

**GEORGE MASON UNIVERSITY**  
**COLLEGE OF EDUCATION AND HUMAN DEVELOPMENT**  
**SPECIAL EDUCATION**  
**EDSE 744.001 and 844.001 and 844.657: Current Issues in Special Education**  
**Spring 2011**  
**Monday, 7:20 – 10:00 p.m.**  
**Robinson Hall B, Room 218**

**PROFESSOR:**

Dr. Peggy King-Sears

**Office phone:** 703.993.3916

**Office location** until February or March: 2104 West (inside suite 2100) Building on GMU Fairfax Campus; then Finley Building, Room 218, in Feb or March

**Office hours:** *By appointment only at these times or other mutually agreeable days/times: Mondays 4:30 to 6pm (West office); Tuesdays 3:00 to 4pm (Kellar)*

**E-mail:** [mkingsea@gmu.edu](mailto:mkingsea@gmu.edu)

**COURSE DESCRIPTION:** *Prerequisite: Admission to the PhD in Education program or permission of instructor.*

Helps students develop an understanding of the role of convergent research evidence in addressing current issues in special education practice and policy. Familiarizes students with current issues in special education and the group experimental, single subject, and qualitative research designs used to address these current issues. Students evaluate research studies both in terms of their methodological strengths and weaknesses and their part in providing convergent bodies of evidence that can be used for defining practice and policy.

**LEARNER OUTCOMES**

This course is designed to enable students to:

- 1) Identify current issues in special education.
- 2) Explain the historical, educational, and philosophical roots of current issues.
- 3) Explain the multiple perspectives on the topic.
- 4) Propose implications for policy and practice.

**NATURE OF COURSE DELIVERY**

**Learning activities include the following:**

- Discussion of material read in preparation for course sessions.
- Student participation (e.g., discussion, demonstration, inquiry) in small group and cooperative learning activities, including analysis of critical issues and readings as applied to case-based scenarios.
- Online discussions and other individual assignments
- Access and analyze materials and resources using a variety of medium, including Blackboard, web-based resources, and professional peer-reviewed journal articles.
- Instructor-student dialogue and interactions during and outside of class sessions that bring relevance and heightened skills, knowledge, and insights to the students and Instructor, with a focus on strengthening lifelong learning skills in the professional and ethical practice of special education.

### **Required Text and Readings:**

American Psychological Association (2009). *Publication manual* (6<sup>th</sup> ed.). Washington, DC: Author.

Recent (2007 to 2011) additional readings will be required, and the majority will be acquired by students in the course. Most readings will be original research articles from peer-reviewed journals. Numerous supporting documents (e.g., research articles, federal statutes and regulations, case studies, recent reports from organizations such as <http://www.projectforum.org/>) will be posted on the class Blackboard site and/or otherwise assigned.

### **Recommended\* Research Text and Research Web Sites** (refer to course Bb for research web sites):

Boudah, D. H. (2011). *Conducting educational research: Guide to completing a major project*. Los Angeles: Sage.

\*"Recommended" means you do not need to have these to do well in the course, but if you'd like to have these as resources to use this semester and in the future, consider acquiring now. Because we will be discussing current issues in special education from a research perspective, you need some understanding of basic research. The intent with these recommendations is to provide graduate and doctoral students in this course some basic resource materials about research. The text by Boudah can be acquired directly from the publisher <http://www.sagepub.com/authorDetails.nav?contribId=631797>

### **Required Access to Course Blackboard Site:**

GMU's Blackboard will be used to post important information for this course. You should check Blackboard two or three times a week and right before class to make sure you are informed about class/GMU issues, and to complete the Blackboard discussions or other activity as assigned for course points.

## **GEORGE MASON UNIVERSITY COLLEGE OF EDUCATION AND HUMAN DEVELOPMENT**

### *Student Expectations*

- Students must adhere to the guidelines of the George Mason University Honor Code [See <http://academicintegrity.gmu.edu/honorcode/>].
- Students with disabilities who seek accommodations in a course must be registered with the George Mason University Office of Disability Services (ODS) and inform their instructor, in writing, at the beginning of the semester [See <http://ods.gmu.edu/>]. Alert instructor either prior to or immediately after the first class session.
- Students must follow the university policy for Responsible Use of Computing [See <http://universitypolicy.gmu.edu/1301gen.html>].
- Students are responsible for the content of university communications sent to their George Mason University email account and are required to activate their account and check it regularly. All communication from the university, college, school, and program will be sent to students solely through their Mason email account.
  - *George Mason Blackboard*: GSE Blackboard will be used to post important information for this course (and others) and in completing some course assignments. Materials, resources, dialogues, notes, and other types of information will be housed on this course's Blackboard web site. Plan to access the Bb site several times per week; announcements and resources are posted on the Bb site in between class sessions (e.g., in response to queries or information requested by students). There will also be materials and websites on the Bb site for supplemental resources (choices for these resources may vary from

