

Special Education M.Ed. Program Context Statement

Category 1: COST AND REVENUE OF DELIVERY

There are several factors that impact the cost and revenue of delivery for the M.Ed. Special Education Program. These include:

- a. coordination of the program (e.g., recruitment, enrollment, course scheduling, recruiting adjunct faculty, program completion, communication with and support of alumni, advisory board, program review and development);
- f. advising of graduate students (both M.Ed. and Ph.D. students)
- g. sponsoring of student level of professional organizations (e.g., UNCG Student Council for Exceptional Children)
- h. cross-listing of faculty with other departments to support teacher preparation requirements (e.g., .50 FTE for School of Education level coordination of required edTPA for pre-service teachers);
- i. cross-listing of faculty to support related programs on campus (e.g., Beyond Academics post-secondary program for students with extensive support needs; that is college-aged students who did not earn a regular K-12 diploma);
- j. covering of sections of cognate courses required for students in other departments and units including the Honors' College;
- l. advising, teaching, and mentoring of doctoral students, including chairing dissertation supervisory committees, serving on additional dissertation supervisory committees, teaching doctoral seminars, mentoring for research and publication requirements);
- m. coordination of the Doctorate in Special Education program;
- n. coordination of the Fellows Program; and
- o. same limited faculty responsible for each of the five (5) special education teacher preparation programs and most of the doctoral level seminars.

Category 2: ACADEMIC PROGRAM DEMAND & INSTRUCTIONAL PRODUCTIVITY/EFFICIENCY

There have been several internal changes in faculty since 2019 that have severely impacted the instructional productivity and efficiency of the M.Ed. program. These include:

- b. the loss of four (4) tenured or tenure-track faculty members in the department, and through death, resignations, and retirements, thus requiring remaining faculty to be assigned to additional courses in the Doctorate in Special Education program and other teacher preparation programs; and
- c. the enrollment of one (1) tenured special education faculty member in the UNC System Phased Retirement Program (2022-23 through 2024-25) resulting in a decrease from 1.0 FTE to 0.5 FTE available for teaching courses and mentoring doctoral scholars.

None of these faculty lines have been returned to the department, thus these faculty transitions have resulted in current faculty completing all the roles and responsibilities for this and the other special education programs, which previously were completed by six (6) faculty members until 2019; that is a decrease from 6 faculty members in 2019 to 3.5 faculty members in 2023.

This decrease in faculty has had two (2) overarching impacts on the program. First, recruitment efforts have decreased because of the lack of faculty availability. Second, some courses previously offered every year are now being offered every other year. If courses are eliminated, students will not be able to complete the requirements for their degree programs and for state teacher licensure. If programs are eliminated, the chronic critical shortage of special education teachers in the state will continue to grow. **To clarify, North Carolina has a chronic and critical shortage of special education teachers. According to North Carolina's governor, the state faces more than 5,000 teacher vacancies (source: WLOS news, August 2023).**

According to the North Carolina Department of Public Instruction (NCDPI), the teacher shortage in NC is well publicized and school districts find it difficult to hire qualified candidates to educate our children. In fact, one of the school districts with which special education faculty collaborate has indicated that they are recruiting their bus drivers to teach classes; that is, they are recruiting individuals with high school diplomas to fill the role of special education teacher and serve students who, by federal law, should be receiving specially-designed instruction provided by a licensed special education teacher. The impact is that students with the most intense and diverse learning needs will receive a less than minimally adequate education.

In spite of this shortage of special education teachers, the number of students enrolling in NC universities to pursue careers in special education has been declining for several years; this also is evident on a national basis. While it is clear that recruitment efforts must increase tremendously to begin to address the chronic critical shortage of special education teachers, such an increase is not possible given the significant decrease in special education faculty.

Category 3: EXTERNAL CONTRACTS AND GRANTS

While exceeding expectations in this area, additional external contracts and grants are possible to support undergraduate, graduate, and doctoral students. Many competitions occur annually to support both teacher and doctoral scholar development, as well as research projects in which students may participate to develop relevant expertise (e.g., U.S. Office of Education).

Category 5: GRADUATE STUDENT PROGRAM SUCCESS

The department GA (M.Ed. Student) helps serve the department and undergraduate needs on campus. Graduate students are involved in community engagement (SCEC events, Children's Festival at UNCG Homecoming) and presenting at conferences (NCDPI EC Conference, NCCEC Conference)

OTHER CONSIDERATIONS

- a. Of the 33 credits required for this degree program, 9 credits are taken across three programs (PAIL, MAT, M.Ed.) while 3 credits are offered in another department. Meaning 21 credits are offered solely for this program. However, of these credits, a section of one of the classes (SES 612) is offered for another department.
- b. Students currently in program with 2025 completion date
- c. Several PAIL students interested in continuing into M.Ed. program