications or licenses, or any other credential that might indicate to the public specialized knowledge or expertise in their field of study. AER Members who do not hold specialized credentials in the disciplines specific to blindness and low vision will not misrepresent themselves as having knowledge specific to the disciplines for which they have no credential.

1.05 AER Members will not attribute more to their credentials than the credentials represent.

1.06 AER Members will refer consumers to other specialists as the needs of the consumer dictate.

1.07 AER Members will take reasonable steps to consult with other professionals when they have questions concerning ethical obligations or practice issues.

### ADVOCACY

2.01 AER Members will strive to eliminate attitudinal barriers, including stereotyping and discrimination, toward individuals with disabilities and to increase their own awareness and sensitivity to such individuals.

2.02 AER Members will remain aware of actions taken by cooperating agencies on behalf of their consumers and will act as advocates of such consumers to ensure effective service delivery.

2.03 AER Members will provide consumers with appropriate information and will support their efforts at self-advocacy both on an individual and an organizational level.

### ACCESSIBILITY

3.01 AER Members will demonstrate an appreciation of the need to provide necessary access to information and accommodations, including full ability to access information about their services and programs, participation in program access, and accessible facilities and services, to individuals with disabilities.

3.02 AER Members will identify physical, communication, and transportation barriers to consumers and will communicate information on barriers to public and private authorities to facilitate removal of said barriers to access.

3.03 AER Members, as advocates for individuals with disabilities, will ensure, prior to referring consumers to programs, facilities, or employment settings, that they are appropriately accessible.

3.04 AER Members will ensure that all instructional materials are not only accessible but also usable to ensure complete functionality.

### RELATIONSHIPS

4.01 AER Members' primary responsibility is to promote the well-being of consumers. In general, consumers' interests are primary and their concerns and those of their families must always be treated with respect. In addition, AER Members will treat colleagues with respect and will represent accurately and fairly the qualifications, views, and obligations of consumers and colleagues.

4.02 AER Members will not engage in unfair discrimination or knowingly engage in behavior that is harassing or demeaning based on age, gender, gender identity, race, ethnicity, culture, national origin, religion, sexual orientation, disability, socioeconomic status, or any basis prohibited by law.

4.03 All forms of harassment and discrimination are not acceptable.

4.04 AER Members will take reasonable steps to avoid harming their consumers, supervisees, research participants, colleagues, organizational consumers, and others with whom they work, and minimize harm where it is foreseeable and unavoidable.

4.05 AER Members will avoid conflicts of interest. They refrain whenever possible from taking on a professional role when personal, scientific, professional, legal, financial, or other interests or relationships could reasonably be expected to (1) impair their objectivity, competence, or effectiveness in performing their functions, (2) expose a person or organization to harm or exploitation, or (3) where there is a personal advantage at the expense of others in their line of duties.

4.06 When working with consumers, AER members will promote and provide a safe, positive learning environment. They will abide by government regulations concerning mandatory reporting of suspected abuse and neglect.

4.07 Whenever possible AER Members will avoid conflicts of interest, and where they do exist will disclose them and treat consumers and students in a manner reflecting their professional commitments and ethics.

4.08 AER Members will avoid providing direct service to accepting as consumers any person with whom they have had prior intimate relationships. If, this is not possible because of the unavailability of other professionals, the nature of any prior relationship will be made known to supervisor(s) for consumer protection and to avoid even the appearance of impropriety.

4.09 Unless otherwise covered by contract, AER Members will make reasonable efforts to plan for facilitating services in the event that services are interrupted by factors such as the practitioner's illness, death, unavailability, relocation, or retirement or by the consumer's relocation or financial limitations or by natural disasters or civic emergencies.

#### PRIVACY AND CONFIDENTIALITY

5.01 AER Members have a primary obligation and will take reasonable precautions to protect confidential information obtained through or stored in any medium, recognizing that the extent and limits of confidentiality may be regulated by law or established by institutional rules or professional or scientific relationship.

5.02 Before initiating personal data collection for the purposes of providing services or programs, AER Members will discuss with persons (including, to the extent feasible, persons who are legally incapable of giving informed consent or assent and their legal representatives) and organizations with whom they establish a scientific or professional relationship (1) the relevant limits of confidentiality and (2) the foreseeable uses of the information generated through their services.

5.03 Before recording the voices or images of individuals to whom they provide services, AER Members will obtain permission from all such persons or their legal representatives.

5.04 AER Members will disclose confidential information without the consent of the individual only as mandated by law, or where permitted by law for a valid purpose such as to (1) provide needed professional services; (2) obtain appropriate professional consultations; (3) protect the consumer, the professionals themselves or others from harm; or (4) obtain payment for services from a consumer in which instance disclosure is limited to the minimum that is necessary to achieve the purpose.

5.05 Education and rehabilitation professions will maintain up-to-date knowledge of individual laws relative to privacy, confidentiality and privileged communication and strive to protect the anonymity of the consumer as much as possible.

5.06 When releasing information on a consumer to a requesting agency or individual, the AER Member will obtain fully informed, written permission from the consumer to release the information.

5.07 AER Members will remain mindful of the confidentiality limits of electronic communications such as email, FAX machines, voice mail and social media, and they will ensure that consumers are notified of these limits so that proper safeguards may be utilized to protect consumer records.

#### COMMUNICATION

6.01 AER Members will be held to the same level of expected behavior and confidentiality as defined by the AER Code of Ethics regardless of the form of communication they choose to use (i.e., cellular phones, electronic mail, facsimile, video, audio-visual).

6.02 When consumers request language interpretation or communication is unclear, AER Members will provide qualified interpreters.

6.03 AER Members will request use, when appropriate, of augmentative communication technology when working with persons with speech difficulties and will make every effort to understand consumers' attempts to communicate even when said communication uses non-verbal/behavioral means rather than verbal language.

#### ADVERTISING AND OTHER PUBLIC STATEMENTS

7.01 AER Members will not make public statements that are false, deceptive, or fraudulent concerning their research, practice, or other work activities or those of persons or organizations with which they are affiliated.

7.02 AER Members will not make statements on behalf of AER without the express consent of the organization.

7.03 AER Members will not solicit testimonials from current consumers or other persons who because of their particular circumstances are vulnerable to undue influence.

7.04 AER Members will not exploit the presence of a disability or in any way diminish the respect and dignity due consumers for the purposes of agency fundraising or personal gain.

## ASSESSMENT

8.01 Whenever possible AER Members will use assessment instruments whose validity and reliability have been established for use with members of the population tested. When other instruments without such validity or reliability are used, professionals describe the strengths and limitations of test results and interpretation.

8.02 AER Members will base the opinions contained in their recommendations, reports, and diagnostic or evaluative statements on information and techniques sufficient to substantiate their findings.

8.03 AER Members will provide opinions of the functioning of individuals only after they have conducted an assessment of the individual adequate to support their statements or conclusions. When, despite reasonable efforts, such an examination is not practical, professionals document the efforts they made and the result of those efforts, clarify the probable impact of their limited information on the reliability and validity of their opinions, and appropriately limit the nature and extent of their conclusions or recommendations.

## PROFESSIONAL AND BUSINESS PRACTICES

9.01 When setting fees, AER Members will ensure that the fees are fair, reasonable, and commensurate with the services performed, and will be mindful of antitrust laws in setting those fees to avoid price fixing.

9.02 AER Members will avoid accepting goods or services from consumers in exchange for professional services. Bartering arrangements, particularly involving services, create the potential for conflicts of interest, exploitation, and inappropriate boundaries.

9.03 AER Members will not accept personal gifts of significance from consumers of their services.

9.04 As early as is feasible in a professional or scientific relationship, AER Members and consumers of services will reach an agreement specifying payment and billing arrangements.

9.05 When AER Members agree to provide services to a person or entity at the request of a third party, they will attempt to clarify at the outset of the service the nature of the relationship with all individuals or organizations involved. This clarification includes the role of the practitioner, identification of who is the consumer, the probable uses of the services provided or the information obtained, and the fact that there may be limits to confidentiality.

9.06 AER Members will create, and, to the extent the records are under their control, maintain, disseminate, store, retain, and dispose of records and data relating to their professional and scientific work in order to (1) facilitate provision of services later by them or by other professionals, (2) allow for replication of research design and analyses, (3) meet institutional requirements, (4) ensure accuracy of billing and payments, and (5) ensure compliance with law.

9.07 AER Members in private practice will maintain confidentiality in creating, storing, accessing, transferring, and disposing of records under their control, whether these are written, electronic, or in any other medium.

9.08 In their reports to payers for services or sources of research funding, AER Members will take reasonable steps to ensure the honest and accurate reporting of the nature of the service provided, the fees, charges, or payments, and where applicable, the identity of the provider, and the findings.

9.09 AER Members will terminate services when it becomes reasonably clear that the consumer no longer needs the service, is not likely to benefit, or is being harmed by continued service. Except where precluded by the actions of consumers or third-party payers, prior to termination, AER Members will provide predetermination advising and suggest alternative service providers as appropriate.

#### UNIVERSITY-BASED EDUCATION

10.01 AER Members responsible for education and professional preparation programs will take reasonable steps to ensure that the programs are designed to provide the appropriate knowledge and proper experiences for students, and to meet the requirements for licensure, certification, or other goals for which claims are made by the program.

10.02 AER Members will take reasonable steps to ensure that course syllabi and other materials accurately reflect the subject matter and the plan for evaluation.

10.03 AER Members do not require students to disclose personal information in course or program-related activities.

10.04 AER Members will consider all communication with students confidential, except in the event that the student suggests a harmful act has been committed or when a student suggests that actions may be taken that could inflict harm to the student and or others. In the event that communication with the student raises concern, the professional must comply with the reporting laws in his or her jurisdiction.

10.05 AER Members will not endorse students for certification, licensure, employment, or completion of an academic or training program if they believe students or supervisees are not qualified for the endorsement. They will take reasonable steps to assist students who are not qualified for endorsement to become qualified. They will seek professional consultation and document their decision to dismiss or to refer students or supervisees for assistance. AER Members will advise students of appeals processes as appropriate.

10.06 In academic and supervisory relationships, AER Members will establish a timely and specific process for providing feedback to students. Information regarding the process is provided to the student at the beginning of supervision. AER Members will evaluate students on the basis of their actual performance on relevant and established program requirements.

10.07 AER Members will clearly define and maintain ethical, professional, and social relationship boundaries with their students. They will be aware of the



differential in power that exists and the student's possible lack of understanding of that power differential.

10.08 AER Members will supervise only within the boundaries of their competence, based on their education, training, supervised experience, state and national professional credentials, and appropriate professional experience.

10.09 AER Members who function as onsite supervisors will perform direct supervision sufficient to ensure that services provided to consumers are adequate, respectful, and do not cause harm or unnecessary discomfort. Those who are serving as practicum or internship supervisors will be adequately prepared and supervised by the training program.

### RESEARCH AND PUBLICATION

11.01 When conducting research every effort will be made to fully inform the participant of the risks of participation and their ability to withdraw at any time without consequences.

11.02 When conducting research, every effort will be made to protect the confidentiality of the participant, and to obtain informed consent to have their information used for research purposes.

11.03 When conducting research AER Members will follow IRB standards that protect research participants.

11.04 AER Members will not plagiarize by presenting portions of another's work or data as their own, even if the other work or data source is cited occasionally. AER Members will observe all copyright and fair use laws.

11.05 AER members conducting research will insure that participants understand that participation is voluntary and without any penalty for participation, refusal to participate, or opinions expressed.

11.06 After data are collected, AER Members will provide participants with full clarification of the nature of the study to remove any misconceptions. Where scientific or human values justify delaying or withholding information, AER Members will take reasonable measures to avoid causing harm.

11.07 AER members who are university faculty will appropriately credit students as principle authors on articles produced as a result of a thesis or dissertation. Faculty advisors will discuss publication credit with students as early as feasible and throughout the research and publication process.

11.08 AER Members will take responsibility and credit, including authorship credit, only for work they have actually performed or to which they have substantially contributed. AER Members will give credit through joint authorship, acknowledgment, footnote statements, or other appropriate means to those who have contributed significantly to research or concept development in accordance with such contributions.

11.09 AER Members who are reviewers of presentations, publications, grants, or

research proposals respect the privacy and confidentiality and the proprietary rights of such information and of those who submitted it. When asked to be a reviewer, AER members will disclose if there is a conflict of interest.

### ADMINISTRATION

12.01 AER members will be honest, fair, and transparent regarding financial management and accounting practices.

12.02 AER members will advocate for adequate resources to meet consumer needs. They will insure that resource allocation procedures are open, fair, and equitable.

12.03 AER Members will take reasonable steps to ensure that organizational resources are available to provide appropriate staff supervision.

12.04 AER members who are administrators will stay current on research and will utilize best practice and evidence-based practice in designing effective rehabilitation and education programs and services.

12.05 AER members who have responsibility for evaluating the performance of others will fulfill such responsibility in a fair and considerate manner and on the basis of clearly stated criteria.

12.06 AER members will endeavor to hire credentialed professionals who have the education and training necessary to provide the highest quality services.

12.07 AER Members will make every effort to ensure that service providers have reasonable workload responsibilities sufficient to meet consumer needs.

12.08 AER members will encourage participation in professional development.

12.09 AER Members who are administrators will take reasonable steps to ensure that the working environment for which they are responsible is consistent with and encourages compliance with this AER Code of Ethics. Professionals and administrators will take reasonable steps to eliminate any conditions in their organizations that violate, interfere with, or discourage compliance with this Code.

### RESOLVING ETHICAL ISSUES

13.01 AER Members will encourage ethical behavior and facilitate discussion regarding ethics.

13.02 AER Members will take adequate measures to discourage, prevent, expose, and correct the unethical conduct of colleagues.

13.03 AER Members will be knowledgeable about this code and any code that defines practice in their profession.

13.04 When uncertain as to whether a particular situation or course of action may be in violation of the AER Code of Ethics, AER Members will consult with other AER professionals who are knowledgeable about ethics with colleagues, and/or with appropriate authorities.

13.05 When AER Members have reasonable cause to believe that another professional is violating an ethical standard, they will attempt to resolve the issue informally with the other practitioner if feasible, providing that such action does not violate confidentiality rights that may be involved.

13.06 When necessary, AER Members who believe that a colleague has acted unethically and after being confronted but not responding appropriately, will take action through formal channels such as contacting a certification or licensing board or regulatory body, or other professional ethics committees as available through their specific profession.

### DEFINITION OF TERMS

**AER Members:** all those individuals who have paid their current dues to AER and belong to any of the professions serving people who are blind or visually impaired.

**Consumers:** the children and adults with blindness and visual impairment, and their families, who are receiving professional services.

**Students:** individuals who are under the guidance or are supervised by faculty members from a college or university.

**Accountability:** professionals being held accountable for their ethical behavior to consumers, credentialing bodies, employers and fellow professionals.

**Codes of Ethics:** are adopted by organizations to assist members in understanding the difference between “right” and “wrong” and applying that understanding to their decisions.

**Public statements:** include but are not limited to paid or unpaid advertising, product endorsements, grant applications, licensing applications, other credentialing applications, brochures, printed matter, directory listings, personal resumes or curricula vitae, or comments for use in media such as print, electronic transmission, or social media, statements in legal proceedings, lectures and public oral presentations, and published materials.

**Harassment:** covers a wide range of behaviors of an offensive nature. It is commonly understood as behavior intended to disturb or upset, and it is characteristically repetitive. In the legal sense, it is intentional behavior which is found threatening or disturbing. Sexual harassment includes: unwelcome sexual advances, requests for sexual favors, and other verbal or physical conduct of a sexual nature that tends to create an intimidating, hostile, or offensive work or learning environment, and is potentially disadvantageous to the victim.

### ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The Association for Education and Rehabilitation of the Blind and Visually Impaired wishes to thank the following organizations the use of elements from their codes of ethics in this document:

The Belmont Report

<http://www.hhs.gov/ohrp/humansubjects/guidance/belmont.html>

American Counseling Association

<http://www.counseling.org/resources/aca-code-of-ethics.pdf>

Counseling Psychology

<http://www.apa.org/ethics/code/>

Rehabilitation Counseling

<http://www.crccertification.com/>

Social Work

<http://www.socialworkers.org/pubs/code/default.asp>

### ***Program Requirements***

### ***Completion Requirements***

In order to gain accreditation as TSVI through completion of any of the programs offered by the VIP program, the candidate must fulfill the following requirements:

#### **Teacher of Students with Visual Impairments**

Successfully complete all required didactic courses Complete practicum (350) hours

Pass two TExES exams: braille (283) and visual impairment (182)

#### **Master of Education**

Successfully complete 36 hours of didactic instruction in Visual Impairment / Orientation and Mobility.

Practicum hours that are required for individual certifications may not apply toward the master's degree.

Successful completion of an individual research project, which is conducted one-on-one with the student's SPED 5370 faculty advisor.

Passing the comprehensive exams for the candidate's specific area. (You MUST be enrolled at SFASU in the semester in which you satisfy comps).

## **Course Requirements**

The course listings below represent typical classes that are taken in order to fulfill the requirements in our program.

### ***Teacher of students who have a Visual Impairment – Graduate Teacher Certification Program***

The following are the classes that are required for completion of the TSVI certification program.

**Course: SPED 5315 Foundations in Visual Impairment**

Semester: Fall

Credits: 3 semester hours

Description: Class provides a broad overview of various aspects of blindness (e.g., agencies which provide services to persons with visual impairments, psychological and sociological aspects of blindness, history of the field).

**Course: SPED 5316 Structure and Function of the Visual System**

Semester: Summer

Credits: 3 semester hours

Description: This class is designed to familiarize the candidate with the various parts of the visual system and their impact on the process of seeing. The Functional Vision/Learning Media Assessment process is also introduced.

**Course: SPED 5317 Communication Skills for Persons with Visual Impairments**

Semester: Summer

Credits: 3 semester hours

Description: Requires the candidate to master uncontracted and contracted braille, Nemeth Code, and rudimentary slate and stylus.

**Course: SPED 5318 Orientation and Mobility Skills and Concepts**

Semester: Fall

Credits: 3 semester hours

Description: Body imagery, concept development, spatial awareness and mobility is considered. Body imagery, concept development, spatial awareness and mobility are emphasized.

**Course: SPED 5351 The Role of the Teacher of Persons with Visual Impairments**

Semester: Spring

Credits: 3 semester hours

Description: Formal and informal assessment instruments appropriate for visually impaired students; sources and operation of special equipment, adaptation of curriculum for visually impaired learners.

**Course: SPED 5352 Instructional Strategies for Individuals with Visual and Multiple Disabilities**

Semester: Spring

Credits: 3 semester hours

Description: Candidates are required to study a wide array of conditions that often accompany vision loss as well as educational programming considerations, assessment, and adaptation of environments for these students.

**Course: SPED 5158 Practicum in Visual Impairment**

Semester: Fall and Spring

Credits: 1-3 semester hours

Description: Candidates are required to do a Functional Vision Assessment and Learning Media assessment as well as attend an IEP Team meeting, write IEPs, and various other activities that certified TSVIs perform. The students will be followed across at least the first public school year they are working in the field.

<p><b><i>Master of Education Program</i></b></p>
--------------------------------------------------

Typically, candidates who enter the master's program have already finished either the COMS or the TSVI certification program. This means that they come to the program with 18 to 21 of the needed 36 semester hours. In this situation, candidates continuing into the M.Ed. program are required to complete the following classes. Your master's degree must be completed within 6 years of the completion of your first class in the program.

**Course: SPED 5353 VI Technology**

Semester: Fall

Credits: 3 semester hours

Description: Because technology in the field changes so rapidly, it is not the objective of this course to teach the use of specific computer systems. Rather, it is aimed to give the student an understanding of the foundational principles of adaptive technology and of the operating and use principles for broad areas of equipment (e.g., screen readers).

**Course: SPED 5319 Low Vision**

Semester: Spring

Credits: 3 semester hours

Description: Visual assessment and intervention methods for persons with low vision. Psychosocial aspects, optical devices, environmental evaluation and modification.

**Course: SPED 5321 Teaching the Expanded Core Curriculum to Students with Visual Impairments**

Semester: Fall

Credits: 3 semester hours

Description: The expanded core curriculum includes areas such as assistive technology, compensatory skills, career education, independent living skills, recreation & leisure, etc. This class provides an opportunity to delve deeper into the importance of the expanded core curriculum and how it should be taught.

**Course: SPED 5356 Infancy and Early Childhood for Individuals with Visual Impairment**

Semester: Spring

Credits: 3 semester hours

Description: This class provides an in-depth examination of how learning takes place during the first five years

of life of persons with visual and visual/multiple impairments. It also provides students with vital information about educational programming and intervention strategies that apply to these children.

**Course: SPED 5367 Trends in Educating Exceptional Children**

Semester: Fall/Spring/Summer

Credits: 3 semester hours

Description: An advanced survey course. Emphasis on current research.

***And your research/capstone course:***

**Course: SPED 5370 Independent Project in Visual Impairment**

Semester: Fall/Spring

Credits: 3 semester hours

Description: This is the capstone class of the M.Ed. program. In this class, candidates develop and execute their own research project. The candidate will work under the direction of a faculty person in a one-on-one arrangement.

***Program Admission Requirements***

Requirements for admission depend on the program in which the candidate wishes to participate. The following are the requirements.

**Teacher of Students with Visual Impairments**

In order to be eligible for this program, the applicant must have at least a bachelor's degree from an accredited university. Applicants to the TSVI program must also have a valid teacher's certification from the Texas Education Agency in order to be admitted to the program. Training provided to teachers from other states must meet their state requirements.

***Additional Admission Requirements***

Prospective candidates must:

1. have a minimum overall 2.5 Grade Point Average (based on a 4.0 system) and a 2.8 Grade Point Average on the last 60 hours of your college work for admission to the university.
2. demonstrate a proficiency in both reading and writing. The applicant will be required to submit 3 written essays which will be evaluated in terms of content, grammar, and spelling.
3. demonstrate a fit between the program's goals and the applicant's goals and interests, as described in a written statement which is submitted at the time of application.
4. indicate their previous participation and experience in people-oriented activities. For the TSVI program, while previous (or current) placement as a teacher in special education is not required, prior extensive experience with individuals with disabilities is an important consideration.

5. provide satisfactory recommendations: One letter must be provided from the applicant's current supervisor if the participation in the TSVI Certification programs alone is anticipated. If the applicant is interested in pursuing a master's degree, three letters should be submitted.
6. submit ALL materials required before any consideration of the applicant's status will be undertaken. Completion, organization, and presentation of all required application materials will be considered as part of the admission process.