student to student, depending on interest and focus during the semester). Check Blackboard regularly for additional course materials.

- Students must follow the university policy stating that all sound emitting devices shall be turned off during class unless otherwise authorized by the instructor.
  - The use of electronic devices that produce sound or otherwise interfere with the learning of others (i.e., cell phones, pagers, etc.) is prohibited during class. Please turn these devices off or to vibrate before the start of class.
  - Computers may be used to take notes during class, but they may not be used for internet exploration or other non-class activities during class time.
- Students are expected to exhibit professional behaviors and dispositions at all times.
  - See <http://www.gse.gmu.edu/> for a listing of these dispositions.

#### *Campus Resources*

- The George Mason University Counseling and Psychological Services (CAPS) staff consists of professional counseling and clinical psychologists, social workers, and counselors who offer a wide range of services (e.g., individual and group counseling, workshops and outreach programs) to enhance students' personal experience and academic performance [See <http://caps.gmu.edu/>].
- The George Mason University Writing Center staff provides a variety of resources and services (e.g., tutoring, workshops, writing guides, handbooks) intended to support students as they work to construct and share knowledge through writing [See <http://writingcenter.gmu.edu/>].
  - Students are expected to use APA Guidelines for written work and provide credit when using the work of others. <http://apastyle.org/> is the official web site for the most recent edition of the APA manual. Caution with using web sites or resources other than the APA manual because some may have erroneous information on them. Note that the most recent edition of the APA manual is listed as a required text for this course.
- For additional information on the College of Education and Human Development, Graduate School of Education, please visit our website [See <http://gse.gmu.edu/>].

#### ***Caution about NOT using the APA manual:***

*Tip from the Instructor: Some internet sites attempt to distill the APA style down to a few pages. My observation has been that (a) their focus is on the technical aspects of APA, such as how to cite References, (b) there are sometimes APA errors on these sites, and (c) the major or sole focus is on technical APA with little to no information on clear and excellent writing. All assignments for this course are scored according to the written language and technical aspects of organizing and citing content using the APA style. Caution if you choose to use another source that claims it is providing exemplars of APA, but may not be accurate.*

#### *Assignments and Readings and Due Dates:*

For a satisfactory grade in the course, students are expected to attend all classes, arrive on time, be prepared for class, demonstrate professional behavior (see *Professional Disposition Criteria* at <http://www.gse.gmu.edu> for a listing of these dispositions), and complete all assignments with professional quality in a timely manner. To successfully complete this course, students need to adhere to the due dates for specific readings and assignments to be completed.

*Absences:*

Understanding you are individuals with full and active lives, who have made the intellectual and financial commitment to regularly attend class, there may be an instance when you are not able to attend. If this unlikely event should occur, it is your responsibility to make arrangements to obtain notes, handouts, and lecture details from another student (it is recommended that you have two colleagues in the course for this). Students who are absent are held responsible for the material covered and assignments due as if in attendance. Please be sure to notify the classmate(s) in sufficient time for them to be of assistance for you. Recommended, but not required, is that you notify the Instructor about absences in advance or within 24 hours after an absence. Be aware any points earned for participation in class activities, during a time of absence, will not be earned and cannot be made up. If you need to miss, for any reason, more than two class sessions, contact the Instructor immediately (within 48 hours) with notification of when your course withdrawal will be completed. If you realize after the first class session that this course's requirements are not a match for you for this semester, process your withdrawal immediately (within 48 hours) and notify the Instructor.

