

**Unit Plan for Assessing and Improving  
Student Learning in Degree Programs**

*Doctoral Program in Special Education*

**Unit: Special Education**

**Unit Head approval:**

**Date: April 9, 2008**

**SECTION 1: PAST ASSESSMENT RESULTS**

**Brief description of changes or improvements made in your unit as the result of assessment results since 2000.**

Since 2000 faculty in the Department of Special Education have engaged in the evaluation and continuous improvement of the doctoral program. The department has been involved in several Doctoral Leadership grants that have allowed students to focus on specific research areas. A doctoral leadership grant in collaboration with the Department of Speech and Hearing Science provided doctoral funding and advanced seminars focused on speech and language acquisition in young children with disabilities. The current doctoral leadership grant, *Preparing Leaders in Access by Design (PLAD)* focuses on preparing dynamic, visionary leaders who will empower teachers to help students with disabilities access the general curriculum. This leadership grant provides doctoral students with linkages to the University of Illinois Department of Disability Resources and Educational Services (DRES) and Educational Policy Studies (EPS). Doctoral students are engaged in research, teaching, and service activities with faculty and community members who are engaged in issues related to access to the general curriculum and that incorporate opportunities for service learning activities.

**SECTION 2: REVISED ASSESSMENT PLAN**

**(a) PROCESS: Brief description of the process followed to develop or revise this assessment plan.**

The Department of Special Education Doctoral Programs Committee is responsible for oversight of the doctoral program. This assessment plan has been developed in collaboration with the faculty members on this committee as well as through document reviews of the doctoral leadership grants.

**(b) STUDENT OUTCOMES: List Unit's student learning outcomes (knowledge, skills, and attitudes).**

**Outcome 1.** Graduates will be knowledgeable about the major topics in the special education scholarly literature (e.g., assessment, special education law and policies, universal design for curriculum, etc.) with a focus on their particular research area of interest.

**Outcome 2.** Graduates will conduct and critically assess research both independently and in collaboration with others in the field of special education.

**Outcome 3.** Graduates will access resources (e.g., write grants, design policy initiatives, participate in professional organizations, etc.) to enable them to engage in research, teaching, and service that positively impacts the quality of life for individuals with disabilities.

**Outcome 4.** Graduates will demonstrate the knowledge and skills required to teach and supervise future special education practitioners.

**Outcome 5.** Graduates will demonstrate the ability to share their expertise in the field of special education through scholarly writing, presentations at professional conferences, and through service activities.

**(c) MEASURES AND METHODS USED TO MEASURE OUTCOMES:**

The following methods are used to measure doctoral student outcomes:

1. All doctoral students in collaboration with their advisor are required to write an Individual Plan of Study that is updated on an annual basis. The Special Education Department faculty review doctoral students' grades and academic progress during a meeting held in the spring semester.
2. All doctoral students are required to participate in a formal first year review conducted by the student's advisor and two other faculty members. The first year review is scheduled during the second semester of the student's program.
3. The Department of Special Education uses the College of Education student tracking system to monitor doctoral students' progress throughout their program of study.

**SECTION 3: PLANS FOR USING RESULTS**

**(a) PLANS: Brief description of plans to use assessment results for program improvement.**

Formative and summative assessment results will impact improvements to the doctoral program. The *PLAD* grant action plan describes multiple opportunities to gather evidence both formally and informally that will be used to improve doctoral seminars, traineeships, and courses offered in the department. The *PLAD* Project evaluator also provides evaluative information that the *PLAD* program's principal investigators will use to revise and improve the doctoral program.

**(b) TIMELINE FOR IMPLEMENTATION:**

This plan for assessing and improving the Special Education Department doctoral program is currently in process. A detailed action plan is available for review in the *PLAD* grant.