An example of the admissions rubric which is used to evaluate applications is included as **Appendix A.**

### ***Cohort and Non-Cohort Admission Policy***

Grant Funded Candidates- It is the policy of the VIP program to admit grant funded candidates to their graduate level programs in a single cohort. This means that **CANDIDATES ARE TYPICALLY ADMITTED ONCE PER YEAR.** Decisions are made regarding admissions at the end of March, and each new cohort starts their program at the beginning of the first Summer term (usually in late May or early June). Once admissions decisions have been made, **NEW GRANT FUNDED CANDIDATES WILL TYPICALLY NOT BE ADMITTED UNTIL THE NEXT ADMISSIONS CYCLE.**

Candidates can join on a limited basis at other times of year (due to prerequisite requirements) and will be considered for funding when available. Candidates who are self-pay are encouraged to participate in the program in the same course cycle as those in the cohorts. Those candidates seeking admission to the program at a period other than the time described above will be admitted to the program in a case-by-case basis. **THOSE CANDIDATES WHO COMMIT TO THE PROGRAM THROUGH SELF-PAY WILL BE GIVEN PRIORITY CONSIDERATION FOR FUNDS AS SOON AS THEY BECOME AVAILABLE.**

### ***How to Apply for Admission***

In order to apply for admissions, the applicant should complete the following steps:

1. Complete and submit the Texas Common Application. Your major is Special Education and area of specialty is either Visual Impairment. This is available at [https://www.applytexas.org/adappc/gen/c\\_start.WBX](https://www.applytexas.org/adappc/gen/c_start.WBX) After you have completed and submitted the application print a copy and send it, along with the rest of the packet, to the following address:

Department of Education Studies  
Visual Impairment Program – Attn: Wendi Channel  
Stephen F. Austin State University  
PO Box 13017 – SFA Station  
Nacogdoches, TX 75962

Candidates working toward an endorsement only should still indicate desire for master's degree on the Texas Common Application. This is done to ensure efficient processing of your application. You are not required to pursue the M.Ed.

2. Print out the separate VIP program application form from the website, complete it and return it with all



required materials to the VIP program offices at the above-mentioned address.

3. Submit a letter of recommendation from your current supervisor. If you intend to apply for a master's degree, you must also submit two additional letters.

Submit 3 essays in which you explain

- a. your philosophy of teaching;
- b. your understanding of the role of a TSVI; and
- c. your reasons for deciding to pursue the career change into or into the field of visual impairment.

4. Submit official copies of your university and college transcripts from EVERY university or college you have attended.
5. In addition, candidates may be required to complete a phone interview with the VIP program admissions committee.

**We will not be able to register candidates if ALL of these are not on file:**

A checklist of all the paperwork required is provided in **Appendix B**.

Having a letter of acceptance from the Graduate School does NOT necessarily mean that the candidate has been accepted into the VIP program. In order to be accepted into our program, the candidate MUST have a signed letter stating that their acceptance has been approved by the VIP program admissions committee.

***Mandatory Note for Persons Working or Seeking Practicum  
Experience in Texas Public Schools-Background Check***

**Mandatory Note for Teachers EDIT THIS TO MEET REQUIREMENTS of new Syllabi**

To complete Certification/Licensing Requirements in Texas related to public education, you will be required to:

1. Undergo criminal background checks for field or clinical experiences on public school campuses; the public school campuses are responsible for the criminal background check; YOU are responsible for completing the information form requesting the criminal background check; the completed information form is due prior to your placement. If you have a history of criminal activity, you may not be allowed to complete field or clinical experiences on public school campuses. At that point, you may want to reconsider your major while at SFASU
2. Provide one of the following primary ID documents: passport, driver's license, state or providence ID cards, a national ID card, or military ID card to take the TEXES exams (additional information available at [www.texas.ets.org/registrationBulletin/](http://www.texas.ets.org/registrationBulletin/)). YOU must provide legal documentation to be allowed to take these mandated examinations that are related to certification/licensing requirements in Texas. If you do not have legal documentation, you may want to reconsider your major while at SFASU.
3. Successfully complete state mandated fingerprint background check. If you have a history of criminal activity, you may want to reconsider your major while at SFASU.

***Pathway Through the Programs - Timelines***

Candidates who enter either Certification programs or M.Ed. programs can expect that the following classes will be only offered during the semesters specified. The pathways include courses that may be in addition to those required for a master's degree.

**Certification as a Teacher of Students with Visual Impairments (TSVI)**

Course	Semester Completed
SPED 5317 – Braille	Summer
SPED 5316 – The Eye Class	Summer
SPED 5318 – Basic O&M	Fall
SPED 5315 – Foundations	Fall
SPED 5351 – Academic Methods	Spring
SPED 5352 – MDVI	Spring
SPED 5158 – Practicum in Visual Impairment	Fall/Spring

**Master of Education in Special Education with a concentration in Visual Impairment**

Course	Semester Completed
SPED 5317 – Braille	Summer
SPED 5316 – The Eye Class	Summer
SPED 5318 – Basic O&M	Fall
SPED 5315 – Foundations	Fall
SPED 5351 – Academic Methods	Spring
SPED 5352 – MDVI	Spring
SPED 5158 – Practicum in Visual Impairment	Fall/Spring
<b>Year 2</b>	
SPED 5353 – VI Technology	Fall
SPED 5321 – Expanded Core Curriculum	Fall
SPED 5367 – Trend in Educating Exceptional Children	Fall/Spring/Summer
SPED 5319 – Low Vision	Spring
SPED 5356 – Infants and Preschoolers	Spring
SPED 5370 (6 hours) – Independent Research	Fall/Spring

\*The SPED 5158 is required for certification but does not count towards your 36-hour M.Ed.

Upon completion of the first 12 hours of graduate study, you are required to file admission to candidacy with your major professor and may be required to pass a Candidacy Exam. You must pass a comprehensive exam covering all required courses prior to graduation.

***Advising Policies and Practices***

## Faculty Advisors

The VIP program faculty is committed to establishing advisement relationships that will support, challenge, and contribute to the professional development of candidates. Each new candidate will be assigned to an advisor who is a member of the VIP program faculty; however, all faculty members are committed to being available to all students in order to provide support whenever possible.

Faculty will make every effort to be available and responsive to the needs of candidates. It is equally important that candidates take initiative in establishing contact with their advisors in requesting assistance and guidance, as needed. Faculty should be consulted promptly if candidates encounter any problems with coursework, practicum, or any other aspect of the program. Candidates are responsible for maintaining communication so that the advisor can carry out his or her roles as consultant, advocate, mentor, and monitor. All faculty members post weekly office hours and these times are available on the VIP program page at [www.sfasu.edu/visual-impairment](http://www.sfasu.edu/visual-impairment) for the purpose of meeting with candidates. Since most of our programs are based on distance education, we are aware that candidates will not be able to visit our offices. However, we encourage calls from candidates during our office hours. Another option is to make an appointment to meet with one of the faculty in a telephone conference or a net meeting on the internet.

## Registration

Registration permits are required before candidates can register for any of the classes in the VIP program. In order to be permitted to register for a class, a candidate **MUST CONTACT THE PROGRAM**. Individuals who are in the cohort will be permitted for the next classes in the sequence. Those in the master's program should notify the program to indicate the course in which they want to enroll for the next semester. If you have questions about which classes you should take, please contact your advisor or one of the faculty members.

**\*Even though candidates' tuition is paid, the program does not register candidates for classes. It is the candidate's responsibility to register or drop from a class and fully adhere to the SFASU withdrawal/drop policies and timelines. The candidate will be required to repay any grant monies paid on their behalf if they exit the program.**

## ***University and Program Academic Policies***

### Academic Standards

The VIP program is committed to high academic standards and expects all of its candidates to excel. By university policy, the highest grade assigned for any course is 4.0. The VIP program recognizes and enforces a 3.0 cumulative grade-point average for all courses counting toward either a certification or the master's degree. Candidates who fail to meet this standard will not be permitted to continue to enroll in the VIP program. Candidates will receive notification at the end of any semester in which their academic status falls below the minimum requirements.

### Withheld Grades

Occasionally, there will be an unusual situation that will warrant the assignment of a WH (grade withheld) for a particular class. **THESE SITUATIONS SHOULD BE VIEWED AS THE EXCEPTION.** A WH grade will be

assigned only when the candidate can demonstrate some valid reason that coursework cannot be completed. When a WH is a valid grade, the instructor and candidate must negotiate a plan for the completion of course requirements beyond the end of the semester in which the student is enrolled in the course. To receive a passing grade, candidates MUST complete and submit the requirement(s) and receive an adequate evaluation prior to the university-regulated deadline during the following semester. **PLEASE NOTE THAT WHs AUTOMATICALLY BECOME "Fs" IN ONE CALENDAR YEAR.**

### **Time Limits for Returning to the Program or Transferring Credit**

According to University policy there is a six-year limit on the time that courses may be applied to current work. If a candidate has taken an applicable course (either from the VIP program or another university) if *MORE THAN SIX YEARS HAVE PASSED, THE CLASS WILL NOT BE ACCEPTED* and the candidate will be required to retake the course.

### **Transfer of Credits**

According to the Graduate Bulletin, the following is the University's policy on transferring credit:

Under certain circumstances, a graduate candidate may transfer from 6 to 12 semester hours of graduate course work taken at other accredited institutions. The candidate pursuing a master's degree with thesis may transfer a maximum of 6 semester hours; a candidate pursuing a master's degree without thesis may transfer a maximum of 12 semester hours.

To transfer any credit from other institutions, however, the candidate must submit an official transcript of the courses to be considered and have the approval of the appropriate academic department and academic dean. The work must have been taken not earlier than six years prior to the candidates first graduate enrollment at SFA. Moreover, if the candidate fails to complete work on the graduate degree at SFA before the expiration of the six years, the transfer credit will not be applicable toward a degree here.

Any course accepted by transfer will carry credit but not grade point value. Moreover, to transfer credit, the student must have earned a grade of B or higher on the course.

The exception is that ALL hours earned in a SFASU Certification program can be considered for transfer into a graduate degree program.

## ***Field Experience, Practicum, and Internship***

### **Teacher of Students with Visual Impairments Program**

#### ***Field based experience***

In order to complete the TSVI certification program, each candidate is required to complete 350 hours of field-based experiences and practicum hours. Historically, these hours were completed at the end of a candidate's program. This meant that some of our candidates would complete their entire course of study without ever having any interaction with a student. Since it has been our experience that the students are quite often the very best teachers and since we as a program are committed to emphasizing practicality rather than theoretical goals and objectives, we now require students to complete 170 hours of field-based experience broken up into

manageable chunks in each course. Candidates each of the following courses will complete 40 hours' worth of activities that count toward the 170 hours in each of the following courses: in SPED 5316, SPED 5315, SPED 5351, and SPED 5352, with an additional 10 hours required in SPED 5318. All of the didactic courses, with the exception of the braille class, have a field-based component. These 170 hours are composed of a combination of direct observation of students with visual impairments and other relevant activities.

### ***Practicum***

The TSVI practicum takes place during the first year that the teacher begins their career in vision. Typically, candidates register for the practicum class, SPED 5158, in both the fall and spring semesters. Your practicum should cover your first full year of service. During that academic year, candidates must generate a minimum of 180 hours of direct service with students with visual impairment. Combined with the 170 field-based experience hours, candidates complete the state-required 350 hours for practicum/internship. During this practicum year, supervisors from the VIP program visit the practicum teachers repeatedly in their local districts to provide support and demonstration teaching.

## ***Comprehensive Exam for the Master in Education Degree***

### **Comprehensive Exam Content**

**ALL CANDIDATES WHO ARE SEEKING A MASTER'S DEGREE MUST COMPLETE A COMPREHENSIVE EXAMINATION.**

**THIS IS A VERY SERIOUS UNDERTAKING AND IS A REFLECTION OF YOU AS A PROFESSIONAL.**

**YOU CANNOT GRADUATE WITH A M.Ed. WITHOUT SUCCESSFUL COMPLETION OF COMPS**

#### **EXAM GUIDELINES AND REQUIREMENTS:**

- You must successfully complete the examination in a semester in which you are registered.
- If you fail to schedule an exam, or are not successful in your exam attempt, you will be required to register for a one credit hour class the following semester if your program is otherwise complete.
- You are eligible to take your comprehensive exam at any time during either of your last two semesters of training.
- It is YOUR responsibility to schedule your comprehensive exams.
- Exams must be scheduled for completion 30 DAYS PRIOR TO THE END OF THE SEMESTER.

The Comprehensive Exam will focus on nine key areas of knowledge covered in the graduate program you have completed. Those areas are:

1. Foundations in Visual Impairment
2. Structure and Function of the Visual System
3. Basic Orientation and Mobility
4. Methods for Working with Academic Students Who Have Visual Impairments

5. Methods for Working with Students Who Have Visual and Multiple Impairments
6. Advanced Assessment and Instructional Strategies for Students Who Have Low Vision
7. Infancy and Early Childhood Instruction for Students with Visual Impairments
8. Technology for Students Who Have Visual Impairments
9. Educational Evaluation and Assessment of Skills

<p><b>Current Comprehensive Exam Format</b></p>
-------------------------------------------------

The Exam will thoroughly and comprehensively test your knowledge in all areas previously studied. The Exam will be composed solely of essay questions. Some of these questions may be scenario based. Here are instructions that should be followed (as a minimum) for success on the examination:

- You will be provided 6 questions multi-part questions upon which you are to research and compose professional responses.
- You must complete 4 out of the 6 questions.
- You must make sure and effectively address each part of the question you choose fully and support your answers.
- Write an introduction, give your response, and then provide an accurate and reflective conclusion for each question.
- You must use APA format and cite verifiable references in text as well as produce a reference page for each question. You do not need a title page or abstract for your question responses. You do need both in-text citations AND a reference page.
- You can use resources and the Internet but as with your research paper this work must be original and supported by sources.
- You may NOT receive assistance in answering the questions from any individual. You may seek editing assistance from the AARC THIS IS VERY SERIOUS - DO NOT PLAGARIZE, CUT AND PASTE, OR OVER-USE OTHER'S MATERIALS.
- Your role here is to demonstrate your knowledge with the support of research NOT to show that you can locate the work of others. You MUST demonstrate the ability to paraphrase, connect ideas, and combine source materials.

**\*\*\*THIS PAPER WILL BE EVALUATED FOR PLAGERISM AND WILL BE PROCESSED WITH AVAILABLE PLAGERISM SOFTWARE AND RESOURCES.**

You should plan to compose about 4+ pages *on each question* to be comprehensive. One question will typically be drawn from your research project. The exam will be delivered to you electronically and you will have a set time limit to complete the examination (currently 4-5 days).

<p><b>Current Comprehensive Exam Procedures</b></p>
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**Making Arrangements for the Exam**

Candidates are required to notify the instructor of their research course (SPED 5370 and the Visual Impairment/Orientation & Mobility Program Director at least 2 weeks before they want to take the test. Candidates will need to identify the date/time period in which they want to complete the Exam. Your comprehensive exam WILL NOT be scheduled within 30 days of the end of the semester. YOU MUST PLAN EARLY. You may NOT share your questions with any individuals and you may NOT seek assistance in answering questions from anyone. Your integrity matters.

## **Scoring**

Upon completion of the Exam, responses will be reviewed by a minimum of three faculty persons from the Vision Program. All exams will be blind graded, with names or any other identifying information withheld from the reviewer. The candidate's responses will be evaluated using the rubric included in the appendix of this handbook. PLEASE review the rubric as you plan your comprehensive examination. In the event that there is a lack of agreement, the 3 reviewers may call in an additional SFASU faculty member to assist. Within 15 working days after the exam is submitted each candidate will be notified if he or she has been successful or unsuccessful on the Exam.

## **Retakes**

If a candidate does not successfully complete the Exam, three options are available:

1. If the candidate is not successful, the reviewing faculty may ask the candidate to take part an oral question and answer session to clarify their submission or to demonstrate their knowledge. This oral session is NOT limited to topics upon which the candidate answered for their examination.
2. A candidate may be asked to re-write 1-2 questions that did not demonstrate mastery of the question.
3. If all other options are completed and the candidate is still not successful a plan for retaking the exam, with new questions, will be determined. A time will be presented to the faculty for approval. If there is not sufficient time to complete the process during the current semester the candidate may be required to register for an additional course to satisfy university policy of satisfying comprehensive examination requirements during a semester in which they are registered. No candidate will be allowed to attempt passage of the Comprehensive Exam more than twice.

## ***Statewide Mentoring***

Over the last several years, the state of Texas has been fortunate enough to have a statewide mentoring program for new professionals in visual impairment. When students in the VIP program have actually begun to practice in the field, they will be assigned a mentor through the Outreach Program of the Texas School for the Blind and Visually Impaired (TSBVI). The information below is published on the TSBVI website at <http://www.tsbvi.edu/mentor-program>.

### **Mentoring VI Professionals**

#### **Why do VI professionals need a mentor program?**

Pre-service training for VI certification provides a strong background in theory and practice. The mentor

program is designed to support that training by introducing the participants to the unique intricacies and challenges of being an itinerant VI professional and to assist in the transition from learner to VI professional. For example:

- VI professionals work with students with a wide range of both cognitive and visual abilities as well as ages from birth to 21.
- VI teachers are often the only VI professionals employed by small and rural districts. Consequently, they may be isolated from peers who could provide knowledgeable support.
- VI professionals must also be able to interact frequently and successfully with parents, other teachers, and professionals serving their students and administrators in numerous buildings.
- In order to successfully serve students and meet the demands of the job, well-developed organizational and people skills are a must.

In the past people have completed the course work necessary to become a VI teacher only to discover that they do not like the varied and demanding role of working with a diverse population of students scattered over a large service area. Some found that they had the necessary skills to work with students, but wanted more assistance gaining skills in the consultative and/or assessment responsibilities of the job. The mentor program was designed to provide support to new VI professionals so that they would feel less isolated and also have an opportunity to learn how experienced VI teachers handle the many challenges inherent in their jobs.

The Texas Legislature and the State Board for Educator Certification (SBEC) are currently considering plans to provide mentors to all new educators in Texas. The mentor program for VI professionals is at the forefront of this progressive development in education.

### **When and for how long is a VI professional assigned a mentor?**

A candidate entering one of the training options to become a VI professional is assigned a mentor during the first semester of coursework or as soon as one is available. The mentor relationship continues through the protégé's training and extends through the protégé's first year of employment as a VI professional in Texas schools. In general, the commitment to act as a mentor is for two years.

### **Who can be a mentor?**

- General personal qualifications include good communication skills, a solid understanding of professional knowledge, high standards for self and others, a desire for continued professional growth and an ability to nurture the growth of others.
- Mentors for VI teachers must have a minimum of four years of experience and written administrative approval and support.
- O&M mentors must be ACVREP certified and have a minimum of three years of experience providing O&M instruction to children with varying levels of visual impairment and cognitive abilities.
- Applications are reviewed and approved by Outreach staff and appropriate ESC consultants.

### **What is the application process to become a mentor?**

Those who meet the minimum number of years' experience can begin the application process. This process includes:

- completing an application (which includes information about the applicant and a recommendation and statement of support from the supervisor or director)
- securing letters of support from the ESC and other knowledgeable professionals



- submitting a resume (required for O&M specialists only)

attending a 1.5-day training (at no expense to the mentor or district

- completing the TSBVI on-line Mentor Training Course).

### **How are mentors and protégés matched?**

Prior to completing the match, various parties are consulted, including the mentor and the vision consultants at the ESC. If no preference exists, the mentor coordinator will make the match. Once a match is identified, all parties involved need to agree to the pairing of the mentor/protégé team.

Ideally, the mentor will be from a district that is geographically close to the protégé 's home district as this facilitates interaction between the pair. However, if a nearby mentor is not available, the protégé may be assigned to a statewide mentor who will travel to the protégé 's district for regular visits, provided the protégé is assigned a VI caseload.

In rare instances the only VI professional available to the protégé is their mentor. In this situation the mentor may also assume the role of the intern supervisor, provided both the protégé (intern) and the mentor are comfortable with this arrangement. Prior approval by the mentor coordinator for this type of arrangement is required.

### **How will a protégé benefit from having a mentor?**

A mentor is a source of information and support for a protege-UCSC4a guide to a new profession. Some activities a mentor may provide include:

- Opportunities for the protégé to observe the mentor in situations such as conducting evaluations, attending ARD meetings, providing direct instruction and consultations, writing IEP goals, scheduling daily plans, and keeping records
- Introductions to sources for VI-related professional development such as workshops, conferences, web sites, and publications
- Informal observations of the protégé working with students during the first year of employment for the purpose of providing supportive feedback
- Networking opportunities with other professionals in the field of visual impairment.

### **How do experienced VI professionals benefit from being a mentor?**

Tangible benefits include two days of all-expense-paid training to learn how to support a protégé's professional growth. Additional training and opportunities for networking will be offered at professional conferences. In recognition of their time, travel, and expenses, a small stipend is paid to all mentors assigned to protégés. Serving as a mentor can provide the benefits listed below.

- A unique opportunity for professional development and a recognized activity for the Professional Development and Appraisal System (PDAS) and ACVREP recertification credit for O&M specialists
- An excellent contribution to the field by helping to ensure the continued quality of VI teachers and O&M specialists
- A profound sense of personal satisfaction and professional renewal
- Opportunities for new bonds and connections with professionals at various levels of professional development.

### **What support does a school district need to provide to mentors and protégés?**

Upon application to the mentor program, all mentors must complete a TSBVI Mentor Training course online and attend a one-time face-to-face training that lasts 1.5 days. Training sessions are conducted once a year, in Austin. All expenses for the training are paid for by the mentor program. Professional release time to attend the training would be helpful.

Once a mentor has been assigned to a protégé, regular contact between the mentor and protégé is needed to foster a supportive relationship. Contact can be made by phone, e-mail, letters, videotape exchange and face-to-face visits.

For the purposes of onsite observations or shadowing, occasional release time may be needed by either the mentor or the protégé. If it will be necessary for the protégé's school to hire a substitute for time spent observing the mentor, there are limited funds available for this purpose. Prior approval by the mentor coordinator for using these funds will be required. If the mentor and protégé are not employed in the same district, it may be possible for observation days to be scheduled when one district has a professional development day. Since districts often do not have VI- related workshops available for O&M specialists and VI teachers and since mentoring is a recognized activity for the PDAS teacher evaluation process, the time spent mentoring can provide for professional growth and meet criteria for PDAS. Using professional development days also eliminates the problem of not providing scheduled services for VI students on regular school days.

For additional information or to relay comments or ideas, please contact:

Chrissy Cowan, TSBVI Outreach Services, Mentor Coordinator  
1100 W. 45th Street Austin, Texas 78756 (512) 206-9367  
[ChrissyCowan@tsbvi.edu](mailto:ChrissyCowan@tsbvi.edu)

**Attachments:**

<a href="#">Mentor Application</a>	61 Kb
<a href="#">Mentor Recommendation Form</a>	52 Kb



VI professionals are a small, elite group spread out over the state. Beginners may lack opportunities to observe seasoned VI professionals in the classroom and itinerant settings. Three times per year we will be providing two days of professional observation at TSBVI and in surrounding school districts for TSVIs, COMS, and Texas Tech or Stephen F. Austin candidates enrolled in VI coursework. You will have the opportunity to discuss what you have observed and ask questions of the instructors. The mentor program pays for hotel, meals, partial travel, and substitute teacher expenses. You just show up and learn!