*TaskStream Electronic Portfolio Submission of Signature Assignments:*

Every student registered for any EDSE course as of the Fall 2007 semester is required to submit signature assignments to TaskStream (regardless of whether a course is an elective, a one time course or part of an undergraduate minor). TaskStream information is available at <http://gse.gmu.edu/programs/sped/>. Failure to submit the assignment to TaskStream will result in reporting the course grade as Incomplete (IN). Unless this grade is changed, upon completion of the required submission, the IN will convert to an F nine weeks into the following semester. Doctoral students will most likely use the signature assignments, and/or other assignments from this course, within one of their Doctoral Portfolio Reviews.

## **PROFESSIONAL STANDARDS**

### **Course's Relationship to Program Goals and Professional Organization**

This course is part of the George Mason University, Graduate School of Education (GSE), Special Education Program. This program complies with the standards for special educators established by the Council for Exceptional Children (CEC), the major special education professional organization.

The CEC Standards are listed on the following web site: <http://www.cec.sped.org> . Look in the second column on the left, and click on "Professional Standards." On this page, to the right, there is a red book PDF document titled "What Every Special Educator Must Know." The CEC Standards for all beginning special education administrators are located in this document. The primary CEC standard that will be addressed in this class is Standard 9: Professional and Ethical Practice. The standard is stated as follows:

### **Special Education Content Standard 9: Professional and Ethical Practice**

Special educators are guided by the profession's ethical and professional practice standards. Special educators practice in multiple roles and complex situations across wide age and developmental ranges. Their practice requires ongoing attention to legal matters along with serious professional and ethical considerations. Special educators engage in professional activities and participate in learning communities that benefit individuals with ELN\*, their families, colleagues, and their own professional growth. Special educators view themselves as lifelong learners and regularly reflect on and adjust their practice. Special educators are aware of how their own and others attitudes, behaviors, and ways of communicating can influence their practice. Special educators understand that culture and language can interact with exceptionalities, and are sensitive to the many aspects of diversity of individuals with ELN and their families. Special educators actively plan and engage in activities that foster their professional growth and keep them current with evidence-based best practices. Special educators know their own limits of practice and practice within them.

\*ELN is Exceptional Learning Needs

**COURSE REQUIREMENTS, PERFORMANCE-BASED ASSESSMENT, AND EVALUATION CRITERIA**

**Grades:**

95 –100%	= A+
90 – 94.9%	= A
85 – 89.9%	= B+
80 - 84.9%	= B
70 – 79.9%	= C
< 70%	= F

Class Participation (15 @ .5 points per class session)	7.5 points
Synthesis Papers (3 @ 5.5 points each)	16.5 points
Class Presentation	35.0 points
Controversial Issue	35.0 points
Blackboard Interactions/Discussions/Webinars (points vary)	6.0 points
<b>Total</b>	<b>100.0 points</b>

**Class Participation**

**7.5 Points**

Due to the importance of lecture and discussion to your total learning experience, you must both attend and participate in class regularly. Attendance, punctuality, preparation, and active contribution are essential. .5 points are available to earn each of the 15 class sessions.

<b>MINIMAL</b>	<b>GOOD</b>	<b>OUTSTANDING</b>
The student is late for class and/or leaves class prior to the end time. Absences are not documented by following the procedures outlined in the syllabus. The student is not prepared for class and does not consistently and/or appropriately and actively participate in discussions. May fail to exhibit professional behavior and dispositions. <i>Note that course withdrawal is necessary for more than two absences (refer to syllabus).</i>	The student is on time for class, prepared for class, actively and appropriately participates in group and class discussions, and attends the entire class session. The student attends 13/15 classes. When an absence occurs, the procedure outlined in the syllabus is followed.	The student attends all classes, is on time, is well-prepared, and attends 15/15 entire class sessions. The student actively and appropriately participates in class discussions, and supports the members of the class.

**Synthesis Papers on Current Research Topics**

**5.5 points x 3 Synthesis Papers = 16.5 points**

For each of three topics identified as a current issue in special education, select a minimum of two (EDSE 744) or three (EDSE 844) recent (2007 or later) research articles published in peer-reviewed journals on that topic. On no more than three pages (double-spaced, 1” margins, 12-point font), synthesize the three research studies. Each person may be choosing different articles, or if the same articles are selected, the way in which each person synthesizes can vary. *Caution: This assignment is not about summarizing, it is about synthesizing. Think in terms of analyzing the content of the studies, determine how you want to approach a synthesis, and focus on that synthesis for a maximum of three pages.* Follow this format:

1<sup>st</sup> page: Cover sheet

2<sup>nd</sup>, 3<sup>rd</sup>, and 4<sup>th</sup> pages: Your Synthesis (use headings as appropriate, but be judicious)

5<sup>th</sup> page: References (there should be only three references)

EDSE 744 graduate students select TWO recent research articles.