To be eligible to attend, you must be a candidate currently working on VI or O&M certification or a VI professional who has entered the field within the last three years. Experienced professionals who are new to Texas are also invited to attend. Your mentor may accompany you to a Mentor Center; she/he is welcome and will receive the same accommodations.

To register go on-line to the TSBVI website (Outreach Pages) and follow the links. Questions? Please contact: Chrissy Cowan, Mentor Coordinator at 512-206-9367 or [chrissycowan@tsbvi.edu](mailto:chrissycowan@tsbvi.edu).

\*All candidates will be required to visit the Mentor Center at least once during their enrollment in the VIP Program.

### ***Candidates' Voluntary Withdrawal from the Program***

Circumstances inevitably arise in which candidates choose to withdraw from the program voluntarily from the VIP program. Under such circumstances, candidates are to first consult their advisor and formally notify the Program Director and their Advisor in writing of their final decision to do so. If at any time, candidates decide to return, reapplication to the program will be required. Re-admission is not guaranteed.

### ***Dismissal Policies***

The dismissal of a candidate from the VIP program is a significant event for both the candidate and the program faculty. This decision represents the conclusion of the faculty that the candidate has not demonstrated an adequate level of competency in either academic performance, clinical skills, or in other critical areas of professional conduct. Dismissal action is generally the final outcome of several informal and formal communications with the student regarding his or her unsatisfactory progress through the program and, when appropriate, special efforts at helping the student meet program requirements and training objectives have failed. The final decision regarding whether a candidate should be terminated from the program, or under what conditions a candidate making unsatisfactory progress will be allowed to continue, is a decision that rests with the VIP program faculty.

#### **Reasons for Dismissal from the Program**

At any point during the candidate's participation in one of the VIP programs, the faculty retains the right to review any candidate circumstances or personal performances that may negatively affect the candidate's competencies for independent professional practice or that may threaten client welfare. The following are offered as examples of circumstances or performances that may be the basis for dismissal action:

1. Failure to maintain minimum academic standards;
- \* 2. Unsatisfactory performance in TSVI practicum courses (e.g., practicum or internship);
3. Academic dishonesty;
4. Criminal misconduct;
5. Failure to comply with established University or Program timetables and requirements;
6. Unethical practices and/or unprofessional conduct in service delivery and/or research.
7. Cognitive, affective, and/or behavioral impairments that obstruct the training process and/or threaten client welfare;
8. If the candidate is involved in the M.Ed. program, failure to pass the Comprehensive Examination after two retakes;
9. Plagiarism; and,
10. Noncompliance to general university and program guidelines.

\*A 3.0 cumulative grade point average for all courses counting toward the M.Ed. degree is the university and program minimum.

Candidates in the master's program are required to maintain a Grade Point Average of 3.0 or better. If the candidate's GPA falls below a 3.0, the candidate will be notified in writing that they are in danger of being dismissed from the VIP program and will either (1) be placed on probation for one semester; or (2) be dismissed from the program. The procedure for placing a candidate will face probation or dismissal will include the following steps:

1. The candidate will be informed by the Program Director in writing of the change in their status.
2. The candidate will submit a written explanation of the circumstances leading to insufficient academic performance and provide a proposal outlining a plan for improved academic success to the Program Director.
3. The program faculty will review the statement of circumstances and plan for improved academic performance and approve or reject the submitted plan.
4. The decision of the faculty will determine whether the student is placed on probation or dismissed from the program.

If the candidate is placed on probation and their GPA does not rise to 3.0 during the probationary semester, the candidate will be dismissed from the program.

**\*\*Candidates who for any reason are unable to complete the program will be required to make arrangements to repay any grant money received for tuition and fees.**

The SFASU Academic Appeals by Students policy (6.3) is detailed below. The Student Academic Dishonesty policy (4.1) and the VIP program's application of that policy are detailed in Appendix J.

### **Academic Appeals by Students (6.3)**

#### **Final Course Grade Appeals by Students**

**Original Implementation: August 31, 1981**

**Last Revision: February 2, 2021**

Faculty members are responsible for the evaluation of student course work conducted in their class and, under normal circumstances, only the instructor may change a grade. However, this policy provides a formal process for students to appeal final grades and determinations of academic dishonesty. Any further appeal must be made within ten (10) business days from the conclusion of each step. Recommendations at each level are generally made within four (4) weeks of receiving the appeal. The burden of proof rests with the student throughout the process. A student may appeal a final course grade if it can be demonstrated that the instructor did not adhere to stated procedures or grading standards, or if other compelling reasons exist to change the grade. A student may not appeal due to general dissatisfaction with a final grade or disagreement with the instructor's professional judgment regarding the quality of the student's work. These steps are followed when making an appeal:

1. Students must first appeal in writing to the faculty member with whom they have a final grade dispute. Students must appeal to the instructor within thirty (30) calendar days after the first-class day of the next semester, fall or spring. Given extenuating circumstances, exceptions to this deadline may be granted by the academic unit head. If the dispute is not resolved, the student may appeal to the academic unit head. The academic unit head then requests a written statement from the faculty member and the student involved in the dispute. The academic unit head provides both parties a written recommendation.
2. If the dispute remains unresolved after a recommendation by the academic unit head, the student may appeal in writing to the academic dean. The dean notifies both parties of the continuation of the appeal. The faculty member may submit an additional response. The academic unit head will forward all documentation involved in the dispute to the dean. Prior to making a recommendation, the dean may refer the appeal to the relevant college council. If the college council has no student members, the dean asks the president of the Student Government Association to recommend no more than two students from that college to be appointed as voting members. If

consulted, the college council reviews all documentation and submits its recommendation to the dean. The dean provides both parties a written recommendation.

3. If the dispute remains unresolved after a recommendation by the dean, the student may appeal in writing to the provost and vice president for academic affairs. The provost and vice president for academic affairs notifies both parties of the continuation of the appeal. The faculty member may submit an additional response. The dean will forward all documentation involved in the dispute to the provost and vice president for academic affairs. The college 6.3 Final Course Grade Appeals by Students Page 2 of 2 council may serve as an advisory body to the provost and vice president for academic affairs. The provost and vice president for academic affairs informs the student and all persons involved in the appeal process of the recommendation.

Under extraordinary circumstances (e.g., the instructor is deceased, is no longer at the institution or is in violation of university policy), a grade may be changed by the provost and vice president for academic affairs after consultation with the dean and academic unit head. The provost and vice president for academic affairs informs the student and all persons involved in the appeal process of the final decision.

**Cross Reference:** Faculty Handbook, Student Handbook and Activities Calendar; Student Academic Dishonesty (4.1); Title IX (2.13); Faculty Code of Conduct (7.11); Nondiscrimination (2.11)

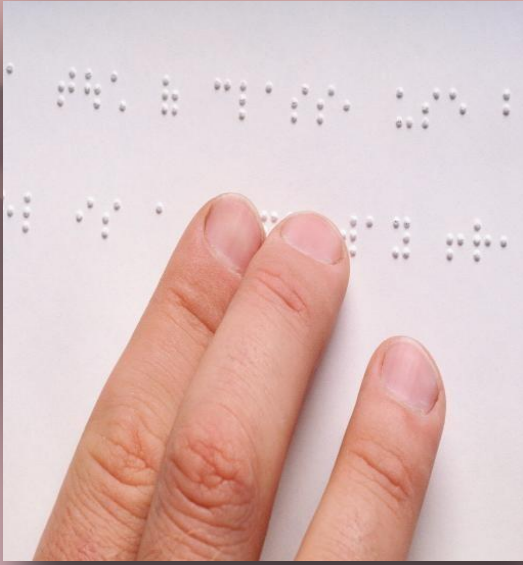
**Responsible for Implementation:** Provost and Vice President for Academic Affairs

**Contact for Revision:** Provost and Vice President for Academic Affairs Forms: None

**Board Committee Assignment:** Academic and Student Affairs

### ***Some Practical Suggestions***

1. **When in doubt, check with your faculty advisor.** Candidates may become uncertain or confused as to policy, procedure, course selection or number of other issues. Do not rely upon hearsay. Contact your advisor by telephone, email, or visit during office hours (if you are an on-campus candidate) to verify the accuracy of the information received. However, to ensure the best outcome in all advisement contacts, it is critical that the Handbook is first consulted!
2. **Take courses in the recommended sequence.**
3. **Be alert to changes in course offerings.** The course sequence published in this Handbook is usually accurate. Occasionally, however, a course may be added or dropped.
4. **Buy a good quality computer headset complete with earphones and a microphone before the first semester of enrollment.** Candidates participating in the master's program will need this for several courses.



## Visual Impairment Preparation (VIP) Certification Programs and Concentrations

International Professional Certification Program and  
Concentration for the Master of Education Degree in Special  
Education for **Certified Orientation and Mobility  
Specialists**



***Visual Impairment Preparation  
Certification Programs and  
Concentrations***

**Stephen F. Austin State University  
PO Box 13017—SFA Station  
Nacogdoches, TX 75965  
Phone: 936-468-1145**

**We are so delighted that you are interested in the Visual Impairment Preparation (VIP) Certification Programs and Concentrations! We are very proud of the VIP system and its many facets, and we very much hope that we will be able to provide the kind of pragmatic, comprehensive academic programming and training that will best empower you to serve the needs of individuals who are blind or visually impaired in Texas, across the nation, and around the world. As part of that training, we are philosophically committed to:**

- Providing our candidates with the kind of training that will impart the knowledge and skills necessary for serving individuals with visual impairment in a practical, real-life educational setting.
- Ensuring that each candidate feels supported in both academic and practicum/field-based experiences.
- Giving our candidates opportunities to form relationships with VIP course instructors through open, honest, and transparent communication modes and methods that encourage questioning and exchanges between candidates and VIP faculty.
- Making sure that all candidates have a meaningful and positive practicum experience.
- Making every effort to be sure that all candidates leave our programs/concentrations with the opinion that all our courses were relevant, interesting, and engaging.

We truly look forward to having an opportunity to work with you and get to know you as a person as well as a fellow professional. Please feel free to contact us if we can provide any additional information.



## PREFACE

The faculty and staff of the Visual Impairment Preparation (VIP) Certification Programs and Concentrations at Stephen F. Austin State University (SFA) would like to thank you for taking an interest in our certification program/concentrations. This handbook will serve as a guide that will provide you with the vital information that pertains to the certification program and concentration area for Certified Orientation & Mobility Specialist.

Our graduate-level Certified Orientation & Mobility Specialist (COMS) coursework offers the opportunity to earn either a standalone international professional certification as a COMS, or to earn the COMS certification as part of the Master of Education (M.Ed.) degree in Special Education with a concentration in Orientation & Mobility (O&M).

SFA and the VIP team sets high expectations and holds all candidates to high standards in order to guide and support all VIP candidates in providing appropriate and effective services to the clients/students with visual impairment who our candidates serve. SFA itself is a regionally-accredited university through the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools Commission on Colleges (SACSCOC), which ensures that SFA and the programs within the university are meeting rigorous standards for excellence.

In addition to the university level accreditation from SACSCOC, our O&M certification program and concentration adheres to the O&M standards set forth by the Association for the Education and Rehabilitation of the Blind and Visually Impaired (AERBVI) University Accreditation Committee. Meeting these high standards in the O&M certification program and concentration will provide our candidates with the qualifications needed to be eligible to sit for the national-level certification exam offered through the Academy for Certification of Vision Rehabilitation and Education Professionals (ACVREP). With the international certification from ACVREP, you will be eligible to teach orientation and mobility skills to individuals with visual impairment throughout the country and other countries around the world as a COMS. COMS certification requires renewal every five years, which is accomplished by attending trainings, conferences, and professional development related to AER- and ACVREP-approved O&M standards and certification renewal requirements.

As you read through this Candidate Handbook for O&M, use it as a guide to help you to (a) plan each phase of your studies; (b) familiarize yourself with the certification program and concentration's general educational policies, expectations, and standards; and (c) understand how faculty advise candidates and ensure that the certification program and concentration's policies are applied systematically and fairly to all candidates.

The policies and regulations included in this Handbook apply to all O&M certification candidates. The faculty of SFA's VIP certification programs and concentrations do not discriminate against any candidate for any reason, including race, gender or gender identity, religion, native language, culture, sexual orientation, or political identification. It is expected that the candidates who enter this O&M certification program and concentration also adopt and enact a principle of non-discrimination and respect for SFA faculty and its student body. Candidates who have concerns in this area are encouraged to reach out to us at any time.

**Please continue to read and become familiar with the many additional policies and procedures included in this handbook. As you read, feel free to supply any feedback or ask any questions about this content at any time!**

**Welcome to SFA, and Axe'em JACKS!!!**



## **CERTIFICATION PROGRAM/CONCENTRATION MISSION STATEMENT**

### **Orientation & Mobility**

It is the mission of the SFA Orientation and Mobility certification program and concentration to train candidates to become Certified Orientation and Mobility Specialists (COMS) who are practically and pragmatically prepared to meet the needs of persons with visual impairments in the state of Texas, across the United States, and around the world. Through training in the O&M certification program and O&M concentration, certification/concentration completers are prepared to successfully complete the ACVREP national Certified Orientation & Mobility Specialist certification examination. We strive to ensure that completers of the O&M certification program and O&M concentration are trained to effectively deliver services, providing opportunities for students and clients who are blind or visually impaired to be more independent, lead lives to their fullest potential, and participate to a greater extent in society at large. In order to meet these goals, we provide mentorship, guidance, and education for our candidates, which enables them to recognize and remove/modify/address environmental and societal barriers, raise expectations, provide solutions, and exhibit compassionate approaches to teaching O&M skills and techniques, while valuing the worth of all individuals regardless of age, gender, race, sexual orientation, or level of disability.

Since 1972, our SFA Orientation and Mobility (O&M) certification program and concentration has been training candidates to work with persons who are blind or visually impaired. SFA is proud to offer the **only** undergraduate O&M certification program in the United States. The undergraduate O&M certification program is an option for candidates completing a bachelor's degree in Rehabilitation Services at SFA.

## **GENERAL PROGRAM DESCRIPTION**

The VIP certification programs provide training which leads to TSVI and/or O&M certifications. Additionally, candidates can seek Master of Education (M.Ed.) in Special Education with a concentration in Visual Impairment or Orientation and Mobility. Each of the certification programs and concentrations share many common courses and common faculty. See the Candidate Handbook for Teachers of Students with Visual Impairments for more information about the TSVI program at SFA. Note that candidates who desire to become certified in both areas are encouraged to pursue the TSVI certification first before returning for the COMS certification. Also note that candidates who enter the certification program for TSVIs must already have a valid initial teaching certification, and candidates who enter into the certification program for COMS must have a bachelor's degree, but no initial teaching certification is required to become a COMS.

For O&M certification, candidates may pursue certification in Orientation and Mobility at the undergraduate level or the graduate level.

Graduate candidates who pursue certification, take a leave from school, and then decide to return later for the Master of Education degree in Special Education with a concentration in O&M must return to finish the master's coursework within six years of STARTING coursework in graduate-level O&M certification coursework. Candidates are eligible to complete the master's degree coursework as long the O&M certification coursework and the master's coursework is completed is all within six (6) years. After that time frame, candidates who earned certification only will be required to retake any certification coursework that is six years old or older in order for the coursework to be counted toward the Master of Education in Special Education with a concentration in O&M.

It is important to note that the national certification from ACVREP includes an application process that is completed through ACVREP. The preparation programs at SFA make candidates eligible take their certification exam and to apply for COMS certification upon successful completion of the ACVREP certification exam. **The VIP certification programs and concentrations at SFA do not award, nor guarantee, COMS certification.**

Certification and concentration pathways that include the O&M certification programs or O&M concentration:

### **1. ACVREP O&M Certification Preparation Only**

Candidates already holding at least an undergraduate degree in any field become eligible for O&M Certification Preparation by taking 33 credit hours of O&M courses, which include 140 practicum hours and a 350-hour internship. Candidates who successfully complete all 33 credit hours with a GPA of a 3.0 or better will be eligible to apply for national certification through ACVREP. This affords our candidates with an excellent opportunity to work in a variety of settings with either children or adults who are blind or have visual impairments, and to use the skills acquired through the certification program/concentration.

### **2. Master of Education, Special Education (M. Ed.) Degree with O&M Certification Preparation**

Many candidates continue on from receiving either one or both certifications to seek a master's degree. All master's degrees, regardless of the number of certifications, must be completed within six years from the first semester courses were begun.

The culminating projects that satisfy the requirements for a master's degree, include completing research in the field of blindness and low vision.

Comprehensive Written Examinations that demonstrate mastery are also required and must be successfully completed during the final semester. Candidates who are unable to demonstrate mastery of comprehension through the Comprehensive Written Examinations on the first try will be given a second opportunity. After the second opportunity, candidates may retain their certifications, but they will be ineligible to graduate and receive the master's degree.

**Twelve O&M practicum and internship credit hours are required for certification, but they do not count toward the M.Ed. in Special Education with a concentration in O&M**

## ***THINGS YOU SHOULD KNOW***

Visual Impairment is a very small field. There are approximately 40 programs in the United States that offer master's degrees/certification in our field. SFA is one of two programs in the state of Texas. We prepare candidates for certification in Orientation & Mobility. Several things make our certification program/concentration distinctive:

While we offer all our graduate certification program/concentrations through distance learning, we emphasize contact with the candidates through online meetings via Internet platforms. In every course that the candidate takes, there will be some sort of direct interaction with the instructor.

Candidates in all our certification program/concentrations interact with faculty from both the COMS and the TSVI certification program/concentrations. This provides the candidates with a broader understanding of the field and their responsibilities. ALL Texas candidates who complete the SFA Orientation & Mobility certification program/concentration are eligible for mentor support for up to two years from TSBVI Outreach.

### ***HOW CLASSES ARE DELIVERED***

We do our best to meet our candidates' needs and train them in the best possible way. One of the challenges in training to becoming a COMS is the scarcity of programs and the requirements that candidates leave their homes for extended periods of time or travel long distances to participate in training programs. Most of the SFA programs are offered online. Our certification programs/concentrations have been fortunate enough to have consistent state and federal support in providing programs that require the least possible amount of interruption in our candidate's lives. SFA's VIP program is dedicated to providing high quality instruction for the candidate with a minimum amount of time away from home by using distance education techniques.

The O&M graduate certification program/concentration DOES require the candidate to participate in on-campus training that lasts approximately six weeks. This is referred to as the blindfold simulation course. During this time, candidates may live on the SFA campus or make other arrangements in the area. Housing is not covered by grant funding and is the responsibility of the candidate. They participate in extensive simulation training where they are required to wear a blindfold as they are taught techniques for using a cane. Candidates are also required to take part in community-based activities that are used to help build instructional skills. The O&M undergraduate certification program/concentration provides the same blindfold training over the 16-week spring semester (at a different pace).

For the rest of the certification program/concentration, our goal is to provide the maximum amount of candidate support possible through a variety of distance learning technologies. Basically, you can expect your training to be provided in the following ways:

- Distance instruction for all other courses currently use Brightspace/D2L and Zoom: Zoom is an online learning platform used to share presentations and facilitate classroom discussions between faculty and candidates. Through the use of a computer and microphone, class members meet together to share ideas and develop knowledge. You will receive the bulk of the information for your training courses from Brightspace/D2L pages. You will access this material on your own computer, at your own home or office, whenever you choose to work on the class. Many of your assignments and tests will also be administered through this online format.

### ***FINANCIAL SUPPORT***

#### **TEXAS RESIDENTS**

The VIP Certification program/concentration is proud to support Texas residents who are pursuing Teacher of Students with Visually Impaired (TSVI) or Orientation and Mobility (O&M) certification preparation at the graduate level. Grant funding for scholarships is graciously provided from the State of Texas and Texas School for the Blind and Visually Impaired (TSBVI).

To qualify for a scholarship, Texas residency and admission to the SFA graduate school are

required. Grants are awarded on a competitive basis. Applications for grant funding are due on March 1st of each year.

Some stipulations to grant awardees are important to note. Grant awardees must 1) complete the certification program/concentration and 2) serve as TSVI or O&M for approximately 1 year for each semester of school paid by the grant.

Additionally, grant recipients must maintain a 3.0 GPA in order to continue to qualify for the grant while enrolled.

If any of these stipulations are not met, candidates will be asked to refund any grant money that was paid to them. Recipients of the award will receive funding to cover tuition and most fees at the university toward certification preparation in O&M.

Regardless of grant award status, all books and supplies are the responsibility of the candidate. Grant funded certification candidates who wish to pursue a Master's degree after the certification(s) is/are earned will need to apply for federal financial aid such as through FAFSA or utilize other independent means of payment.

### **NON-TEXAS RESIDENTS**

At this time, there are no competitive grants or stipends available. Please consider applying for federal financial aid through FAFSA or utilize other means of financial support through your family, a work-study relationship with your employer, a scholarship with your state, or private loans or grants, such as through the Veterans Administration.

## **EMPLOYMENT DEMAND FOR O&M PROFESSIONALS**

The demand for professionals in the field of visual impairment has always been high in the state of Texas. The problem that most school districts have had is that Certified O&M Specialists (COMS) just were not available. Today, more and more opportunities are open for COMS. Mary Shore, Professional Preparation Coordinator in TSBVI's Outreach Programs, regularly gathers data regarding job availability. The following are a few of the statistics that she has provided:

### **Current Demographic Information for Texas**

Since 1996, the Texas School for the Blind and Visually Impaired has conducted an annual survey of the Visual Impairment (VI) consultants at the Education Service Centers (ESCs), university VI programs, and TSBVI to assess the characteristics of and need for VI professionals in Texas. "VI professionals" includes teachers of students with visual impairments (TVIs) and certified orientation and mobility specialists (COMS). The most striking findings of the September 2019 survey include:

- In 2019, the total number of VI professionals, including leadership positions, increased from 956 to 992 individuals. The increase was seen in both the total number of TVIs and COMS across the state with the majority of the increase in the part-time category.
- The number of part-time TVIs providing direct service grew by 14, from 154 to 168.
- The number of full-time TVIs did not change significantly, adding only one for a total of 526 individuals this year.
- There are 306 COMS providing direct service, an increase of 18 individuals. The parttime category increased by 15 and 3 were added to the full-time category.
- Sixty-three VI professionals are dually certified, providing both TVI and O&M services.

- Approximately 19% of the total number of individual VI professionals providing direct service are contract service providers.

**Cultural diversity** of VI professionals showed signs of growth in the number of VI professionals who are Hispanic and African-American. The number of TVI and COMS who are fluent in Spanish dropped by 1% this year.

- The number of VI professionals who are Hispanic increased by 10.5 percent.
- The number of VI professionals who are African-American increased by 10 percent.
- Ten percent of the VI professionals statewide are fluent in Spanish.

**Attrition in the previous year increased** from 39 to 44 individuals.

- Last year's total of 39 matches the 10-year average, increasing by 5 in 2019.
- ESC consultants anticipate 92 TVIs and 40 COMS, or 12% of existing VI professionals, will retire or otherwise leave the field over the next 3 years.

**The number of students with visual impairments continues to grow.** In 2019, the number of students reported to the Annual Registration of Students with Visual Impairments increased by 332 students, or approximately 3.2%, bringing the total number of students to 10,753. This is significant growth, well over the 2.5% average increase typically seen from year to year. An increase in caseloads reported by many of the VI consultants could be seen as a direct effect of this student growth, however, only 13 individuals (6 FTE) were added to the number of TVIs available in 2019 to support them.

### **Anticipated Need for VI Professionals**

- It is projected that Texas will need up to 72 additional full-time equivalent TVIs and 48 full-time equivalent COMS by 2022 to accommodate student growth alone.
- Texas is estimated to need an additional 150-164 full-time equivalent TVIs and 80- 97 full-time equivalent COMS in the next 3 years to replace those who are likely to leave the field and respond to anticipated student growth.

The statewide total number of new professionals entering and completing the certification program/concentrations at **Stephen F. Austin State University and Texas Tech University** declined this year. This could cause future shortages of VI professionals to work with students with visual impairments across Texas.

- There are 152 future VI professionals in a program leading to certification as either a TVI or COMS. Ninety-six are working toward their TVI certification and 56 are enrolled in an orientation and mobility program. Total enrollment was down approximately 7% from last year.
- Fifty-seven individuals (36 TVIs and 21 COMS) completed a VI certification program in 2019, 30% fewer than in 2018.
- The majority of candidates enrolled in SFASU and TTU TVI and O&M certification training programs receive funding support for coursework. As tuition continues to rise, existing funding will provide less support to candidates than in previous years. This will in turn create a greater challenge of meeting the need for an adequate number of VI professionals.

## WHAT IT MEANS TO BE AN O&M PROFESSIONAL

### The Role of the Orientation and Mobility Specialist in Public Schools A Position Paper of the Division on Visual Impairments and Deafblindness Council for Exceptional Children 2015

Jennifer L. Cmar, Nora Griffin-Shirley, Pat Kelley and Bonnie Lawrence

Children develop an understanding of their world via movement through and exploration of various environments (McAllister & Gray, 2007). Children typically learn skills and concepts required for independent movement through incidental visual observation; however, children with visual impairments require support to acquire these vital skills. Orientation and mobility (O&M) is the set of concepts, skills, and techniques needed for safe, efficient, and graceful travel under all environmental conditions (Jacobson, 2013). Taken separately, *orientation* refers to the use of sensory information to establish and maintain one's position in the environment, and *mobility* refers to the capacity, readiness, and ability to move (Hill & Ponder, 1976).

O&M is recognized as an integral component of the Expanded Core Curriculum (ECC) for students with visual impairments (Hatlen, 1996). Children with visual impairments require direct sequential instruction by an O&M specialist (Lohmeier, Blankenship, & Hatlen, 2009). O&M skills allow children to interact with and move through environments purposefully and independently (Pavey, Douglas, McLinden, & McCall, 2003), and they facilitate access to educational, vocational, social, and recreational opportunities (McDonnall, 2011; Riley, 2000; Wolffe & Kelly, 2011).

#### Public Policy Framework

Federal legislation supports the provision of O&M services to children with visual impairments in public school settings by qualified O&M specialists. O&M was cited as a related service in the 1997 and 2004 Amendments to the *Individuals with Disabilities Education Act* (IDEA). IDEA specifies that O&M services are "provided to blind or visually impaired children by qualified personnel to enable those students to attain systematic orientation to and safe movement within their environments in school, home, and community" (34 CFR 300.34(c)(7)). Furthermore, IDEA states that O&M includes teaching students the following, as appropriate: (a) spatial and environmental concepts and use of information received by the senses (such as sound, temperature and vibrations) to establish, maintain, or regain orientation and line of travel (e.g., using sound at a traffic light to cross the street); (b) to use the long cane to supplement visual travel skills or as a tool for safely negotiating the environment for students with no available travel vision; (c) to understand and use remaining vision and distance low vision aids; and (d) other concepts, techniques, and tools (34 CFR 300.34(c)(7)).

IDEA mandates that each state educational agency (SEA) establish and maintain qualifications to ensure that personnel have adequate knowledge, skills, preparation, and training to serve children with disabilities (34 CFR 300.156(a)). Furthermore, each SEA must have qualifications for related service providers, including O&M specialists, that (a) are consistent with any state-approved or state-recognized certification, licensing, registration or other comparable requirements that apply to the professional discipline in which those personnel are providing special education or related services; (b) ensure that related services personnel who deliver services in their discipline or profession have not had certification or licensure requirements waived on an emergency, temporary or provisional basis; and (c) allow paraprofessionals and assistants who are appropriately trained and supervised to assist in the provision of special education and related services to children with disabilities (34 CFR 300.156(b)).

## **Considerations**

### **Population Served**

Today's O&M specialists serve an increasingly heterogeneous population of students with visual impairments. O&M specialists may instruct infants, toddlers, preschoolers, children, and adolescents who are blind or have low vision, students with additional disabilities including deafblindness, and students with diverse cultural and linguistic backgrounds (Bina, Naimy, Fazzi, & Crouse, 2010; Tobin & Hill, 2011; Wall Emerson & Corn, 2006). Accordingly, O&M specialists must have a broad repertoire of expertise and the ability to tailor instruction to the maturity, ability, and needs of children at various developmental stages (McAllister & Gray, 2007).

### **O&M Evaluation**

Referral, evaluation, and program planning are ongoing and vital responsibilities of the O&M specialist (Bina et al., 2010; Huebner, Merk-Adam, Stryker, & Wolffe, 2004; Neal, Bigby, & Nicholson, 2004). O&M specialists are responsible for developing and conducting O&M evaluations for all children with visual impairments in collaboration with an evaluation team. O&M evaluations are used to determine a need for services, establish present levels of performance, monitor achievement of goals, and evaluate the effectiveness of instruction (Bina et al., 2010). The evaluation process typically involves a review of records; interviews with students, family members, and other professionals; selection of age-appropriate evaluation tools; use of planned routes and activities designed to assess performance in multiple domains; and observations of students in natural, everyday settings (Bina et al., 2010; Griffin-Shirley & Nes, 2004; Smith & Herlich, 2014). Evaluation data are used to make high-stakes decisions about frequency, duration, and appropriateness of O&M services (Fazzi & Naimy, 2010).

### **The O&M Curriculum**

The ultimate goal of O&M instruction is for individuals with visual impairments to travel in any environment as independently as possible. O&M specialists are responsible for designing sequential, individualized instruction and providing structured experiences to facilitate concept and skill development (Fazzi & Naimy, 2010). O&M instruction must begin at the earliest possible age (Poggrund & Fazzi, 2002). After receiving a medical diagnosis of a visual impairment, early intervention services need to be provided in a timely fashion (Huebner et al., 2004). The progression of O&M skill development begins with the understanding of how to move one's body in space (Sapp & Hatlen, 2010). Instruction focuses on spatial concepts and skills, perceptual skills, environmental knowledge, sensory development, motor development, mobility skills, decision-making, and interpersonal skills (Bozeman & McCulley, 2010; Neal et al., 2004; Wall Emerson & Corn, 2006).

The traditional O&M curriculum includes mobility skills such as guiding techniques, long cane techniques, travel in residential and business areas, crossing streets, locating destinations, and use of public transportation (Hill & Ponder, 1976; LaGrow, 2010; Neal et al., 2004). O&M specialists also teach the use of orientation aids, optical devices, adaptive mobility devices, electronic travel aids, and global positioning systems (Bozeman & McCulley, 2010; Smith & Penrod, 2010; Wall Emerson & Corn, 2006). Students who are blind must develop a conceptual understanding of various environments, and learn how to best traverse a given environment using auditory, tactile, and kinesthetic information, and students with low vision must learn strategies for maximizing use of their residual vision (Wall Emerson & Corn, 2006).

## **O&M Service Delivery**

The O&M specialist serves as a member of the multidisciplinary or transdisciplinary team in developing and implementing individualized education programs (IEPs) for children with visual impairments (Fazzi & Naimy, 2010; Griffin-Shirley, Trusty, & Rickard, 2000; Smith & Levack, 1996). O&M specialists may assume many roles and provide a continuum of services, ranging from direct services provided to students with visual impairments to indirect services (e.g., consultation and in-service training) provided to professionals who have direct contact with students (McMahon, 2014; Neal et al., 2004). Components of the O&M curriculum, such as map skills, are naturally incorporated into the common core curriculum and can be taught in collaboration with the general education teacher (Sapp & Hatlen, 2010). O&M specialists may role release some basic instructional duties (e.g., monitoring route travel) to individuals who interact with students on a daily basis. O&M specialists may encounter service delivery challenges related to shortages of qualified personnel, large caseloads, insufficient funding, and academic mandates (Bina et al., 2010; McMahon & Sacks, 2014; Wall Emerson & Anderson, 2014). Constraints related to scheduling conflicts, travel time, and caseload size affect the availability of O&M specialists and may reduce frequency of instruction for individual students (Bina et al., 2010; Griffin-Shirley, Poggrund, Smith, & Duemer, 2009).

## **Importance of Community Travel**

The nature of O&M requires that candidates be exposed to various travel scenarios in natural environments; thus, services are provided in indoor and outdoor settings, both on school grounds and in the community (Bina et al., 2010). Instruction in community travel skills takes place in settings such as grocery stores, shopping malls, banks, restaurants, and subway stations, where candidates can integrate their O&M skills with other aspects of the ECC, including daily living skills, social interaction skills, recreation and leisure, and career skills. For students with visual impairments and additional disabilities who have difficulty generalizing skills across settings, community instruction may focus on partial participation and adaptations or modifications to encourage independent or semi-independent community travel (Ambrose-Zaken, Calhoon, & Keim, 2010; Silberman, Sacks, & Wolfe, 1998). Furthermore, community experiences are an evidence-based predictor of post-school employment for students with disabilities (Test et al., 2009).

## **Family, School, and Community Support**

Family, school, and community support is essential for high quality O&M services (Fazzi & Naimy, 2010). O&M specialists are responsible for educating students, families, teachers, administrators, other professionals, and the public about O&M. O&M specialists design and implement in-service training for teachers, paraprofessionals, administrators, other professionals, and families (Fazzi & Naimy, 2010; Griffin-Shirley et al., 2000). In-service training should focus on the role of the O&M specialist, the goals of the O&M certification program/concentration, and the roles of all appropriate school personnel in promoting O&M development. During community travel lessons, opportunities often arise for O&M specialists and students to educate the general public about O&M and the capabilities of individuals with visual impairments.

O&M instruction will have very little impact on children with visual impairments if parents/caregivers and family members are not involved in the process. Establishing an ongoing method of communication with parents/caregivers can facilitate family involvement (Fazzi & Naimy, 2010). In addition to working cooperatively with family members in developing realistic goals, the O&M specialist must develop specific activities that parents and family members can implement in the home setting for continuity of instruction to occur (Crone, Scannell, & Cordeau, 2005; Fazzi & Petersmeyer, 2001). O&M activities should be designed so that parents and other family members can carry them out through daily living activities and recreational activities.



## **Recommended Practices**

### **Qualified O&M specialists must conduct O&M evaluations for all students with visual impairments.**

O&M evaluation should be conducted upon initial identification of a visual impairment or in the absence of prior O&M evaluation (Douglas, Pavey, McLinden, & McCall, 2003; Fazzi & Naimy, 2010; Wall Emerson & Corn, 2006). Other factors precipitating a need for O&M evaluation may include: (a) transitioning to a new school, (b) a change in residence, (c) an upcoming IEP meeting, or (d) a sudden change in visual impairment or physical status (Douglas et al., 2003; Wall Emerson & Corn, 2006). Evaluations should include observations of students performing everyday tasks in indoor and outdoor environments (Bina et al., 2010).

### **O&M specialists, in collaboration with the multidisciplinary or transdisciplinary team, should use evaluation data to drive decisions regarding O&M services.**

The IEP team considers students' eligibility for O&M services at each meeting and provides documentation in the IEP (Bina et al., 2010; Wall Emerson & Corn, 2006). When O&M services are recommended by the IEP team, the O&M specialist prepares a statement of the student's present level of functioning and collaborates with the team to establish goals, and to schedule adequate frequency and duration of services in appropriate locations to meet students' needs (Bina et al., 2010; Fazzi & Naimy, 2010; Griffin-Shirley & Nes, 2004). Team members may use established tools, such as the Orientation and Mobility Severity Rating Scales, to assist in determining appropriate service levels for students (Wall Emerson & Anderson, 2014). Instructional decisions should be based on students' goals and needs, and not solely on external factors or availability of resources.

### **School districts should recruit and hire highly qualified O&M specialists.**

Federal legislation calls for children to be taught by highly qualified personnel. Highly qualified O&M specialists (a) possess the knowledge and skills needed to provide quality O&M instruction to children with visual impairments; (b) are graduates of university programs specializing in the preparation of O&M specialists; and (c) meet state-approved certification, registration, or licensing requirements. Some SEAs require that an O&M specialist have dual certification as a teacher of students with visual impairments and an O&M specialist, whereas others require professional certification through a certifying body like the Academy for Certification of Vision Rehabilitation and Education Professionals. Either or both the above may be required for employment within a local public school system.

### **O&M instruction should be provided in school, home, and community environments.**

The O&M specialist provides developmentally appropriate challenges in real-life scenarios to assist students in developing O&M skills (Cameto & Nagle, 2007). The effectiveness of O&M training is maximized by infusing O&M content into school curricula and activities, with support and reinforcement by all individuals connected with the student (Griffin-Shirley, Trusty, & Rickard, 2000). The O&M specialist must integrate O&M content into students' daily schedules through naturally occurring routines, and create opportunities for students to practice their skills in natural settings (Sapp & Hatlen, 2010). O&M lessons often take place the community, in all weather conditions, and at various times of day (Wiener & Sifferman, 2010). Training environments are chosen based on their applicability to student's current and future needs, while accounting for cognitive, physical, and psychological factors (Wall Emerson & Corn, 2006). Opportunities to learn, practice, and apply these skills and concepts in various environments allow students with visual impairments to develop the

highest degree of independence as possible (Fazzi & Naimy, 2010; Sapp & Hatlen, 2010).  
*O&M specialists must remain informed of advances in policy, research, and practice that may impact O&M teaching and learning.*

Professional growth through continued education is an ongoing and vital responsibility of O&M specialists (Wiener & Sifferman, 2010). O&M specialists must have accurate knowledge of state and federal laws, trends and advances in the field, and current instructional practices (Bina et al., 2010). Attending workshops, seminars, and conferences; membership in professional organizations; reading professional journal articles; maintaining certifications; networking with other professionals; and participating in research are some of the methods O&M specialists use to stay current (Bina et al., 2010; Sapp & Hatlen, 2010; Wiener & Sifferman, 2010).

### **Position**

O&M specialists play an integral role in the provision of a free appropriate public education to children with visual impairments. School districts should employ highly qualified O&M specialists to provide services to students in accordance with their IEPs. O&M specialists must have the expertise required to serve a diverse population of students, including children with total blindness and low vision, and children who have additional disabilities including deafblindness. All children with visual impairments need an O&M evaluation to determine their eligibility for O&M services. O&M specialists should incorporate O&M into students' daily schedules and routines and involve family members in students' training. O&M specialists empower students with visual impairments to become safe, independent travelers to the maximum extent possible through individualized instruction in school, home, and community settings. Effective O&M skills assist students in the pursuance of their life goals, improvement in their quality of life, and successful integration into society.

**Full article and references are available from**  
<http://community.cec.sped.org/dvi/resourcesportal/positionpapers>

## **AER CURRICULAR STANDARDS**

### **I. Medical Aspects of Blindness and Visual Impairment**

- a. ocular visual impairments and the effects of these impairments on visual functioning.
- b. neurological visual impairments and their affects upon visual functioning.
- c. the roles and functions of low vision clinics.
- d. the resources and devices used for low vision services.
- e. hearing impairments and their impact on auditory functioning and communication.
- f. health conditions and disabilities that may impact function.
- g. roles of the professionals involved in the health care and rehabilitation of persons with varying disabilities

### **II. Sensory Motor Functioning**

- a. the basic development, anatomy, physiology, perceptual processes, and training of each sensory system (visual, auditory, vestibular, kinesthetic, touch, olfactory, proprioceptive) and the interrelationships of these systems.
- b. the common pathologies associated with each sensory system and the implications for orientation and mobility
- c. perception as it pertains to cognition, sensation, attention, memory, cognitive mapping, orientation, and the utilization of information conveyed through sensory stimulation.
- d. the manner in which sensory information affects safe and efficient travel in a variety of environments.
- e. sound measurement, classifying and quantifying hearing loss, the special auditory needs of persons with visual impairments, the use of hearing aids by persons with visual impairments,

- auditory training programs, and the uses of audiometric data for traffic interpretation
- f. the rudimentary practices used for screening of sensory function, including the use of questionnaires, functional evaluation and localization tests.
- g. the mechanics of human locomotion and the psychomotor factors influencing mobility such as sensory awareness, integration of reflexes, muscle tone, as well as problems with balance, posture, gait, endurance, strength, flexibility, agility, and coordination.
- h. the principles of non-visual locomotion including movement theories, theories of spatial orientation, veering and its remediation.

### **III. Psych-social Aspects of Blindness and Visual Impairments**

- a. the psycho-social impact of congenital and adventitious blindness.
- b. the adjustment process that may accompany the onset of visual impairment and concomitant disabilities.
- c. the impact of visual impairment on the family and the strategies and resources available to family members, caregivers, and support systems.
- d. strategies and resources available to include family members, caregivers and support systems in the O&M program when supported by the learner.
- e. the impact that motivation, fear, anxiety, self-concept, self-efficacy and social interactions have on the educational and rehabilitative processes.
- f. the importance of establishing appropriate interaction skills and rapport with the learner and their families or significant others.
- g. the importance of counseling the learner about setting mobility goals, choosing a mobility system, and other topics related to the use of mobility skills for daily living.
- h. the resources that are available to assist the learner to deal with psycho-social problems that affect O&M learning or performance.
- i. the impact on learners of socio-cultural factors, including social class identification, ethnic/racial background, and cultural group attitudes towards blindness.
- j. society's attitudes towards blindness and visual impairments and the methods for effecting attitude change that can be utilized by both the instructor and the learner

### **IV. Human Growth and Development over the Lifespan**

- a. the principles of human development through the life span.
- b. the typical and atypical sensorimotor development patterns of infants, children and youth with visual impairments.
- c. the effects of visual impairments on affective, psychomotor, and cognitive development and processes.
- d. how the developmental patterns of children with visual impairments affect the acquisition and performance of motor skills and O&M techniques.
- e. how the aging process affects the acquisition and performance of O&M skills and techniques.
- f. the manner in which the learner's attitudes toward O&M instruction may change over the lifespan
- g. the strategies and methods that are used to teach O&M to learners of all ages.
- h. effective ways to convey information about the implications of the age-related developmental patterns associated with blindness and visual impairments over the lifespan to learners and their families, other professionals, and individuals in the community.

### **V. Concept Development**

- a. the role that body image, spatial, temporal, positional, directional, and environmental concepts have in purposeful movement.
- b. the effects of visual impairment and blindness on concept development and the manner in which persons with visual impairment acquire and utilize conceptual information.
- c. the manner in which concept development is incorporated into O&M evaluations, designing and implementing O&M programs, and evaluating the learners' progress.
- d. the manner in which cognitive and related disabilities affect the acquisition and utilization of concepts by learners with visual impairment.
- e. the methods and strategies used to adapt concept development instruction for learners with

cognitive and related disabilities.

- f. the value of communicating information about the relationship between concept development and visual impairment to families and significant others, and to other professionals involved in the learner's special education or rehabilitation program.

## **VI. Multiple Disabilities**

- a. the effects of myriad impairments (e.g., sensory, physical, cognitive, communication, health related) on O&M.
- b. the effects of deaf-blindness on communication, orientation, and mobility.
- c. the environmental demands and travel environments that affect the mobility of learners with multiple impairments.
- d. the unique evaluation and instructional needs of learners with multiple impairments and learners who are deaf-blind.
- e. approaches to instruction for learners with multiple impairments and learners who are deaf-blind (e.g., the multidisciplinary, interdisciplinary, and transdisciplinary teaming models).
- f. the instructional strategies and methods used, including the use of specialized communication systems, modes, devices and adapted mobility systems and devices, for teaching learners with multiple impairments and learners who are deaf-blind.

## **VII. Systems of Orientation and Mobility**

- a. the use of the long cane as a mobility system.
- b. the different types of long canes, cane tips, adapted canes, and adaptive mobility devices, and their strengths and limitations as travel tools considering individual travel needs and travel environments.
- c. the techniques used to determine specifications for canes, adapted canes, and adaptive mobility devices.
- d. the construction, assembly, and maintenance of the long cane and adaptive mobility devices, the nomenclature of the cane and its parts, resources for procuring long canes and other devices, and maintaining and repairing canes and adaptive mobility devices.
- e. the dog guide as a mobility system, the methods and strategies for providing orientation assistance to a dog guide user, and the process for making referrals to dog guide training centers
- f. electronic travel aids (ETAs) and electronic orientation aids (EOAs) and their use and application as a secondary mobility system, their classification, and the basic principles of operating commercially available devices.
- g. optical and non-optical devices and their use and application as a supplementary mobility system; their classification, their basic principles of operation and the various ways persons with visual impairments can use these devices in travel environments.
- h. the use of ambulatory aids such as support canes, walkers, crutches, and wheelchairs, power chairs and scooters and the manner in which these devices are used by persons with visual impairment.
- i. the relative advantages and disadvantages of the various mobility systems, aids and devices (e.g., long cane, dog guides, human guides, ETAs, EOAs, optical and non-optical devices).

## **VIII. Orientation and Mobility Skills and Techniques**

- a. human guide techniques and their applications (e.g., position, grip, transferring sides, narrow passageways, accepting or refusing assistance, doorways, stairways, and seating).
- b. basic skills in O&M and their applications (e.g., self-protective and positional techniques, trailing techniques, squaring-off, direction taking, and locating dropped objects).
- c. cane techniques and their applications in indoor and outdoor environments (e.g., diagonal and touch technique, stair technique, touch technique modifications, including three-point touch, touch and slide, touch and drag, constant contact technique, and shorelining).
- d. techniques for using adaptive mobility devices for children and adults in indoor and outdoor environments and determining their appropriateness regarding the needs and strengths of

individual learners.

- e. methods used to handle the long cane (e.g., grasp, placement, manipulation; object contact, handling the cane when switching from one side of a human guide to another).
- f. techniques used for familiarization to indoor and outdoor environments (e.g., use of primary and secondary landmarks, clues, cues, search patterns, numbering systems).
- g. orientation skills (e.g., familiarization, self-familiarization, route planning, direction taking, distance measurement and estimation, map skills, utilization of compass directions, recovery techniques).
- h. Skills and strategies for indoor travel environments, outdoor travel environments such as residential, small business and business districts (e.g., analysis and identification of intersections and traffic patterns, traffic control devices, techniques for crossing streets, numbering systems), mall travel and travel in rural areas.
- i. O&M skills and techniques used for non-driver education (e.g., hiring a driver, Uber or Lyft, public transportation: cab bus, train, metro).
- j. O&M skills and techniques used to negotiate public conveyor systems (e.g., elevators, escalators, moving sidewalks, and revolving doors).
- k. modifications to O&M skills and techniques that are needed for night travel.
- l. modifications to O&M skills and techniques that are needed for travel in various types of adverse weather conditions.
- m. modifications to O&M skills and techniques that are appropriate for learners with unique individual needs.
- n. skills and strategies for accessing computer-based mapping systems, on-line directories and itinerary planning for buses, flights and trains.