EDSE 844 doctoral students select THREE recent research articles.

**Assignment’s Scoring Rubric**

Synthesis Paper # ____	Points Possible
1. Directions are followed.	/0.25
2. The synthesis of the three research articles makes it clear which areas are being synthesized. Written language is excellent.	/4.75
3. Technical APA (e.g., citations in the assignment, Reference section, headings/subheadings) is completely accurate	/0.5
<b>TOTAL points earned*</b>	<b>/5.5</b>

\*Full earned credit for assignments turned in on time.

**Class Presentation**

**35 points**

Select one current issue in special education on which to conduct a literature review, develop a class presentation, and lead an in-class and/or on-line discussion.

Develop a 20-minute presentation that synthesizes the most current research and/or policies (as appropriate) related to the topic. Prepare a handout that goes with your presentation, and include a Reference page with all sources cited accurately in APA style.

At least two weeks before your Class Presentation, submit the recent research articles that all will read prior to your Class Presentation to the instructor (to ensure criteria for articles have been followed). The instructor will post your articles on the Bb site at least two (EDSE 744) or three (EDSE 844) recent research articles for class colleagues to read in advance of your presentation. Build into your presentation at least one way to *briefly* (two minutes maximum) engage class colleagues in a discussion related to these articles during your presentation. Additionally, *at the conclusion* of your presentation, identify an open-ended question or thought that leads to a brief class discussion, and elicit / answer questions regarding the issue.

EDSE 744 graduate students submit at least TWO recent research articles.

EDSE 844 doctoral students submit at least THREE recent research articles.

<b>Scoring Rubric for Class Presentation</b>	<b>Points Possible</b>
1. Issue and articles' choices are appropriate. Articles submitted to instructor at least two weeks in advance of individual's presentation.	/2.0
2. Quality of presentation content is excellent, including handout. The clarity of information presented (on the PPT) and its importance to the field of special education is excellent.	/25.5
3. Interactions with class colleagues are well-planned, high-level, and stay within the time limit.	/3.0
4. The individual's presentation style and interactions with the audience are professional.	/4.0
5. Reference page and all use of APA (technical and written language) is excellent / completely accurate.	/0.5
<p><b>Questions:</b>                      Did the presenter:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Keep within the time limits?</li> <li>• Reflect poise, clarity, knowledge, and interest in the content being presented?</li> <li>• Make effective use of visuals (i.e., PPT)?</li> <li>• Describe, and stay focused on, the research as it relates to the topic being presented?</li> <li>• Keep the audience's attention?</li> </ul> <p><b>TOTAL points earned</b></p>	<b>/35.0</b>
<b>Comments from instructor:</b>	

## Controversial Current Issue

**35 points**

Identify one controversial issue in special education. Briefly describe the history of the issue, then use research and other types of professional sources to describe what the controversy is about. Focus on at least two advantages/positives/pros and two disadvantages/negatives/cons of the issue. Use a minimum of six (EDSE 744) or eight (EDSE 844) sources; more if necessary. Because you are identifying this as a current issue, ensure some (at least two) of your sources are current (2010, 2011). As with the Synthesis Papers you wrote for this course, aim your focus in writing more on integrating, analyzing, and synthesizing than on identifying and describing (although you will be identifying and describing to some extent). Follow this format:

- 1<sup>st</sup> page: Cover sheet
- Body of the Paper (use these as your major headings):
  - History of Issue (to include cause of controversy) [1 page\*]
  - Advantages (or Positives, or People in Favor of) of the Issue [3 pages\*]
  - Disadvantages (or Negatives, or People Opposed to) of the Issue [3\* pages]
  - Conclusion (to include both a summary and implications, such as for practice or policy) [2\* pages]
- Last page: References

\*page numbers are approximate; more important than quantity of pages is the quality of the messages