#### **IX. Instructional Methods, Strategies, and Assessment**

- a. approaches to instruction for learners with visual impairments (e.g., the multidisciplinary, interdisciplinary and transdisciplinary teaming models).
- b. basic principles of learning theory, including classical conditioning, operant conditioning, cognitive theory, social cognitive, memory and information processing, guided and discovery learning, and the manner in which these theories relate to O&M instruction.
- c. media and materials that are used to support O&M instruction, (e.g., visual, tactile, and auditory maps and models, graphic aids, audio recorded information and computer-based tools).
- d. Proficiency in designing and producing instructional materials, and knowledge of the resources for obtaining commercially available media and materials.
- e. strategies and methods used to select, design, and implement non-clinical procedures for assessment and instruction in the use of sensory information in travel environments.
- f. strategies and methods used to design and implement instructional programs using the optical and non-optical devices recommended by eye care professionals for use in travel environments.
- g. strategies and methods used to assess environments for accessibility and safety.
- h. strategies and methods used to analyze and select environments for introducing, developing, and reinforcing O&M skills and techniques.
- i. the considerations involved in selecting appropriate monitoring strategies and instructor position for effective assessment, instruction and safety as the learner advances through the O&M program and applies skills in environments of various types and complexities.
- j. the importance of gradually increasing distances between the instructor and the learner as the learner progresses from early learning situations when skills are introduced to advanced learning when skills are applied to environments of various types and complexities.
- k. the use of "drop-off" lessons for the assessment of O&M skills, and the strategies and methods for selecting, designing, and implementing "drop-off" lessons.
- l. strategies and methods used to develop and conduct "solo" (independent) lessons and independent travel experiences.
- m. the strategies and methods used to communicate with learners about instructional travel

- experiences in which the distance between the instructor and the learner is not in close proximity.
- n. the role of audiologist, rehabilitation counselor, vision rehabilitation teacher, special education teacher, adapted physical education teacher, occupational therapist, physical therapist, social worker, and other related professionals who may be involved in interdisciplinary, multidisciplinary, or transdisciplinary programming, assessment and instruction.
- o. analyzing and interpreting assessment reports from related professional fields and utilizing information in these reports in conjunction with standardized and nonstandardized O&M assessment instruments.
- p. appropriate procedures used to assess the impact of skills (e.g., cognitive, motor, sensory, communication) as they relate to O&M foundational areas.
- q. strategies and methods used to analyze, interpret, and utilize O&M assessment information for selecting, designing, and implementing O&M programs consistent with the learner's individual needs.
- r. strategies and methods for using assessment information to maintain ongoing evaluation of the learner's progress and implement program modifications as needed.
- s. strategies and methods used to conduct O&M assessments and instruction in a range of settings.
- t. strategies and methods used to conduct assessments, and to select, design, and implement O&M instruction that accommodates cultural and lifestyle differences.
- u. strategies and methods used to evaluate the effects of health conditions, physical impairments and sensory impairments on orientation and on mobility.
- v. strategies and methods used to determine the impact of sensory motor functioning on O&M.
- w. strategies and methods used to determine the impact of psychosocial aspects on O&M instruction.
- x. strategies and methods used to determine the impact of human growth and development over the lifespan for planning and implementing O&M instruction.
- y. strategies and methods used to assess concept development, and to select, design, and implement instruction that is consistent with the learner's O&M needs.
- z. foundational strategies and methods used to assess and instruct learners who are deafblind.

## **X. History and Philosophy of Orientation and Mobility**

- a. the history of the profession of O&M as well as ongoing and new developments in the following areas: long cane and adaptive mobility devices, dog guide programs, low vision services, ETAs, electronic orientation aids, university personnel preparation programs, recruitment, personnel development and the implementation and preparation of blind O&M Specialists.
- b. major historical events leading to the establishment of university personnel preparation programs in O&M.
- c. the history and philosophy of educational and rehabilitation practices as they relate to O&M instruction.
- d. the development and nature of O&M programs and services around the world.
- e. certification standards for O&M specialists.
- f. the Code of Ethics for O&M specialists.
- g. history and evolution of standards for educational programs and services.
- h. history and evolution of standards for rehabilitation programs and services.
- i. ongoing and new developments in instructional approaches and certifications of O&M.
- j. ongoing and new developments in O&M including long cane and adaptive mobility devices
- k. ongoing and new developments in dog guide programs
- l. ongoing and new developments in low vision services.
- m. ongoing and new developments in ETAs and EOAs.
- n. ongoing and new developments in university personnel preparation programs
- o. strategies and methods that are used to empower learners and their families to be informed and

effective consumers and advocates in educational systems.

- p. strategies and methods that are used to empower learners and their families to be informed and effective consumers of rehabilitation systems.
- q. strategies and methods used to advocate with consumers for quality programs and services for persons who are visually impaired.

#### **XI. Professional Information**

- a. sources of current literature pertinent to the profession of O&M.
- b. professional organizations and their services relevant to the practice of O&M.
- c. maintaining professional competence and staying abreast of new information and evolving trends pertinent to the profession of O&M.
- d. basic research approaches used to study O&M.
- e. the strengths and limitations of published literature pertinent to the practice of O&M.
- f. environmental accessibility standards as they apply to the community, state, province, and/or nation of the practitioner.
- g. consumer organizations (e.g., the National Federation of the Blind and the American Council of the Blind), and their affect and influence relative to O&M.
- h. major blindness agencies and organizations, (e.g., American Foundation for the Blind, American Printing House for the Blind, Foundation Fighting Blindness, Center for the Partially Sighted, and the Helen Keller National Center for Deaf-Blind Youths and Adults), and their influence on O&M practice.

#### **XII. Development, Administration, and Supervision of O&M Programs**

- a. rehabilitation O&M service delivery models in a range of rehabilitation systems (e.g., residential rehabilitation center, non-residential rehabilitation center, and itinerant rehabilitation services).
- b. educational-based O&M service delivery models in a range of educational systems (e.g., residential school programs, community based itinerant services and resource room school programs).
- c. practice models available for O&M specialists (e.g., educational systems, rehabilitation systems, health care systems, private contracting, and independent consulting).
- d. community, state, provincial, and/or national resources that support the effective provision of O&M programs and services.
- e. establishment and organization of new O&M programs within educational and rehabilitative systems.
- f. issues involved with learner safety and instructor liability.
- g. designing O&M instructional goals, and objectives.
- h. appropriate communication about learner's O&M programming, including goals and progress to family members and significant others.
- i. ensuring knowledge of current privacy laws and reasons for confidentiality.
- j. planning and conducting in-service presentations, workshops, and public education programs about topics in O&M.

#### **XIII. Clinical Practice Competencies**

- a. establishing rapport and interacting with students.
- b. evaluating the manner in which a learner with low vision uses residual vision for travel in a variety of travel environments.
- c. designing and implementing activities, with and without optical devices to maximize the use of functional vision in a variety of travel environments.
- d. evaluating static and dynamic sound localization.
- e. teaching echolocation skills.
- f. writing behaviorally stated goals and objectives based on evaluation findings that are realistic and

- appropriately sequenced.
- g. planning, conducting, and evaluating lessons according to the individual's learning style, stage of development, age, and other unique personal attributes that affect learning.
  - h. planning and delivering lessons that have a stated goal, appropriate site or setting, clear instructions, and stated desired behavior or action.
  - i. obtaining, constructing, and utilizing instructional materials that are appropriate for the learner's level of functioning and the particular lesson.
  - j. designing instructional programs based on knowledge of the various means and levels of communication best suited to the learner.
  - k. observing, interpreting and analyzing lessons, and adapting lessons in accordance with learner's needs.
  - l. providing timely and accurate feedback to the learner.
  - m. appropriately consulting with the learner, learner's family, and other personnel regarding the learner's O&M program.
  - n. modifying or adapting instruction in situations or environments that may affect an O&M lesson (e.g., adverse weather, fatigue, emotional reactions, unexpected noise, construction).
  - o. teaching learners to use their remaining senses in establishing their position, location, and direction in relationship to a variety of travel environments.
  - p. establishing and utilizing environmental concepts (e.g., reference point, clue, primary landmark, secondary landmark).
  - q. teaching kinesthetic, visual, auditory and temporal distance awareness.
  - r. teaching compass directions, and the application of compass directions to label intersections and blocks.
  - s. teaching the use of indoor and outdoor numbering systems.
  - t. teaching human guide technique.
  - u. teaching cane techniques in appropriate travel environments (e.g., diagonal, constant contact, touch technique, touch and drag, touch and slide).
  - v. teaching ascending and descending stairs with and without handrail use.
  - w. teaching use of the cane for object detection and negotiation.
  - x. teaching the use of the cane for entry and exit through doors.
  - y. teaching handling of the cane when traveling with a human guide.
  - z. teaching storage of the one piece and folding cane when not in use
  - aa. teaching the use of the cane for indoor and outdoor travel.
  - bb. teaching learners to identify and negotiate the location of outdoor intersections.
  - cc. teaching alignment using traffic sounds and lines of reference.
  - dd. teaching skills and concepts needed for crossing at stop sign controlled intersections.
  - ee. teaching how to evaluate gap judgment and other information for crossing noncontrolled intersections.
  - ff. teaching how to negotiate street crossings with channelized traffic lanes.
  - gg. teaching procedures for crossing at traffic light controlled intersections, including those with semi and full actuation.
  - hh. teaching the detection and correct usage of accessible pedestrian signals.
  - ii. teaching travel skills to learners in complex environments (e.g., unpredictable hazards and drop offs, irregular intersections and roundabouts).
  - jj. teaching learners to negotiate service stations, parking lots, and railroad tracks.
  - kk. teaching learners self-efficacy and self-determination skills in a variety of environments.
  - ll. assisting learners to choose the most appropriate mobility system (e.g., long cane, dog guide, ETA, EOA) to meet the student's needs at a particular time.
  - mm. planning, implementing, and/or adapting lessons that incorporate the use of a dog guide,



- ETA, EOA) to meet the learner's needs at a particular time.
- nn. planning, implementing and/or adapting lessons that incorporate the use of a dog guide, ETAs and EOAs.

## **ACVREP ORIENTATION & MOBILITY BODY OF KNOWLEDGE**

Orientation and mobility graduates must demonstrate knowledge and understanding of a multitude of competencies in O&M. These are listed below in the body of knowledge.

### **1. Know Professional Information**

1. Identify and describe basic laws and regulations that affect O&M services, e.g., IDEA (Individuals with Disabilities Education Act), Rehabilitation laws, ADA (Americans with Disabilities Act), Medicare, etc.
2. Identify and describe resources for consumers to obtain services, support, and/or information related to visual impairment [e.g., dog guide schools, NAPVI (National Association for Parents of Children with Visual Impairments), NFB (National Federation of the Blind), ACB (American Council of the Blind), Department of Veterans Affairs, BVA (Blinded Veterans Association), etc.].
3. Identify and describe professional resources pertinent to the O&M profession, e.g., AFB (American Foundation for the Blind), JVIB (Journal of Visual Impairment & Blindness), AER (Association for Education and Rehabilitation of the Blind and Visually Impaired), ACVREP (Academy for Certification of Vision Rehabilitation & Education Professionals), etc.
4. Identify and describe the major historical events and persons responsible for the establishment of the O&M profession as it exists today.

### **2. Understanding Relevant Medical Information**

1. Describe the anatomy and physiology of the visual system.
2. Describe common eye conditions/etiologies (macular degeneration, RP, ROP, glaucoma, diabetic retinopathy, CVI, optic nerve hypoplasia, refractive errors, etc.) of consumers and their implications on visual functioning, and be able to interpret eye reports.
3. Describe the basic anatomy and physiology of the auditory system and be familiar with the components of audiological reports.
4. Describe basic procedures necessary to react appropriately to medical situations (e.g., insulin reaction, seizures, etc.) during O&M lessons.

### **3. Understand and Apply Learning Theories to O&M**

1. Describe basic principles of learning theories and their implications for O&M instruction.

### **4. Plan and Conduct O&M Assessment**

1. Develop a plan for O&M assessment that includes obtaining and interpreting medical, education, and rehabilitation reports; interviewing the consumer and relevant others; and selecting appropriate assessment tools, materials, activities, and settings.
2. Assess the consumer's present level of functioning in each of the following areas as related to O&M: vision, senses, orientation and mobility skills, social/emotional issues, concepts/cognition, medical and physical limitations, and personal goals.
3. Based on the O&M assessment, determine the consumer's O&M needs and/or make recommendations for services, mobility devices and/or systems (e.g., long cane, etc.), and additional assessments.
4. Describe the roles of related professionals (OT, PT, low vision specialists, rehabilitation specialists, optometrists, teachers, ophthalmologists, etc.) who provide relevant O&M assessment information.
5. Conduct ongoing assessment to monitor progress, to determine the need for change in instructional strategy or O&M program, and to determine when the skill level is sufficient to graduate or move on.

### **5. Plan O&M Programs**

1. Describe service delivery models for O&M programs such as itinerant, center-based, and residential.
2. Develop O&M goals and objectives/benchmarks for individualized programs.
3. Describe the components and process for the development of early intervention, education, and applicable rehabilitation plans [e.g., IFSP (Individualized Family Service Plan), IEP

(Individualized Educational Program), IWRP (Individualized Written Rehabilitation Program), etc.].

## **6. Teach O&M Related Concepts**

1. Describe the relationship of O&M-related concepts (body, environmental, and spatial) to purposeful movement.
2. Describe the impact of visual impairment on the development of concepts and how consumers develop concepts.
3. Provide instruction to facilitate the development of O&M-related concepts (e.g., body, environmental, and spatial, etc.).
4. Teach life skill concepts related to O&M, e.g., money organization, social skills, time management, etc.

## **7. Teach Orientation Strategies and Skills**

1. Develop orientation skills through the use of environmental features (e.g., sun, sounds, slopes, etc.).
2. Facilitate optimal development of the consumer's spatial organization skills using strategies such as cognitive mapping and spatial updating.
3. Assist the consumer in route planning using various approaches such as route shapes, mapping skills, and compass directions.
4. Teach problem-solving strategies related to establishing and maintaining orientation while traveling, using instructional approaches such as drop offs, re-orientation, planning alternative routes, hypothesis testing, etc.
5. Familiarize consumer to novel environments using techniques appropriate for persons with various frames of reference (object-to-object, self-to-object).
6. Compare and contrast approaches for orienting dog guide handler to new environments versus long cane users.

## **8. Teach Mobility Skills**

1. Know the mechanics of locomotion that affect efficient mobility, e.g., integration of reflexes, muscle tone, coordination, balance, gait patterns, posture, etc.
2. Identify and describe basic O&M skills, including protective and human guide techniques, and the rationale for teaching these skills.
3. Determine appropriate mobility device and/or system by considering advantages, disadvantages, and consumer's needs and preferences, including, but not limited to human guide, long cane, dog guide, ETA, functional vision, and AMD.
4. Identify and describe O&M cane skills, (e.g, cane use with a guide, diagonal technique, two-point touch, etc.) and the rationale for teaching these skills.
5. Apply appropriate sequence of street crossing instruction, i.e., simple to complex.
6. Teach consumers to analyze intersections in simple and complex environments.
7. Identify and describe traffic controls (e.g., uncontrolled, 2-way and 4-way stops, traffic signal systems, roundabouts, yields, etc.) and implications for consumer crossings.
8. Identify and describe street crossing techniques and when to apply them, such as determining when to begin crossing, alignment, use of pedestrian button, etc.
9. Teach consumers how to access, plan, and execute simple and complex transportation systems, including buses, rail, and Paratransit.
10. Teach travel in special environments, including adverse weather conditions, rural areas, airports, malls, stores, gas stations, etc.

## **9. Teach Use of Senses**

1. Explain principles of vision development as they apply to visual efficiency training.
2. Teach use of optical and non-optical low vision devices for O&M tasks.
3. Teach visual skills that optimize O&M performance, e.g., eccentric viewing, scanning, tracking, tracing, etc.
4. Teach consumer to use tactile information for O&M-related tasks.
5. Teach consumer to interpret kinesthetic and proprioceptive information to maximize O&M skills during movement/travel, such as using time-distance estimates, making accurate turns, recognizing/using slopes, etc.
6. Teach auditory skills to maximize effective movement/travel, e.g., use sounds to align/position self, echolocation, Doppler effect, etc.

## 10. Teach Consumers who have Additional Disabilities

1. Describe the implications of additional disabilities upon O&M instruction, e.g., physical impairments, cognitive disabilities, multiple disabilities, hearing impairments, traumatic brain injury, etc.
2. Adapt instructional strategies for consumers with additional disabilities, e.g., physical impairments, cognitive disabilities, multiple disabilities, hearing impairments, traumatic brain injury, etc.

## 11. Teach Diverse Consumers

1. Describe the implications of diversity, including age and cultural differences, as they relate to potential adaptations in O&M instruction.
2. Apply principles of human development and the aging process to O&M instruction.

## 12. Analyze and Modify Environment

1. Analyze travel environments to identify and overcome potential barriers to consumer access in home, school, work, or community environments.

## 13. Know the Psychosocial Implications of Blindness and Visual Impairment

1. Identify and describe factors to be considered to minimize the psychosocial impact of vision loss upon consumers with congenital or adventitious visual impairments and their families.
2. Identify strategies to assist consumers during the process of adjustment to visual impairment, including providing resources, informational counseling, etc.

# ACVREP CLINICAL PRACTICE COMPETENCIES

## CLINICAL PRACTICE COMPETENCIES

1. **Communication and professional relationships** - Candidate is able to establish and maintain effective communication and professional relationships with students, families, colleagues, and supervisors, including individuals from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds.
2. **O&M assessment** - Candidate is able to plan and conduct individualized comprehensive O&M assessments, synthesize the findings in a professionally written report, and communicate results with students, families, and members of the individualized intervention/education/rehabilitation team, as appropriate.
3. **Instructional planning** - Candidate is able to plan for individualized O&M instruction through the:
  - o review and interpretation of relevant records and reports;
  - o selection and preview of potential training areas (e.g., home, school, work, or community);
  - o design and/or procurement of instructional materials and appropriate devices (with appropriate medical consultation regarding optical devices);
  - o provision of accurate information regarding options for mobility systems (e.g., long cane, dog guide, electronic travel devices) to student and family so that students can make informed choices regarding the most appropriate option for a given time;
  - o collaboration with student, family, and colleagues to develop appropriate goals and behavioral objectives; and development and sequencing of individual lessons based on student abilities, needs, and goals.
4. **Instruction** - Candidate is able to effectively teach and reinforce the following elements of O&M instruction across a range of environments (such as indoor, residential, and light business):
  - o Concepts related to independent movement and orientation (such as body, laterality, directionality, spatial, environmental, and time-distance).
  - o Mobility techniques, including, but not limited to, basic skills, cane skills, adapted mobility devices, route travel, street crossings, and the use of public and other transportation systems.
  - o Orientation skills, including, but not limited to, use of cognitive processes; landmarks; cardinal directions; room, store, and community familiarization; address system; independent information gathering; route planning; and maps.
  - o Use of low vision in maintaining safe and independent movement and orientation (such as use of non-optical devices, use of optical devices in conjunction with eye care professionals, use of visual skills, and incorporating vision use with cane or other mobility systems).

- Use of remaining senses (other than vision) in maintaining safe and independent movement and orientation (such as the use of auditory skills, reflected sound, tactile recognition, proprioceptive, and kinesthetic awareness).
- 5. **Monitoring and safety** - Candidate is able to effectively monitor orientation and mobility skills, recognize potentially dangerous situations, and intervene as appropriate to ensure student safety.
- 6. **Facilitating independence** - Candidate is able to facilitate student independence and problem solving ability across a variety of travel situations, in familiar and unfamiliar environments.
- 7. **Professionalism** - Candidate demonstrates professional conduct consistent with the Code of Ethics for Orientation & Mobility Specialists, finds and accesses appropriate resources, keeps on-time scheduling, and follows and maintains appropriate record keeping and reporting procedures.

## **ACVREP CODE OF ETHICS FOR O&M SPECIALISTS**

### **PREAMBLE**

*Revised 2020*

(<https://www.acvrep.org/resource/docs/COMS%20Code%20of%20Ethics%202020.pdf>)

Certified Orientation and Mobility Specialist (COMS) Code of Ethics Preamble Certified Orientation and Mobility (O&M) Specialists (COMS) recognize the significant role that independent movement plays in the overall growth and functioning of individuals with visual impairment. COMS dedicate themselves to help individuals receive the services they need, to which they are entitled, and to attain the maximum level of independence commensurate to their unique strengths, needs, abilities, goals, and preferences. A COMS develops and utilizes specialized knowledge to accomplish this goal while collaborating with other professionals. The possession of specialized knowledge obligates the COMS to protect the rights of the individuals served. The Code of Ethics provides guidance for ethical practice but is not intended to serve as an exhaustive list of every possible ethical or unethical behavior. The COMS is responsible for identifying and implementing a sound decision-making model involving

professional discussions with appropriate parties when questions arise regarding ethical practices that are difficult to answer alone. To assure the public of the COMS' awareness and commitment to this obligation, the specialist commits to the Code of Ethics for COMS, henceforth referred to as the Code. COMS pledge themselves to maintaining integrity, excellence, and accountability as it relates to their commitment to the client, the community, the profession, colleagues and other professionals, and professional employment practices. The following principles and associated standards of conduct guide this commitment.

#### **Principle 1: The COMS will value the worth, dignity, and self-determination of each individual.**

- 1.1. The COMS will respect the rights of the client, family, support network and/or legal representative to participate in decisions regarding the instructional program.
- 1.2. The COMS will collaborate with the client served to identify their needs and to make decisions about intervention that are in the best interest of the client and relevant others.
- 1.3. The COMS will exemplify conduct that does not discriminate or knowingly engage in behavior that is harassing or demeaning based on age, gender, gender identity, race, ethnicity, culture, national origin, religion, sexual orientation, disability, socioeconomic status, or on any other basis prohibited by law.

#### **Principle 2: The COMS will respect the privacy, right to consent, and confidentiality of the client.**

- 2.1. The COMS will obtain full informed, documented permission from the client or legal representative before releasing information to a requesting agency or individual.
- 2.2. The COMS will ensure all client information obtained through or stored in any medium (e.g., hard copy, audio-visual, electronic, digital) remains confidential, unless authorized to divulge this information by the client and/or legal representative, required by law or institutional policies, or because withholding such information would endanger the wellbeing of the client or the public.