EDSE 744 graduate students select SIX recent research articles.
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EDSE 844 doctoral students select EIGHT recent research articles.
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<b>Scoring Rubric for Controversial Current Issue</b>	<b>Points Possible</b>
1. History of the current issue is clearly described. Written language is excellent.	/4
2. One side of the issue is well-developed with at least two advantages, clearly written, well-supported by research or literature, and logically evolves from the available data and history of the controversy. Written language is excellent.	/10
3. The other side of the issue is well-developed with at least two disadvantages, well-supported by research or literature, clearly written, and logically evolves from the available data and history of the controversy. Written language is excellent.	/10
4. The conclusion's summary is well-developed and clearly written. Implications for practice or policy (as applicable) are logically connected to the issue and clearly written. Written language is excellent.	/8
5. Technical APA (e.g., citations in the assignment, Reference section, headings/subheadings) is completely accurate	/3
<b>TOTAL points earned*</b>	<b>/35.0</b>

\*Full earned credit for assignments turned in on time.



**Blackboard Discussions, Interactions, and Webinars**

**6 points**

On about six occasions across the semester, questions or points-of-view or a brief reading or a webinar will be posted on Bb for you to discuss. Specific directions for what you need to do will be posted on Bb. Follow the directions for each Bb posting to earn the maximum points available for that Bb assignment.

**GENERAL RUBRIC for all Assignments  
(when applicable; use these as a guide to accompany the point rubric)**

<b>Evaluation Standards</b>	<b>Exceeds Expectations 3</b>	<b>Meets Expectations 2</b>	<b>Does Not Meet Expectations 1</b>
Paper	Synthesis goes beyond the obvious. Suggestions are creative and realistic. Minimal writing errors.	Includes background information on the issue, explanation of the controversy, summary of pros/cons, and suggestions for policy/practice. Writes in an organized style using APA.	Fails to meet all elements of the stated expectations. Writing is mechanically unsound.
Presentation	Articulates novel implications for practitioners.	Presents a broad, interesting background. Summarizes and analyzes differing views. Presents in an organized style.	Presentation is disorganized or lacking key information.
Face-to-Face Discussion	Encourages dialogue and novel thinking.	Proposes thought-provoking questions or discussion points. Clearly communicates key ideas.	Minimal efforts to engage the audience are made.
Online Discussion	Encourages dialogue and novel thinking.	Proposes thought-provoking questions or discussion points.	Minimal efforts to engage the audience are made.
Link to CEC Standard 9	Clear reflection of professional and ethical desire to embrace ongoing learning and evidence-based practices.	Efforts to engage in an active learning community. Offers reflective ideas showing a desire to learn.	Minimal efforts to engage in learning demonstrated.
Overall Critical Issues Project	The project meets expectations and generates insightful suggestions for how special needs might be better met.	The project clearly identifies a significant issue AND provides clear connections to a need for lifelong learning.	This project fails to clearly identify a significant issue OR fails to provide clear connections to a need for lifelong learning.

Course Schedule		
Date	Topic	Readings and Assignment Due
Class #1 1/26	Introductions Overview of Course Content of Syllabus Group Suggestions for Current Issues and Controversies  <i>Perusing peer-reviewed journals</i> <i>Using the GMU online library</i>	
Class #2 1/31	Issue # 1 Historical Perspectives (PKS assigns readings)  Individual students target their (a) Issue Topic and (b) Class Presentation Topic. For each, students gather recent research for all to read.  Describe differences between summarizing and synthesizing.	Readings and Bb activities on Bb throughout the course
Class #3 2/7	<b>Issue # 2 _____ (PKS assigns readings)</b> <b>Class Presentations begin Class 3.</b>  <b>These dark shaded areas will be completed after people target their (a) Issue Topic and date and (b) Class Presentation and date during Class 2 on January 31<sup>st</sup>.</b>	
Class #4 2/14		
Class #5 2/21		<i>Synthesis # 1 due no later than 7:20pm Class 5</i>
Class #6 2/28		
Class #7 3/7		
<b>No Class on March 14 – Spring Break!</b>		
Class #8 3/21		<i>Synthesis # 2 due</i>
Class #9 3/28		
Class #10 4/4		
Class #11 4/11		
Class #12 4/18		<i>Synthesis # 3 due</i>
Class #13 4/25		↓
Class #14 5/2	Course Summary and Conclusion Course Evaluations	
Class #15 5/9* to 5/16	*5/9 is a GMU Reading Day. 5/16 is the date for courses that have Final Exams. Consider that the Controversial Issues assignment is your final exam.  May 16 by 10pm is the latest date/time to submit <b>Controversial Issues</b> assignment.	