- 2.3. The COMS will ask the consent of the client served, or when applicable their family, support network or legal representative, before inviting others to observe a lesson or arranging to have the individual photographed or recorded.
- 2.4. The COMS, who is conducting research, will follow research ethics board procedures relevant to their jurisdiction and seek informed consent, including making clear the plan for maintaining confidentiality and the right of the participant to withdraw.

**Principle 3: The COMS will be accountable for exercising sound professional judgements.**

- 3.1. The COMS will adequately assess the needs and current capability of the individual client.
- 3.2. The COMS will make reasonable attempt to obtain, evaluate, and conduct a review of records relevant to the O&M assessment prior to instruction.
- 3.3. The COMS will identify and address interfering conditions and take reasonable precautionary actions.
- 3.4. The COMS will seek the advice and counsel of colleagues whenever such consultation is in the best interest of the client and does not jeopardize confidentiality.
- 3.5. The COMS will collect appropriate data to monitor client progress and determine outcomes of service.
- 3.6. The COMS will make all reports objective and will present only data relevant to the purposes of the evaluation and instruction. When appropriate, the specialist will share information with the client and/or the family and/or legal representative.
- 3.7. When planning or using alternative or new methods for instruction (e.g. remote supervision, role release, group instruction), the COMS will consider the safety and the best interest of the client, impact on team members, ethical implications of the method based on ACVREP standards, consultation with relevant professionals and jurisdiction regulations.
- 3.8. The COMS will evaluate the strength of evidence and applicability of content from professional development before integrating it into practice.

**Principle 4: The COMS will promote organizational and business practices that benefit clients and society.**

- 4.1. The COMS will ensure appropriate instructional design and implementation of lessons occur without undue consideration of personal comfort or convenience.
- 4.2. The COMS will be responsible for O&M services to individuals when any portion of the service is assigned to O&M students, interns or other stakeholders under his or her supervision.
- 4.3. The COMS supervising interns will provide adequate direct supervision to ensure intern skill development and client well-being, with decreasing supervision occurring when the COMS concludes an intern achieves applied/clinical competency.
- 4.4. The COMS will advocate for the rights of all individuals with visual impairments to receive appropriate services.
- 4.5. The COMS will not train any person to be an O&M Specialist outside of a recognized university preparation program or government-approved training program.
- 4.6. The COMS who is responsible for education and professional preparation programs will take reasonable steps to ensure that the programs are designed to provide the appropriate knowledge and proper experiences for students enrolled in such programs, and to meet the requirements for licensure, certification, or other goals for which claims are made by the program.
- 4.7. The COMS will decline position of employment where ethical principles of O&M practice are knowingly compromised or abandoned, unless the position is accepted with the intention of amending or modifying the questionable practices and providing that he or she does not participate in the behavior which violates the Code.
- 4.8. The COMS will only accept direct remuneration for professional instruction from a client who is also entitled to instruction through an agency or school if the client is fully informed of the services available and elects to contract privately with the specialist.
- 4.9. The COMS will not engage in commercial activities that result in a conflict of interest between these activities and professional objectives with the client.

- 4.10. The COMS will report suspected or known negligence, illegal, or unethical behavior in the practice of the profession to appropriate authorities, in accordance with ACVREP Standards.

**Principle 5: The COMS will maintain integrity in their relationships with clients, colleagues, other professionals, and the community.**

- 5.1. With the client's consent, the COMS will endeavor to provide those involved in the individual's life with sufficient knowledge, instruction, training and experiences relative to O&M to secure their support in facilitating the goals of the client.
- 5.2. The COMS will work to develop and be actively involved with Professional Learning Communities and Communities of Practice to nurture interdisciplinary teaming and collaboration including appropriate referrals, e.g., support cane, walker, wheelchair.
- 5.3. The COMS will endeavor to establish and maintain a trusting relationship with the client and maintain ethical standards of behavior. Any prior and/or present conflicts of interest will be managed through full disclosure and provision of services by another COMS. If another COMS is not available, the nature of the conflict/relationship will be made known to the COMS' supervisor(s) or contracting authority for orientation and mobility services for the client's protection and to avoid the appearance of impropriety.
- 5.4. The COMS will maintain good will in all activities relating to their client and will not tolerate or engage in any activity that results in the exploitation of the client. Exaggeration, sensationalism, superficiality, and other misleading activities must be avoided.
- 5.5. The COMS will endeavor to disseminate information to service providers involved with the client as it relates to O&M knowledge, instruction, and experiences so as to facilitate the goals of the client, provided such information does not jeopardize client confidentiality.
- 5.6. The COMS will graciously refuse gifts and/or gratuities leading to or influencing a conflict of interest.
- 5.7. The COMS will seek harmonious relations with other professionals, support people, and service providers including those chosen by the client. This includes, with the client's or legal representative's individual's consent, discussion regarding the benefits to be obtained from O&M services and the free exchange of ideas regarding the welfare of the client served.
- 5.8. In such situations where team decisions are made, the COMS will contribute information from his or her own particular perspective and will abide by the team decision unless the team decision requires that he or she act in violation of the Code of Ethics.

**Principle 6: The COMS will provide comprehensive, accurate, and objective information when representing the profession.**

- 6.1. The COMS will provide information regarding the various types of O&M devices and strategies, and will explore with the client which devices and strategies will best meet the specific assessed needs of the client. The COMS will not dispense or supply O&M equipment unless it is in the best interest of the client.
- 6.2. The COMS will contribute to community education by using formal and informal opportunities to describe the nature and delivery of O&M services, and to indicate how the community can support the self-determination of people with blindness or low vision.
- 6.3. The COMS will interpret and use the writing and research of others with integrity when making presentations, writing, or conducting research. This includes being familiar with and giving appropriate recognition to previous work on the topic and giving appropriate level of credit through joint authorship or acknowledgement to those contributing significantly to research or concept development.
- 6.4. The COMS reviewing material submitted for presentation, publication, grant, or research proposal will respect and guard the confidentiality of and the proprietary rights in such information of those who submitted it.
- 6.5. The COMS will ensure the honest and accurate reporting of the nature of the service provided, credentials, fees, and charges.

**Principle 7: The COMS will enhance their expertise through lifelong learning and refinement of knowledge, skills, abilities, and professional behaviors.**

- 7.1. The COMS will reflect on interactions with individuals and other stakeholders to determine areas for further learning, self-improvement, and seek feedback on their own performance from colleagues and mentors in the field.
- 7.2. The COMS will make efforts to share their knowledge and expertise with others in the field, interns, and other professionals as a means of contributing to the lifelong learning of colleagues in the profession.

### ***Program Admission Requirements***

Requirements for admission depend on the program in which the candidate wishes to participate. The following are the requirements for each area.

#### **Orientation and Mobility – Graduate certification program/concentration**

To be an eligible candidate for the orientation & mobility certification program/concentration, the applicant must have completed at least a bachelor's degree from an accredited university. This degree may be in any field.

#### **Teacher of Students with Visual Impairments – Graduate certification program/concentration**

To be eligible for the TSVI certification program/concentration, the applicant must have at least a bachelor's degree from an accredited university AND a current and valid initial teaching certification from the Texas Education Agency. Training and certification preparation provided to candidates from other states must meet their state requirements for supplemental certification/additional endorsements.

### ***Additional Admission Requirements for Graduate Candidates***

Prospective candidates must:

1. have a minimum overall 2.5 Grade Point Average (based on a 4.0 system) and a 2.75 Grade Point Average on the last 60 hours of your college work for admission to the university.
2. demonstrate a college-level proficiency in both reading and writing. The applicant will be required to submit three (3) written essays which will be evaluated in terms of content, grammar, and spelling. Please consider having essay submissions edited if writing is a need area for the applicant.
3. demonstrate suitable compatibility between the certification program's/concentration's goals and the applicant's goals and interests as described in one of the applicant's essays which is submitted at the time of application.
4. indicate their previous participation and experience in activities related to service or education of any individuals in any field. For the COMS certification program, while previous (or current) experience with individuals with special needs or disabilities is not required, prior extensive experience with individuals with disabilities is an important consideration.
5. provide satisfactory recommendations: Three letters of recommendation are required; one must be from the applicant's current supervisor.
6. submit ALL materials required before any consideration of the applicant's status will be

undertaken. Completion, organization, and presentation of all required application materials will be considered as part of the admission process.

### ***Cohort and Non-Cohort Admission Policy***

It is preferred by the VIP certification program/concentration faculty and staff to admit candidates to the VIP graduate-level certification programs/concentrations in a single cohort. This means that **CANDIDATES ARE TYPICALLY ADMITTED ONCE PER YEAR**. Decisions are made regarding new cohort admissions and, for Texas residents, grant funding at the end of March, and each new cohort starts their program at the beginning of the next summer term (usually at the end of May or early June).

Candidates are admitted on a limited basis at other times of year, will be advised to take a limited number of courses due to prerequisite requirements, and, for Texas residents, will be considered for funding if grant funding is available. If no grant funding is available for Texas residents, candidates admitted during times of the year outside of the cohort cycle will be required to self-pay for tuition. Candidates who are self-pay are encouraged to participate in the program in the same course cycle as those in the cohorts. Those candidates seeking admission to the certification program/concentration at a period other than the time described above will be admitted on a case-by-case basis. **THOSE CANDIDATES WHO COMMIT TO THE CERTIFICATION PROGRAM/CONCENTRATION THROUGH SELF-PAY WILL BE GIVEN PRIORITY CONSIDERATION FOR FUNDS AS SOON AS THEY BECOME AVAILABLE.**

### ***HOW TO APPLY FOR ADMISSION***

Stephen F. Austin State University  
VISUAL IMPAIRMENT PREPARATION CERTIFICATION  
PROGRAM/CONCENTRATION APPLICATION INFORMATION  
Certified Orientation and Mobility Specialist Certification program/concentration  
Accepting applications year-round; no due date for applications  
(For Texas residents seeking grant funding: DUE DATE: March 1)

Thank you for your inquiry about the SFA Visual Impairment Preparation (VIP) certification program/concentration and the Certified Orientation and Mobility Specialist certification program/concentration!

Any person applying to the COMS graduate preparation program must have a bachelor's degree in any discipline. The link for the graduate application process is located here: [Graduate Admissions - SFASU http://www.sfasu.edu/admissions-and-aid/admissions-process/graduate](http://www.sfasu.edu/admissions-and-aid/admissions-process/graduate)

For both the undergraduate and graduate O&M program, we ask that you apply to SFA through the ApplyTexas online application system. The link to the ApplyTexas application is located: [ApplyTexas State Application - https://www.goapplytexas.org](https://www.goapplytexas.org)

PLEASE NOTE: For graduate applications, if you are working toward certification only and are NOT interested in earning a Master's degree, you should **still select Degree-Seeking, Special Education** as your major and choose Orientation and Mobility as an area of specialization. A phone interview with the VIP Program Candidate Selection Committee may be required.

Along with ApplyTexas, you will apply to the VIP program by following these steps:



1. Once you have completed your ApplyTexas application, please email a brief letter of intent to apply to the VIP concentration admissions email: omvi@sfasu.edu
2. Fill out the Application to the Visual Impairment Preparation program (this application).
3. Submit the following written documentations (four separate items) through this application platform:
  - a. 1-2 page statement of your present philosophy regarding orientation and mobility
  - b. 1-2 page statement detailing your understanding of the role of a Certified Orientation and Mobility Specialist, and
  - c. 1 page describing your reasons for pursuing this career move.
4. Print the summary of your application after completing the application on this platform.
5. Gather three letters of recommendation.
6. Mail hard/paper copies of program application, essays, and letters of recommendation to:

Visual Impairment Preparation Program  
Stephen F. Austin State University  
Education Studies Department  
ECRC  
PO Box 13017, SFA Station  
Nacogdoches, TX 75962

By submitting the VIP program application, you are also applying for competitive grant funding for certification program courses (Texas residents only due March 1). Grant funding is not guaranteed.

You will NOT be able to register for classes until ALL your materials and transcripts are on file with the Visual Impairment Preparation program and the Graduate School at SFA. If you are working toward certification only and are NOT interested in earning a Master's degree, you should **still select Degree Seeking, Special Education** as your major and choose Visual Impairment as an area of specialization.

### **Mandatory Note for Teachers and Professionals Working in Texas Schools**

**\*Note: The Certified Orientation & Mobility Specialist (COMS) certification DOES NOT qualify any COMS as a certified teacher. In order to become a certified teacher in Texas, all candidates must complete an educator preparation program and pass the necessary state exams and portfolio requirements. Even though COMS are not certified teachers, all COMS are required to meet the Code of Ethics and other requirements listed below in the Code of Ethics for the Texas Educator.**

### **Code of Ethics for the Texas Educator:**

The Texas educator shall comply with standard practices and ethical conduct toward students, professional colleagues, school officials, parents, and members of the community and shall safeguard academic freedom. The Texas educator, in maintaining the dignity of the profession, shall respect and obey the law, demonstrate personal integrity, and exemplify honesty and good moral character. The Texas educator, in exemplifying ethical relations with colleagues, shall extend just and equitable treatment to all members of the profession. The Texas educator, in accepting a position of public trust, shall measure success by the progress of each student toward realization of his or her potential as an effective citizen. The Texas educator, in

fulfilling responsibilities in the community, shall cooperate with parents and others to improve the public schools of the community. This chapter shall apply to educators and candidates for certification. Please go to TAC 247.2 – Code of Ethics and Standard Practices for Texas Educators. This can be found at [https://texreg.sos.state.tx.us/public/readtac\\$ext.ViewTAC?tac\\_view=4&ti=19&pt=7&ch=247&rl=Y](https://texreg.sos.state.tx.us/public/readtac$ext.ViewTAC?tac_view=4&ti=19&pt=7&ch=247&rl=Y).

To complete Certification/Licensing Requirements in Texas related to public education and other professional settings, you will be required to:

1. Candidates must undergo a criminal history background check prior to clinical teaching and prior to employment as an educator. The public-school campuses are responsible for completing the criminal background check. A person who is enrolled or planning to enroll in a State Board for Educator Certification-approved educator preparation program or planning to take a certification examination may request a preliminary criminal history evaluation letter regarding the person's potential ineligibility for certification due to a conviction or deferred adjudication for a felony or misdemeanor offense.

A Preliminary Criminal History Evaluation is a non-mandatory, non-binding evaluation of an individual's self-reported criminal history. In addition, the agency obtains your name-based Texas criminal history information. The service is provided to the requestor for a non-refundable fee. The requestor will receive an evaluation letter by email from agency staff advising of potential ineligibility for educator certification. You are eligible to request a Preliminary Criminal History Evaluation if:

- You enrolled or planning to enroll in an educator preparation program or
- You are planning to take a certification exam for initial educator certification, and
- You have reason to believe that you may be ineligible for educator certification due to a conviction or deferred adjudication for a felony or misdemeanor offense.

You are not eligible for a preliminary evaluation of your criminal history if you do not have a conviction or deferred adjudication for a felony or misdemeanor offense.

In addition, you must complete the fingerprinting process when you apply for certification. Participation in the evaluation does not preclude you from submitting to a national criminal history review at the time you apply for your educator certification. Your criminal history will be reviewed and you may be subject to an investigation based on that criminal history, including any information you failed to submit for evaluation. Additional information can be found at [https://tea.texas.gov/Texas\\_Educators/Investigations/Preliminary\\_Criminal\\_History\\_Evaluation-FAQs/](https://tea.texas.gov/Texas_Educators/Investigations/Preliminary_Criminal_History_Evaluation-FAQs/).

2. Provide one of the following primary ID documents: passport, driver's license, state or providence ID cards, a national ID card, or military ID card to take the TExES exams (additional information available at [http://www.tx.nesinc.com/PageView.aspx?f=GEN\\_Tests.html](http://www.tx.nesinc.com/PageView.aspx?f=GEN_Tests.html)). YOU must provide legal documentation to be allowed to take these mandated examinations that are related to certification/licensing requirements in Texas. If you do not have legal documentation, you may want to reconsider your major while at SFASU.

3. Successfully complete state mandated a fingerprint background check. If you have a history

of criminal activity, you may want to reconsider your major while at SFASU.

For further information, contact the Office of Assessment and Accountability at 936-468-1282 or [edprep@sfasu.edu](mailto:edprep@sfasu.edu).

### **PATHWAY THROUGH THE PROGRAM - TIMELINE**

Candidates who enter either the O&M certification program or M.Ed. in Special degree with a concentration in O&M can expect that the following classes will be only offered during the semesters specified. The pathways include courses that may be in addition to those required for a master's degree.

### **COURSE REQUIREMENTS**

The course listings below represent typical classes that are taken in order to fulfill the requirements in each of our certification program/concentrations.

#### ***Orientation and Mobility – Graduate Certification Program:***

##### **SPED 5600 - Beginning Clinical Practicum in Orientation and Mobility**

Semester: Summer

Credits: 6 credit hours

Description: Six semester hours, two 3-hour lecture meetings, and 10 laboratory hours per week. This provides the candidate with the opportunity to study and practice the skills and concepts needed by individuals who are blind or visually impaired, so that they may safely travel in all environments.

##### **SPED 5315 - Foundations in Visual Impairment**

Semester: Fall

Credits: 3 credit hours

Description: Class provides a broad overview of various aspects of blindness (e.g., agencies which provide services to persons with visual impairments, psychological and sociological aspects of blindness, history of the field).

##### **SPED 5316 - Anatomy and Function of the Visual System**

Semester: Summer

Credits: 3 credit hours

Description: This class is designed to familiarize the candidate with the various parts of the visual system and their impact on the process of seeing. The Functional Vision Evaluation/Learning Media Assessment/Expanded Core Curriculum evaluation process is also introduced.

##### **SPED 5318 - Orientation and Mobility Skills and Concepts**

Semester: Fall

Credits: 3 credit hours

Description: Body imagery, concept development, spatial awareness and mobility are introduced and emphasized.

SPED 5319 - Low Vision

Semester: Spring

Credits: 3 credit hours

Description: Visual evaluation and intervention methods for persons with low vision.

SPED 5352 - Instructional Strategies for Individuals with Visual and Multiple Impairments

Semester: Spring

Credits: 3 credit hours

Description: Candidates are required to study a wide array of conditions that often accompany vision loss as well as educational programming considerations, and evaluation.

SPED 5393 - Intermediate Practicum in Orientation and Mobility

Semester: Fall

Credits: 3 credit hours

Description: Class combines online instruction with a requirement that candidates complete 40 hours supervised practicum experience teaching orientation and mobility to individuals with a visual impairment. Prerequisite: SPED 5600 with a grade of B or better.

SPED 5394 - Advanced Clinical Practicum in Orientation and Mobility

Semester: Spring

Credits: 3 credit hours

Description: Two-hour seminar and five-hour lab per week. Supervised practicum experience requiring a minimum of 40 hours of teaching orientation and mobility to individuals with a visual impairment.

Prerequisite: SPED 5600 and SPED 5393 with a grade of a B or better.

SPED 5695 Internship in Orientation and Mobility

Semester: Summer

Credits: 6 credit hours

Description: Supervised internship experience requiring a minimum of 350 hours teaching orientation and mobility to individuals with a visual impairment.

Prerequisites: SPED 5600, 5393, 5394 and permission of instructor.

## **Master of Education in Special Education with a Concentration in Orientation and Mobility Program**

Candidates who already have completed the O&M certification program track may return for 15 additional credit hours to earn a Master of Education (M.Ed.) degree in Special Education with a concentration in Orientation & Mobility. Candidates must plan carefully to ensure that the last class in the Master's program will be complete and that they graduate within six (6) years from the time the candidate began the certification program track.

The 15 credit hours gained by completing the following additional courses:

Six (6) credit hours in Special Education Studies

**\*SPED 5370 – Special Studies in Special Education**

Semester: Fall/Spring

Credits: 3 credit hours

Description: This is the capstone class of the M.Ed. program. In this class, candidates develop and execute their own research project. This capstone project can either be an action-research project or a survey research design project.

**\*SPED 5367 – Trends in Educating Exceptional Children**

Semester: Fall/Spring

Credits: 3 credit hours

Description: This is the capstone class of the M.Ed. program. In this class, candidates develop and execute their own research project. This capstone project can either be an action-research project or a survey research design project.

*\*required for all candidates in the M.Ed. in Special Education with a concentration in Orientation & Mobility degree*

Nine (9) credit hours in Visual Impairment/Orientation & Mobility Electives

**SPED 5317 – Communication Skills for Visual Impairment**

Semester: Summer

Credits: 3 credit hours

Description: Students are taught to transcribe and read contracted literary Braille and Nemeth code. They also are taught to use the slate and stylus. The course culminates with the administration of the Braille Proficiency Test, which the student must complete in order to receive permission to take TExES Braille exam (TExES 183).

**SPED 5321 – Expanded Core in Visual Impairments**

Semester: Fall

Credits: 3 credit hours

Description: The expanded core curriculum includes nine skill areas: assistive technology, compensatory skills, career education, independent living skills, recreation & leisure, orientation & mobility, social interaction skills, sensory efficiency skills, and self-determination skills. This class provides an opportunity to delve deeper into the importance of the expanded core curriculum and how it should be taught.

**SPED 5351 – Working with Academic Students who have Visual Impairments**

Semester: Spring

Credits: 3 credit hours

Description: Resource materials, curriculum adaptations, equipment, current theories and techniques for teaching students who are blind and visually impaired.

**SPED 5353 – Assistive Technology for Students with Visual Impairment**

Semester: Fall

Credits: 3 credit hours

Description: Because technology in the field changes so rapidly, it is not the objective of this course to teach the use of specific computer systems. Rather, it is aimed to

give the student an understanding of the foundational principles of adaptive technology and of the operating and use principles for broad areas of equipment (e.g., screen readers).

**SPED 5356 – Visual Impairment in Infancy and Early Childhood**

Semester: Spring

Credits: 3 credit hours

Description: This class provides an in-depth examination of how learning takes place during the first five years of life of persons with visual and visual/multiple impairments. It also provides candidates with vital information about educational programming and intervention strategies that apply to these children.

**Graduate Level Certification Courses  
Certified Orientation and Mobility Specialist (COMS)**

Course	Semester Completed
SPED 5600 – <b>Beginning Clinical Practicum in Orientation and Mobility</b>	Summer
SPED 5316 – <b>Anatomy and Function of the Visual System</b>	Summer
SPED 5315 – <b>Foundations in Visual Impairment</b>	Fall
SPED 5318 – <b>Orientation &amp; Mobility Skills and Concepts</b>	Fall
SPED 5393 – <b>Intermediate Practicum in Orientation and Mobility</b>	Fall
SPED 5352 – <b>Instructional Strategies for Individuals with Visual and Multiple Impairments</b>	Spring
SPED 5319 – <b>Low Vision</b>	Spring
SPED 5394 – <b>Advanced Clinical Practicum in Orientation and Mobility</b>	Spring
SPED 5695 – <b>Internship in Orientation and Mobility</b>	Summer

**Master’s Degree in Special Education  
with a Concentration in Orientation and Mobility**

Course	Semester Completed
SPED 5600 – <b>Beginning Clinical Practicum in Orientation and Mobility</b>	Summer
SPED 5316 – <b>Anatomy and Function of the Visual System</b>	Summer
SPED 5315 – <b>Foundations in Visual Impairment</b>	Fall
SPED 5318 – <b>Orientation &amp; Mobility Skills and Concepts</b>	Fall
SPED 5393 – <b>Intermediate Practicum in Orientation and Mobility</b>	Fall

SPED 5352 – <b>Instructional Strategies for Individuals with Visual and Multiple Impairments</b>	Spring
SPED 5319 – <b>Low Vision</b>	Spring
SPED 5394 – <b>Advanced Clinical Practicum in Orientation and Mobility</b>	Spring
SPED 5695 – <b>Internship in Orientation and Mobility</b>	Summer
<b>Year 2</b>	

**SPED 5317 - <b>Communication Skills for Visual Impairment</b>	Summer
**SPED 5321 – <b>Expanded Core in Visual Impairments</b>	Fall
**SPED 5351 – <b>Programs and Services for Students with Visual Impairment</b>	Spring
**SPED 5353 - <b>Assistive Technology for Students with Visual Impairment</b>	Fall
**SPED 5356 – <b>Visual Impairment in Infancy and Early Childhood</b>	Spring
SPED 5367 - <b>Trends in Educating Exceptional Children</b>	Fall/Spring
SPED 5370 – <b>Special Studies in Special Education</b>	Fall/Spring

\*SPED 5393, 5394, and 5695, while required for certification, do not count towards the 36-hour requirement for a M.Ed. degree.

\*\*Candidates must take an additional 9 hours from the following:

- SPED 5317 (summer),
- SPED 5321 (fall),
- SPED 5351 (spring),
- SPED 5353 (fall),
- SPED 5356 (spring)

## **ADVISING POLICIES AND PRACTICES**

### **Faculty Advisors**

The VIP certification program/concentration faculty and staff are committed to establishing advisement relationships that will support, challenge, and contribute to the professional development of candidates. Each new candidate will be assigned to an advisor who is a member of the VIP faculty upon admission to the SFA Graduate School. Your assigned advisor will assist you in completing your personalized degree plan, in advising you about registration and the certification program/concentration course map, and any other academic needs that may arise.

Faculty will make every effort to be available and responsive to the needs of candidates. It is equally important that candidates take initiative in establishing



contact with their advisors, requesting assistance and guidance, and communicating any changes to the candidate's current journey through VIP programming. VIP faculty should be consulted promptly if a candidate encounters any problems with coursework, practicum, internship, or any other aspect of the certification program/concentration. Candidates are responsible for maintaining communication with faculty so that the advisor can carry out his/her/their roles as consultant, advocate, mentor, and monitor. All faculty members designate office hours, which are the available times of each faculty member to discuss advisement, among other program-of-study topics. These office hour times are available on the Education Studies Department web page and on course syllabi. Since most of our course are offered in a hybrid model and at a distance, the VIP faculty and staff are aware that most candidates will not be able to visit our offices. However, we encourage calls, emails, and zoom meetings from candidates during our office hours. Another option is to make an appointment to meet with your advisor at a time other than designated office hours.

### **Registration**

Candidates will utilize the certification program/concentration course map and contact their faculty advisor to determine courses for which to register. All VIP candidates will have a graduation plan on file with the graduate school. This graduation plan will be discussed between the candidate and the faculty advisor. The plan will be completed and submitted to the graduate school by the faculty advisor. Registration for the following semester starts in the middle of the previous semester. Please consult the SFA Academic Calendar for open and closing dates of registrations windows. If you have questions about which course you should take or have issue registering, please contact your faculty advisor.

**\*Even though some Texas residents are receiving grant funding, VIP faculty and staff do NOT register candidates for courses. It is the candidate's responsibility to register or drop from a class and fully adhere to the SFASU withdrawal/drop policies and timelines. The candidate will be required to repay any grant monies paid on their behalf if he/she/they exit the certification program/concentration before completion of the required programming.**

### ***CERTIFICATION PROGRAM/CONCENTRATION COMPLETION REQUIREMENTS***

In order to become eligible to sit for the ACVREP COMS certification exam, all COMS candidates at SFA must complete all O&M certification coursework and programming offered by the VIP O&M certification program/concentration. To be eligible to apply for the COMS certification through ACVREP, the COMS candidate must fulfill the following requirements:



### **Orientation and Mobility – Graduate**

- Successfully complete all required didactic O&M courses (15 credit hours; face-to-face or hybrid format)
- Complete practicum courses (80 contact hours; 12 credit hours)
- Complete internship (350 internship contact hours; 6 credit hours)
- Pass the international COMS certification exam from Academy for the Certification of Vision Rehabilitation and Education Professionals (ACVREP)

### **Master of Education in Special Education with a concentration in Orientation & Mobility**

- Successfully complete all required didactic O&M courses (15 credit hours; face-to-face or hybrid format)
- Complete practicum courses (80 contact hours; 12 credit hours)
- Complete internship (350 internship contact hours; 6 credit hours)
- Successfully complete 15 additional credit hours of master's degree-required didactic instruction
- Successful completion of an individual research project, which is conducted during the SPED 5370 – Special Topics in Special Education course.
- Passing the comprehensive exams for the candidate's specific area. (You MUST be enrolled at SFA in the semester in which you complete your written comprehensive exam).

<b><i>University and Certification Program/Concentration Academic Policies</i></b>
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#### Class Attendance and Excused Absence: Policy 6.7

Regular, punctual attendance, documented participation, and, if indicated in the syllabus, submission of completed assignments are expected at all classes, laboratories, and other activities for which the student is registered. Based on university policy, failure of students to adhere to these requirements shall influence the course grade, financial assistance, and/or enrollment status. The instructor shall maintain an accurate record of each student's attendance and participation as well as note this information in required reports (including the first 12 day attendance report) and in determining final grades. Students may be excused from attendance for reasons such as health, family emergencies, or student participation in approved university-sponsored events. However, students are responsible for notifying their instructors in advance, when possible, for excusable absences. Whether absences are excused or unexcused, a student is still responsible for all course content and assignments. Students with accepted excuses may be permitted to make up work for up to three weeks of absences during a semester or one week of a summer term, depending on the nature of the missed work. Make-up work must be completed as soon as possible after returning from an absence.

#### Academic Accommodation for Students with Disabilities: Policy 6.1 and 6.6

To obtain disability related accommodations, alternate formats and/or auxiliary aids, students with disabilities must contact the Office of Disability Services (ODS), Human Services Building, and Room 325, 936-468-3004 as early as possible in the semester. Once verified, ODS will notify the course instructor and outline the accommodation and/or auxiliary aids to be provided. Failure to request services in a timely manner may delay your accommodations. For additional information, go to <http://www.sfasu.edu/disabilityservices/>

#### Student Academic Dishonesty: Policy 4.1

Abiding by university policy on academic integrity is a responsibility of all university faculty and

students. Faculty members must promote the components of academic integrity in their instruction, and course syllabi are required to provide information about penalties for cheating and plagiarism, as well as the appeal process.

#### Definition of Academic Dishonesty

Academic dishonesty includes both cheating and plagiarism. Cheating includes, but is not limited to:

- using or attempting to use unauthorized materials on any class assignment or exam;
- falsifying or inventing of any information, including citations, on an assignment;
- helping or attempting to help another in an act of cheating or plagiarism.

Plagiarism is presenting the words or ideas of another person as if they were one's own. Examples of plagiarism include, but are not limited to:

- submitting an assignment as one's own work when it is at least partly the work of another person;
- submitting a work that has been purchased or otherwise obtained from the Internet or another source;
- incorporating the words or ideas of an author into one's paper or presentation without giving the author credit.

#### Penalties for Academic Dishonesty

Penalties may include, but are not limited to, reprimand, no credit for the assignment or exam, re-submission of the work, make-up exam, failure of the course, or expulsion from the university.

#### Student Appeals

A student who wishes to appeal decisions related to academic dishonesty should follow procedures outlined in Academic Appeals by Students (6.3).

#### \_\_\_\_\_Withheld Grades: Policy 5.5

At the discretion of the instructor of record and with the approval of the academic unit head, a grade of WH will be assigned only if the student cannot complete the course work because of unavoidable circumstances. Students must complete the work by the deadline set by the instructor of record, not to exceed one calendar year from the end of the semester in which they receive a WH, or the grade automatically becomes an F, except as allowed through policy [i.e., Military Service Activation (6.14)]. If students register for the same course in future semesters, the WH will automatically become an F and will be counted as a repeated course for the purpose of computing the grade point average.

If a student has been found guilty of academic dishonesty, a grade of "WP" or "WH" may be changed to "WF" at the discretion of the faculty member. In the case of a grade change to "WF", the course will not count towards the six-course drop limit since the student is incurring an academic penalty.

#### \_\_\_\_\_Student Code of Conduct: Policy 10.4

Interference or disruption of students, faculty, administration, staff, the educational mission, or routine operations of the university is prohibited. Such activity includes, but is not limited to, behavior in a classroom or instructional program that interferes with the instructor or presenter's ability to conduct the class or program, or the ability of others to profit from the class or program. To remain in the vicinity of activity that is disrupting normal university functions when requested to leave by a university official is prohibited. Bystanders, if their presence incites or adds to the disruption, as well as more active participants in the disruptive activity, may be in violation of this policy as well. Engaging in physical violence of any nature against any person. This includes fighting; assaulting; battering; using a knife, gun, or other weapon; or acting in a manner

that threatens or endangers the physical health or safety of any person or causes a reasonable apprehension of such harm.

The instructor shall have full discretion over what behavior is appropriate/inappropriate in the classroom. Students who do not attend class regularly or who perform poorly on class projects/exams may be referred to the Early Alert Program at SFA.

\_\_\_\_\_ SFASU values students' mental health and the role it plays in academic and overall student success. SFA provides a variety of resources to support students' mental health and wellness. Many of these resources are free, and all of them are confidential.

On-campus Resources:

SFASU Counseling Services

[www.sfasu.edu/counselingservices](http://www.sfasu.edu/counselingservices)

3rd Floor Rusk Building

936-468-2401

SFASU Human Services Counseling Clinic

[www.sfasu.edu/humanservices/139.asp](http://www.sfasu.edu/humanservices/139.asp)

Human Services Room 202

936-468-1041

Crisis Resources:

Burke 24-hour crisis line 1(800) 392-8343

Suicide Prevention Lifeline 1(800) 273-TALK (8255)

Crisis Text Line: Text HELLO to 741-741

Time Limits for Returning to the Certification program/concentration or Transferring Credit

According to University policy there is a six-year limit on the time that courses may be applied to current work. If a candidate has taken an applicable course (either from the VIP certification program/concentration or another university) if *MORE THAN SIX YEARS HAVE PASSED FROM THE FIRST COURSE TAKEN TOWARD DEGREE, THE COURSE(S) WILL NOT BE ACCEPTED* and the candidate will be required to retake the course(s).

Transfer of Credits

According to the Graduate Bulletin, the following is the University's policy on transferring credit:

Under certain circumstances, a graduate candidate may transfer from 6 to 12 semester hours of graduate course work taken at other accredited institutions. The candidate pursuing a master's degree with thesis may transfer a maximum of 6 semester hours; a candidate pursuing a master's degree without thesis may transfer a maximum of 12 semester hours.

To transfer any credit from other institutions, however, the candidate must submit to the Program Facilitator an official transcript of the courses to be considered and have the approval of the appropriate academic department and academic dean. The work must have been taken not earlier

than six years prior to the candidate's first graduate enrollment at SFA. Moreover, if the candidate fails to complete work on the graduate degree at SFA before the expiration of the six years, the transfer credit will not be applicable toward a degree here.

Any course accepted by transfer will carry credit but not grade point value. Moreover, to transfer credit, the candidate must have earned a grade of B or higher on the course.

The exception is that ALL hours earned in a SFASU certification program/concentration can be considered for transfer into a graduate degree program if completion of graduate degree falls within six years of the first course taken.

### ***Field Experience, Practicum, and Internship***

Orientation and Mobility Certification program/concentration - both graduate and undergraduate Pre-Internship Practicum Requirements: Before candidates can start an internship, they must complete the pre- internship requirements that include at least 80 hours of practicum and successful completion of two 3-hour seminar/practicum classes. This experience provides the instruction, observation, and supervision needed to prepare the candidate for an internship. The 80 hours of practicum must include at least 60 hours of observation (and/or direct O&M instruction) and up to 20 miscellaneous/other O&M-related hours. Pre-internship candidates should start by observing a COMS providing O&M services and then progress to teaching lessons under the direct supervision of the COMS. The supervising COMS determines when the candidate is ready to begin planning and teaching. Fifty of the 80 practicum hours can be acquired by teaching blindfolded students/candidates, as long as that instruction is supervised by a COMS. The miscellaneous/other hours may include attending conferences relating to O&M, observing other professionals in the field of visual impairment, and other activities that will help prepare the candidate to teach O&M. The miscellaneous/other hours must be approved by the university supervisor in order to count towards the 80 practicum hours. Liability insurance paid by the certification program/concentration is also required before candidates begin any direct instruction.

Internship Requirements:

**Candidates must complete at least 350 hours during their internship** (280 instructional hours and 70 non-instructional hours). A typical internship is set up as a 10- to 14-week full-time experience. Internship placements are established by the certification program/concentration O&M Internship Coordinator. **Candidates may not arrange their own internship sites.** With approval from the O&M Internship Coordinator, it may be possible to collect some internship hours before the start of the summer internship in order to reduce the number of weeks away from home.

Professional involvement is an essential component of education for candidates in the Orientation and Mobility Certification program/concentration. The focus of the internship experience is not observation or participation in an insignificant job but learning through experience. Learning is direct and personal, as the candidate becomes a part of the agency and has the opportunity to practice in a professional service provision and support role.

Throughout the internship, the candidate should have access to as many different O&M-related experiences as possible in order to experience the internship placement site's various activities in a total perspective. In order to develop this perspective, the candidate should be involved in the following general practices of the internship placement site: staff meetings, staffing of

students/consumers, home visits, initial interviews and evaluations, agency workshops and seminars, group work activities, observations of professional techniques and procedures in various specialty areas, visitation to other facilities within the community, placement services, pre-vocational training, community surveys, committee membership and participation in agency/school extracurricular activities. Most important to the meaningful learning experience is that interns be provided with the type of learning experience which allows them to identify with the internship placement site and to learn about the site's roles, responsibilities, and functions.

The variety in the size, function, and services of the internship placement sites participating in the internship experience may, in some cases, require slight modification of the procedures contained in these guidelines. Any exceptions to these procedures must be mutually approved by both the university O&M internship coordinator and the participating site supervisor. Agreement confirming participating and setting the dates for the beginning and end of the internship as well as the due dates for evaluations will be provided prior to a candidate's reporting to the internship placement site.

The internship experience should enable the candidates to acquire new and meaningful learning experiences of a practical nature, which will better prepare them to enter the field of working with persons with a visual impairment. During the course of the internship, candidates should reach the following learning outcomes:

1. To demonstrate a knowledgeable and skillful application of the instructional strategies and methods for teaching orientation and mobility to students/adult consumers with visual impairments.
2. To demonstrate the knowledge and skills needed in designing appropriate instructional lesson and curriculum for orientation and mobility training with students/adult consumers with visual impairments.
3. To demonstrate the knowledge and skills necessary for conducting orientation and mobility evaluations, and in preparing written reports.
4. To demonstrate skills in consulting and collaborating with professionals, parents and students/adult consumers to assure appropriate orientation and mobility programming.

*Additional information regarding the O&M Internship requirement can be found in the Orientation and Mobility Internship Handbook.*

## **COMPREHENSIVE EXAM FOR THE MASTERS IN SPECIAL EDUCATION DEGREE**

**ALL CANDIDATES WHO ARE SEEKING A MASTER'S DEGREE MUST COMPLETE A COMPREHENSIVE EXAMINATION.**

**THIS IS A VERY SERIOUS UNDERTAKING AND IS A REFLECTION OF YOU AS A PROFESSIONAL.**

**YOU CANNOT GRADUATE WITH A M.Ed. WITHOUT SUCCESSFUL COMPLETION OF COMPS.**

### **EXAM GUIDELINES AND REQUIREMENTS:**

- You must successfully complete the examination in a semester in which you are registered for at least one course.
- If you fail to schedule an exam, or are not successful in your exam attempt, while in your final semester of coursework, you will be required to register for a one credit hour class the following

semester, even if your master's coursework and certification program/concentration is otherwise complete.

- You are eligible to take your comprehensive exam at any time during either of your last two semesters of training.
- It is YOUR responsibility to schedule your comprehensive exams with the instructor of the SPED 5370 – Special Topics is Special Education research course.
- Exams must be scheduled for completion 30 DAYS PRIOR TO THE END OF THE SEMESTER.

The Comprehensive Exam will focus on nine key areas of knowledge covered in the graduate certification program/concentration you have completed. Those areas are:

1. Foundations in Visual Impairment
2. Structure and Function of the Visual System
3. Basic Orientation and Mobility
4. Methods for Working with Academic Students Who Have Visual Impairments
5. Methods for Working with Students Who Have Visual and Multiple Impairments
6. Advanced Evaluation and Instructional Strategies for Persons Who Have Low Vision
7. Infancy and Early Childhood Instruction for Students with Visual Impairments
8. Technology for Students Who Have Visual Impairments
9. Educational Evaluation and Evaluation of Skills

### Current Comprehensive Exam Format

The Exam will thoroughly and comprehensively test your knowledge in all areas previously studied. The Exam will be composed solely of essay questions. Some of these questions may be scenario based. Here are instructions that should be followed (as a minimum) for success on the examination:

- You will be provided 6 questions multi-part questions upon which you are to research and compose professional responses in essay form with APA formatting and references.
- You must complete 4 out of the 6 questions.
- You must effectively and fully address each part of each question and support your answers.
- Basic essay form includes an introduction, responses to each part of the question, and an accurate and reflective conclusion for each question.
- You must use APA format and cite verifiable references in the text of each answer and produce a reference page for each question. You do not need a title page, nor an abstract for your responses. You do need both in-text citations AND a reference page.
- You can use all course-related resources, textbooks, and any other resource found on the internet or other data source, but, as with your research paper this work must be original and supported by sources. Plagiarism will result in failure of the COMPS.
- You may NOT receive assistance in answering the questions from any individual. You may seek editing assistance from the AARC if you need assistance with basic editing for grammar, mechanics, punctuation, and spelling. THIS IS VERY SERIOUS - DO NOT PLAGARIZE, CUT AND PASTE, OR OVERUSE OTHER'S MATERIALS.
- The goal of the COMPS is to verify that each master's candidate can demonstrate knowledge of the VI or O&M material covered in the coursework, along with the support of research. You MUST demonstrate the ability to paraphrase, connect ideas, and combine source materials.

**\*\*\*THIS PAPER WILL BE EVALUATED FOR PLAGERISM AND WILL BE PROCESSED WITH AVAILABLE PLAGERISM SOFTWARE AND RESOURCES.**

You should plan to compose about 3 to 5 pages on each question to be comprehensive. One question will typically be drawn from your research project that is created in SPED 5370. The COMPS exam will be delivered to you electronically, and you will have a set time limit to complete the examination (four [4] days and three [3] nights).

## Current Comprehensive Exam Procedures

### **Making Arrangements to Complete the Comprehensive Exam**

Candidates are required to notify the instructor of their research course (SPED 5370) and the Visual Impairment/Orientation & Mobility Certification Program/Concentration Program Facilitator at least 2 weeks before they want to take the test. Candidates will need to identify the date/time period in which they want to complete the COMPS. Please schedule early in the semester, as the completed exam must be submitted by 30 days before the end of the semester. Your comprehensive exam WILL NOT be scheduled within the 30 days of the end of the semester. YOU MUST PLAN EARLY. You may NOT share your questions with any individuals, and you may NOT seek assistance in answering questions from anyone. Your integrity matters, so please complete your COMPS on your own.

### Scoring

Upon completion of the COMPS exam, responses will be reviewed by a minimum of three faculty persons from the Visual Impairment Preparation Certification Programs/Concentrations. All exams will be blind-graded, with names or any other identifying information withheld from the reviewer. The candidate's responses will be evaluated using the **rubric included in the appendix** of this handbook. PLEASE review the rubric as you plan your comprehensive examination. In the event that there is a lack of agreement, the three reviewers may call in an additional SFASU faculty member to assist. Within 15 working days after the exam is submitted, each student will be notified if he or she has been successful or unsuccessful on the COMPS exam.

### Retakes

If a candidate does not successfully complete the COMPS, the following process will be put into action:

1. If the candidate is not successful, the reviewing faculty may ask the candidate to take part an oral question and answer session to clarify their submission or to demonstrate their knowledge. This oral session is NOT limited to topics upon which the candidate answered for their examination.
2. If the candidate is still not successful during the oral session, a plan for retaking the exam, with new questions, will be determined, and the candidate will have to schedule the COMPS exam for the following semester. No candidate will be allowed to attempt passage of the Comprehensive Exam more than twice.

**WITHDRAWAL FROM ONE OR MORE COURSES**

Circumstances may arise in which candidates need to withdraw from one or more courses in which he or she is enrolled. Withdrawing from one or more courses may have implications related to financial aid, grants, practicum or internship completion, graduation timelines, or other effects. Please consider the decision carefully as VIP courses are only offered one time per year.

When considering to withdraw from one or more courses, please notify the instructor of the course(s) and your academic advisor as soon as possible to help weigh all of the options. Should withdraw from the course(s) be the right decision, candidates will then need to notify the registrar's office of the decision to withdraw from the course(s). If a candidate does not formally withdraw from the course(s) through the registrar's office, the candidate may receive a failing grade for the course. Candidates who need to withdraw from ALL courses will be considered withdrawn from the VIP certification program/concentration and will have to reapply.

Information from the registrar's webpage <http://www.sfasu.edu/registrar/400.asp> is below:

The University uses the term ***withdraw*** to formally indicate that a candidate **has dropped or will drop all courses** for a given term. Withdrawing from the university differs from dropping one or several classes within a given term, because as long as a candidate retains at least one class, he or she is still considered to be registered for that term.

***All withdrawals are handled in the Registrar's Office.***

**No other office nor person has the ability to withdraw candidates.**

**Beginning the first day of class the candidate must come by or contact the Registrar's Office to obtain a Withdrawal form.**

**The amount of your refund and how much you owe SFA depends on when we receive the completed and signed form.**

**A candidate withdrawing prior to the first-class day will be assessed a matriculation fee of \$15.**

Deadlines for withdrawing are posted on the Registrar's Office website under the appropriate semester Calendar and Schedule of Deadlines link. Please remember that **Summer** terms have very abbreviated withdrawal schedules based on the individual summer sessions. Please refer to the Semester Calendar and Deadlines.

The Registrar's Office is open Monday through Friday, 8 a.m. to 5 p.m. (except University holidays). Any form received after this time will be processed on the following business day if the following date does not exceed the deadline of the request.

Withdrawal grades will be determined by the date the candidate withdraws. W (Withdrawal) and WP (Withdraw Passing) grades do not affect GPA. WF (Withdraw Failing) will affect the GPA and counts as an F grade.

Once the Registrar's Office has withdrawn the candidate, the candidate may need to contact the following offices:

- Business Office
- Financial Aid
- To determine how withdrawing from school will affect your eligibility to receive financial aid,



check with a financial aid counselor in room 104 of the Austin building. **Withdrawing from school this semester may prevent a candidate from receiving financial aid in future terms even if the student is not now receiving or has never previously received financial aid.**

- Residence Life
- Candidates living in University owned housing will need to CHECK OUT of the residence hall or apartment and return their housing inventory sheet to the Director of Residence Life located on the first floor of the Austin building.
- Meal Plan
- Post Office
- And/or any other office the candidate has applied to

The candidate needs to understand that withdrawing from the University:

- May cause the candidate to lose financial aid, including any exemptions and waivers applied to the student's account.
- May affect the candidate's medical and / or other insurance coverage.
- May affect the candidate's academic status, especially if the candidate is on probation. If you have questions about your academic status, contact your Academic Dean.

Candidates who have **applied to graduate** will need to contact the Graduation Office at [graduation@sfasu.edu](mailto:graduation@sfasu.edu). Be sure to include your name and student ID number.

Transcript or registration materials will not be released unless all financial obligations are clear. Candidates may still owe money to SFA after withdrawing. If you have questions about financial obligations to the University, contact our Business Office (936) 468-6960.

\*\* Refer to the current General Bulletin for tuition, fees, room & board payment procedure.

### ***Dismissal Policies***

The dismissal of a candidate from the VIP certification program/concentration is a significant event for both the candidate and the certification program/concentration faculty. This decision represents the conclusion of the faculty that the candidate has not demonstrated an adequate level of competency in either academic performance, clinical skills, or in other critical areas of professional conduct. Dismissal action is generally the final outcome of several informal and formal communications with the candidate regarding his or her unsatisfactory progress through the certification program/concentration and, when appropriate, special efforts at helping the candidate meet certification program/concentration requirements and training objectives have failed. The final decision regarding whether or not a candidate should be terminated from the certification program/concentration, or under what conditions a candidate making unsatisfactory progress will be allowed to continue, is a decision that rests with the VIP certification program/concentration faculty.

#### **Reasons for Dismissal from the Certification Program/Concentration**

At any point during the candidate's participation in one of the VIP certification program/concentrations, the faculty retains the right to review any candidate circumstances or personal performances that may negatively affect the candidate's competencies for independent professional practice or that may threaten client welfare. The following are offered as examples of

circumstances or performances that may be the basis for dismissal action:

1. Failure to maintain minimum academic standards;
- \* 2. Unsatisfactory performance in courses (e.g., practicum or internship);
3. Academic dishonesty;
4. Criminal misconduct;
5. Failure to comply with established University or Certification program/concentration timetables and requirements;
6. Unethical practices and/or unprofessional conduct in service delivery and/or research.
7. Cognitive, affective, and/or behavioral impairments that obstruct the training process and/or threaten client welfare;
8. If the candidate is involved in the M.Ed. program, failure to pass the Comprehensive Examination after two retakes;
9. Plagiarism; and,
10. Noncompliance to general university and certification program/concentration guidelines.

\*A 3.0 cumulative grade point average for all courses counting toward the M.Ed. degree is the university and certification program/concentration minimum.

Candidates in the master's program are required to maintain a Grade Point Average of 3.0 or better. If the candidate's GPA falls below a 3.0, the candidate will be notified in writing that they are in danger of being dismissed from the VIP certification program/concentration and will either (1) be placed on probation for one semester; or (2) be dismissed from the certification program/concentration. The procedure for placing a student will face probation or dismissal will include the following steps:

1. The candidate will be informed by the Program Facilitator in writing of the change in their status.
2. The candidate will submit a written explanation of the circumstances leading to insufficient academic performance and provide a proposal outlining a plan for improved academic success to the Program Facilitator.
3. The certification program/concentration faculty will review the statement of circumstances and plan for improved academic performance and approve or reject the submitted plan.
4. The decision of the faculty will determine whether the candidate is placed on probation or dismissed from the certification program/concentration.

If the candidate is placed on probation and their GPA does not rise to 3.0 during the probationary semester, the candidate will be dismissed from the certification program/concentration.

**\* \* Candidate who for any reason are unable to complete the certification program/concentration will be required to make arrangements to repay any grant money received for tuition and fees.**

The SFASU Academic Appeals by Students policy (6.3) is detailed below. The Student Academic Dishonesty policy (4.1) and the VIP certification program/concentration's application of that policy are detailed in Appendix F.

## **Academic Appeals by Students (6.3)**

### **Final Course Grade Appeals by Students**

Original Implementation: August 31, 1981

**Last Revision: February 2, 2021**

Faculty members are responsible for the evaluation of student course work conducted in their class and, under normal circumstances, only the instructor may change a grade. However, this policy provides a formal process for students to appeal final grades and determinations of academic dishonesty. Any further appeal must be made within ten (10) business days from the conclusion of each step. Recommendations at each level are generally made within four (4) weeks of receiving the appeal. The burden of proof rests with the student throughout the process. A student may appeal a final course grade if it can be demonstrated that the instructor did not adhere to stated procedures or grading standards, or if other compelling reasons exist to change the grade. A student may not appeal due to general dissatisfaction with a final grade or disagreement with the instructor's professional judgment regarding the quality of the student's work. These steps are followed when making an appeal:

1. Students must first appeal in writing to the faculty member with whom they have a final grade dispute. Students must appeal to the instructor within thirty (30) calendar days after the first-class day of the next semester, fall or spring. Given extenuating circumstances, exceptions to this deadline may be granted by the academic unit head. If the dispute is not resolved, the student may appeal to the academic unit head. The academic unit head then requests a written statement from the faculty member and the student involved in the dispute. The academic unit head provides both parties a written recommendation.
2. If the dispute remains unresolved after a recommendation by the academic unit head, the student may appeal in writing to the academic dean. The dean notifies both parties of the continuation of the appeal. The faculty member may submit an additional response. The academic unit head will forward all documentation involved in the dispute to the dean. Prior to making a recommendation, the dean may refer the appeal to the relevant college council. If the college council has no student members, the dean asks the president of the Student Government Association to recommend no more than two students from that college to be appointed as voting members. If consulted, the college council reviews all documentation and submits its recommendation to the dean. The dean provides both parties a written recommendation.
3. If the dispute remains unresolved after a recommendation by the dean, the student may appeal in writing to the provost and vice president for academic affairs. The provost and vice president for academic affairs notifies both parties of the continuation of the appeal. The faculty member may submit an additional response. The dean will forward all documentation involved in the dispute to the provost and vice president for academic affairs. The college 6.3 Final Course Grade Appeals by Students Page 2 of 2 council may serve as an advisory body to the provost and vice president for academic affairs. The provost and vice president for academic affairs informs the student and all persons involved in the appeal process of the recommendation.

Under extraordinary circumstances (e.g., the instructor is deceased, is no longer at the institution or is in violation of university policy), a grade may be changed by the provost and vice president for academic affairs after consultation with the dean and academic unit head. The provost and vice president for academic affairs informs the student and all persons involved in the appeal process of the final decision.

**Cross Reference:** Faculty Handbook, Student Handbook and Activities Calendar; Student Academic Dishonesty (4.1); Title IX (2.13); Faculty Code of Conduct (7.11); Nondiscrimination (2.11)

**Responsible for Implementation:** Provost and Vice President for Academic Affairs

**Contact for Revision:** Provost and Vice President for Academic Affairs Forms: None

<b><i>SOME PRACTICAL SUGGESTIONS</i></b>
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- 1. When in doubt, check with your faculty advisor.** Candidates may become uncertain or confused as to policy, procedure, course selection or number of other issues. Do not rely upon hearsay. Contact your advisor by telephone, email, or visit during office hours (if you are an on-campus student) to verify the accuracy of the information received. However, to ensure the best outcome in all communications with your advisor, it is critical that the Handbook is first consulted!
- 2. Take courses in the recommended sequence.**
- 3. Be alert to changes in course offerings.** The course sequence published in this Handbook is usually accurate. Occasionally, however, a course may be added or dropped.
- 4. Buy a good quality computer and headset complete with earphones and a microphone before the first semester of enrollment.** Students participating in the master's program will need this for several courses.

# *Appendices*

APPENDIX A  
Checklist of  
Application  
Materials Policy

**VISUAL IMPAIRMENT PREPARATION PROGRAM – APPLICATION INFORMATION**  
**Teacher of Students with Visual Impairment Program – Texas**  
**DUE DATE: March 1**

Thank you for your inquiry about the SFA Visual Impairment Preparation (VIP) program and the Teacher of Students with Visual Impairment (TSVI) certification program!

In Texas, any person who is applying for a TSVI prep program must have a bachelor's degree in any discipline, as well as an initial Texas teacher certification in any discipline.

After those two items are completed, we ask that you apply to SFA through the ApplyTexas online application system (<https://www.applytexas.org>). Here is the link that will help you with the graduate application process: <http://www.sfasu.edu/admissions-and-aid/admissions-process/graduate>

Also, you will apply to the VIP program using these steps:

1. Once you have completed your ApplyTexas application, please send a brief letter of intent to apply to Dr. Shannon Darst ([darstd@sfasu.edu](mailto:darstd@sfasu.edu)) in the Visual Impairment Preparation Program.

2. Fill out the application attached to this email - Application to the Visual Impairment Personnel Preparation program

3. Send three letters of recommendation to

Visual Impairment Preparation Program  
Stephen F. Austin State University  
Department of Education Studies  
PO Box 13017 SFA Station  
Nacogdoches, TX 75962

4. Submit the following written documentations (four separate items):

- a. Texas state initial teaching certification verification
- b. 1-2 page statement of your present teaching philosophy
- c. 1-2 pages detailing your understanding of the role of a Teacher of Students with Visual Impairment (TSVI), and
- d. One page describing your reasons for pursuing this career move.

5. Submit (by mail) official copies of EACH of your transcripts from ALL COMMUNITY COLLEGES, COLLEGES, AND/OR UNIVERSITIES you have attending Dr. Shannon Darst ([darstd@sfasu.edu](mailto:darstd@sfasu.edu)) at the above-mentioned postal address. This includes college credit you may have earned in high school.

**You will NOT be able to register for classes until ALL your materials and transcripts**

**are on file with the Visual Impairment Preparation Program.**

If you are working toward certification only and are NOT interested in earning a Master's degree, you should still select Degree Seeking, Special Education as your major, and choose Visual Impairment as an area of specialization. A phone interview with the VIP Program Candidate Selection Committee may be required.

APPENDIX B  
Comp. Exam Rubric

Revised Sept 2020

**VISUAL IMPAIRMENT PREPARATION PROGRAM  
COMPREHENSIVE EXAM RUBRIC (SLO #5)**

**Student:**

**Reviewers:**

Category	Exemplary 3	Acceptable 2	Unacceptable 1	Not Attempted 0	SCORE			
					Q	Q	Q	Q
<b>Completeness of Response</b>	Student response addresses all aspects/facets of the questions with detail.	Student response adequately addresses 80% of each aspect/facet of the question.	Student response addresses less than 80% of each aspect/ facet of the question.					
<b>Quality of Content</b>	Student response clearly (100%) relates to the questions and is completely (100%) scholarly and completely (100%) accurate. Student includes key elements and more than four relevant examples.	Student response relates (80%) to the questions and is mostly (80%) scholarly and mostly (80%) accurate. Key elements are present. Student has included two to four relevant examples.	Student response is not relevant (less than 80%) to the questions presented and is not scholarly, nor accurate (less than 80%). Student includes less than two examples.					
<b>Critical and Reflective Thinking</b>	Student response shows insight, critical and reflective thinking on all aspects/facets of the questions. Student includes more than four examples of application of general concepts.	Student response shows some critical and reflective thinking on 80% of the aspects/facets of the questions. Student includes two to four examples of application of general concepts.	Student response is limited to factual interpretation or shows critical and reflective thinking on less than 80% of the aspects/facets of the questions. Student provides fewer than two examples of application of general concepts.					
<b>Evidence of Research-Based Support</b>	Student response shows extensive knowledge and understanding of current research. Student details supportive details/examples and cites more than four sources.	Student response shows evidence of knowledge and understanding of some current research. Student provides some supportive details/examples and cites two to four sources.	Student response fails to show evidence of knowledge and understanding of current research. Student fails to provide supportive details/examples. Student cites less than two sources.					
<b>Written Communication Skills</b>	Student responses are presented in a well-constructed and logical way. Acceptable APA style and grammar are used with no errors.	Student responses are presented in an organized way. Acceptable APA style and grammar are used with 3-5 errors per response.	Student responses are disorganized or unclear. Candidate fails to use acceptable APA style and grammar with more than 5 errors per response.					



Was the student able to successfully complete at least 3 of the 4 submitted responses? Yes \_\_\_\_ No \_\_\_\_

APPENDIX C Steps for  
Obtaining Standard  
Verification - TSVI

## **APPLYING FOR YOUR STANDARD CERTIFICATE**

**Certificate recommendations require the following:**

- All program coursework completed
- All grades posted
- TExES exams passed
- An online application submitted to TEA <https://pryor.tea.state.tx.us/> (see Step-by-Step Guide on the next page)
- Payment to TEA for the certificate

**Earliest dates to apply for certificates each semester (Do NOT apply until your TExES testing is completed):**

- December completers may begin applying October 1
- May completers may begin applying March 1
- August completers may begin applying July 1

**Additional Information:**

- TEA will NOT mail you a hard copy of your certificate. You can view your certificate on the TEA website.

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**Recommendation cannot be made by SFA until grades have been posted by the Registrar's office, which can be a few days after the end of the semester. Students will be notified by TEA that they have been recommended by SFA.**

**The Office of Assessment and Accountability would like to thank you in advance for your patience and understanding**

**\*\*\*IMPORTANT\*\*\***

For employment seeking purposes prior to recommendation, email [edcert@sfasu.edu](mailto:edcert@sfasu.edu) and request a

**STATEMENT OF ELIGIBILITY FOR HIRE LETTER**

*(also referred to as a Pending Letter)*

Before emailing [edcert@sfasu.edu](mailto:edcert@sfasu.edu) to request your letter, be sure you meet these requirements:

- Must be enrolled in your last semester of coursework
- Must have passed your TExES exams
- Must have applied for certification through TEA

In your Pending Letter Request email, you must include:

- Your full name, including your maiden name if applicable
- Your SFA ID

## Academic Integrity Policy

### Academic Integrity

Abiding by university policy on academic integrity is a responsibility of all university faculty and students. Faculty members must promote the components of academic integrity in their instruction, and course syllabi are required to provide information about penalties for cheating and plagiarism as well as the appeal process.

#### Definition of Academic Dishonesty

Academic dishonesty includes both cheating and plagiarism. Cheating includes, but is not limited to:

- using or attempting to use unauthorized materials on any class assignment or exam
- falsifying or inventing any information, including citations, on an assignment
- and/or helping or attempting to help another in an act of cheating or plagiarism.

Plagiarism is presenting the words or ideas of another person as if they were one's own. Examples of plagiarism include, but are not limited to:

- submitting an assignment as one's own work when it is at least partly the work of another person
- submitting a work that has been purchased or otherwise obtained from the internet or another source
- and/or incorporating the words or ideas of an author into one's paper or presentation without giving the author credit.

#### Penalties for Academic Dishonesty

Penalties may include, but are not limited to: reprimand, no credit for the assignment or exam, resubmission of the work, make-up exam, failure of the course, or expulsion from the university.

#### Procedure for Addressing Academic Dishonesty

A faculty member who has evidence and/or suspects that academic dishonesty has occurred will gather all pertinent information and initiate the following procedure:

1. The faculty member will discuss all evidence of cheating or plagiarism directly with the student(s) involved.
2. After consideration of the explanation provided by the student(s), the faculty member will determine whether academic dishonesty has occurred. The faculty member may consult with the academic unit head and/or dean in making a decision.
3. After a determination of academic dishonesty, the faculty member will inform the academic unit head and submit a [Report of Academic Dishonesty](#) with supporting documentation to the office of the dean of the student's major. This report will become

part of the student's record and will remain on file with the dean's office for at least four years, even if the student withdraws prior to receiving a grade.

4. For a serious offense or subsequent offenses, the dean of the student's major will determine a course of action, which may include dismissal from the university. The dean may refer the case to the college council for review and recommendations before making this determination.

A student's record of academic dishonesty will not be available to faculty members. The purpose of the record is for the dean to track a pattern of academic dishonesty during a student's academic career at SFA.

#### Student Appeals

A student who wishes to appeal decisions related to academic dishonesty should follow procedures outlined in [Policy 6.3](#), Final Course Grade Appeals by Students.

***PROTECT YOUR INTEGRITY. BE HONEST, FOLLOW THE RULES, DO YOUR OWN WORK, AND DO NOT SHARE IT WITH OTHERS.***

#### Student Academic Dishonesty

**Original Implementation:** Unpublished

**Last Revision:** January 28, 2020

Abiding by university policy on academic integrity is a responsibility of all university faculty and students. Faculty members must promote the components of academic integrity in their instruction, and course syllabi are required to provide information about penalties for cheating and plagiarism, as well as the appeal process.

#### Definition of Academic Dishonesty

Academic dishonesty includes both cheating and plagiarism. Cheating includes, but is not limited to:

- using or attempting to use unauthorized materials on any class assignment or exam;
- falsifying or inventing of any information, including citations, on an assignment;
- helping or attempting to help other student(s) in an act of cheating or plagiarism.

**Plagiarism** is presenting the words or ideas of another person as if they were one's own. Examples of plagiarism include, but are not limited to:

- submitting an assignment as one's own work when it is at least partly the work of another person;
- submitting a work that has been purchased or otherwise obtained from the Internet or another source;
- incorporating the words or ideas of an author into one's paper or presentation without giving the author credit.

#### Penalties for Academic Dishonesty

Penalties may include, but are not limited to, reprimand, no credit for the assignment or exam, resubmission of the work, make-up exam, failure of the course, or expulsion from the university.

## **Procedure for Addressing Student Academic Dishonesty**

A faculty member who has evidence and/or suspects that academic dishonesty has occurred will gather all pertinent information and initiate the following procedure:

1. The faculty member will discuss all evidence of cheating or plagiarism directly with the student(s) involved.
2. After consideration of the explanation provided by the student(s), the faculty member will determine whether academic dishonesty has occurred. The faculty member may consult with the academic unit head and/or dean in making a decision.
3. After a determination of academic dishonesty, the faculty member will inform the academic unit head and submit a Report of Academic Dishonesty with supporting documentation to the office of the dean of the student's major. This report will become part of the student's record and will remain on file with the dean's office for at least four years even if the student withdraws prior to receiving a grade.
4. For a serious first offense or subsequent offenses, the dean of the student's major will determine a course of action, which may include dismissal from the university. The dean may refer the case to the college council for review and recommendations before making this determination.

A student's record of academic dishonesty will not be available to faculty members. The purpose of the record is for the dean to track a pattern of academic dishonesty during a student's academic career at Stephen F. Austin State University.

### **Student Appeals**

A student who wishes to appeal decisions related to academic dishonesty should follow procedures outlined in Final Course Grade Appeals by Students (6.3).

**Cross Reference:** Student Handbook; Final Course Grade Appeals by Students (6.3); and Course Add/Drop (6.10)

**Responsible for Implementation:** Provost and Vice President for Academic Affairs

**Contact for Revision:** Provost and Vice President for Academic Affairs

**Forms:** Report of Academic Dishonesty Form

**Board Committee Assignment:** Academic and Student Affairs

## APPENDIX E

### **REQUIRED PAPERWORK FOR VIP Certification Programs/Concentrations**

CERTIFICATION AREA: \_\_\_\_\_VI \_\_\_\_\_O&M

ESC REGION (Texas residents only) \_\_\_\_\_

Graduate Application/Apply Texas Application – Apply to the SFASU Graduate School as a degree-seeking candidate with a concentration in either Visual Impairment or Orientation & Mobility

VIP Certification Programs/Concentrations Application (online/survey link)

Includes essays:

- 1) Philosophy Statement
- 2) Description of your personal understanding of the role of COMS, and
- 3) Your reason for the career choice or career move into the field of visual impairment/orientation & mobility

Official transcripts from every college attended sent to the SFASU Graduate School

Documentation of licensure and/or teaching certification

Three letters of recommendation, including one from a current supervisor

**\*\*NOTE-**

**1. For Texas residents, the VIP application will serve as your application for funding to cover tuition for your certification coursework.**

**2. For Texas residents, acceptance into the SFASU graduate school does NOT mean you have been selected for grant funding.**

**2. The VIP Certification Programs/Concentrations do NOT require a GRE.**





**APPENDIX G: VISUAL IMPAIRMENT PREPARATION CERTIFICATION PROGRAM/CONCENTRATION COMPREHENSIVE EXAM RUBRIC (SLO #5)**

Student:

Reviewers:

Category	Exemplary 3	Acceptable 2	Unacceptable 1	Not Attempted 0	SCORE			
					Q	Q	Q	Q
<b>Completeness of Response</b>	Student response addresses all aspects/facets of the questions with detail.	Student response adequately addresses 80% of each aspect/facet of the question.	Student response addresses less than 80% of each aspect/ facet of the question.					
<b>Quality of Content</b>	Student response clearly (100%) relates to the questions and is completely (100%) scholarly and completely (100%) accurate. Student includes key elements and more than four relevant examples.	Student response relates (80%) to the questions and is mostly (80%) scholarly and mostly (80%) accurate. Key elements are present. Student has included two to four relevant examples.	Student response is not relevant (less than 80%) to the questions presented and is not scholarly, nor accurate (less than 80%). Student includes less than two examples.					
<b>Critical and Reflective Thinking</b>	Student response shows insight, critical and reflective thinking on all aspects/facets of the questions. Student includes more than four examples of application of general concepts.	Student response shows some critical and reflective thinking on 80% of the aspects/facets of the questions. Student includes two to four examples of application of general concepts.	Student response is limited to factual interpretation or shows critical and reflective thinking on less than 80% of the aspects/facets of the questions. Student provides fewer than two examples of application of general concepts.					
<b>Evidence of Research- Based Support</b>	Student response shows extensive knowledge and understanding of current research. Student details supportive details/examples and cites more than four sources.	Student response shows evidence of knowledge and understanding of some current research. Student provides some supportive details/examples and cites two to four sources.	Student response fails to show evidence of knowledge and understanding of current research. Student fails to provide supportive details/examples. Student cites less than two sources.					
<b>Written Communication Skills</b>	Student responses are presented in a well-constructed and logical way. Acceptable APA style and grammar are used with no errors.	Student responses are presented in an organized way. Acceptable APA style and grammar are used with 3-5 errors per response.	Student responses are disorganized or unclear. Candidate fails to use acceptable APA style and grammar with more than 5 errors per response.					
<b>TOTAL POINTS</b>								

Was the student able to successfully complete at least 3 of the 4 submitted responses? Yes\_\_\_\_No

