Current Issues and Trends in Special Education

IL 2542/3542

University of Pittsburgh

Fall 2025

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Office Hours: By Appointment
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Meeting Dates: Sept. 6, Oct. 4, Nov. 8, Dec. 6
Meeting Time: 1:00-5:00 PM
Meeting Location: 5602 WWPH

Course Description

This course focuses on philosophical issues as well as research findings that impact the education of persons with disabilities. Through a critical analysis of assigned readings, this course will facilitate a thorough understanding of various perspectives on the education of infants, toddlers, children, and youth with disabilities. The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) and the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) continue to be discussed at the national level, alongside debates about federal, state, and local special education policies, regulations, and practices. Participants in this course will have the opportunity to explore special education debates, enabling them to evaluate the arguments presented more effectively, participate actively and intelligently in discussions, and articulate a reasoned position on key issues.

The issues discussed in this course include the federal government's role in special education; who should be served in special education and the role of special education in prevention activities; inclusion of students with disabilities in general education classrooms, in general education curricula, and in state and district wide assessments; overrepresentation of minority students in special education; issues related to special education funding; teacher evaluations and leadership. This hybrid course meets in person one Saturday a month with continuous interaction through online discussion board activities and responses to readings.

Course Goals/Learning Objectives

After completing this course, each student will be able to:

1. Identify critical issues facing the field of special education.
2. Summarize alternative positions related to each of these issues, grounding these positions in research and other professional literature.
3. Articulate his/her own position relative to these issues in a well-reasoned manner.

Required Texts

Bateman, D., & Yell, M. L. (2019). Current trends and legal issues in special education. Thousand Oaks, California: SAGE Publications. - Permalink

Nario-Redmond, M. R. (2020). Ableism: the causes and consequences of disability prejudice. Wiley Blackwell. Permalink

Course Requirements and Expectations

Activity	Points	Due Date(s)
Introduction	10	Thurs., 9/4
Current Article Share Out	40 (10 points each)	Sat., 9/6, 10/4, 11/8, 12/6
Reading Reflections or Virtual Discussions	90 (30 points each)	Thurs., 10/2, 11/6, 12/4
Case Study / Topic Deep Dive Proposal Doc	10	Thurs., 10/9
Materials & Final Class Presentation	150	Sat., 12/6
Total	**300**	

1. ***Reading Reflections or Virtual Discussions (Students will choose one activity to complete in between class meetings, 30 points each x 3= 90 points total):*** In-depth reflections will help students to process the readings and support participation in class discussions. Students will be expected to review assigned readings weekly and select a follow-up activity to complete. Students will reflect on the readings assigned throughout the course through engagement activities and/or virtual group discussions. The purpose of the reflection and/or discussion assignment is to provide students with an opportunity to react to a variety of topics and examine how they are relevant to their past, present, or future experiences in the field. Students should also be prepared to discuss and share their thoughts and opinions during the scheduled Saturday sessions in class. The instructor will post discussion threads. After reading the assigned chapters, students will select from a variety of reflection and/or discussion activities. Students may select a different choice each week (i.e., you may do the Choice Board one week and a Virtual Discussion the next week).

    a. ***Reading Reflection Activity Choice Board:*** Students who select this option will choose one reflection activity from a choice board to complete and upload to the discussion thread. See the Reading Reflection Activity Choice Board and schedule for due dates.

    b. ***Virtual Discussion:*** Students who select this option will identify a common day and time during the week and meet virtually to discuss the assigned reading(s). Students are encouraged to pose thoughtful questions and reflections to the group. Each member must actively participate in the virtual meeting. One student should record the meeting and post it to the discussion thread. See schedule for due dates.

2. ***Long Term Project (Students will choose one; 150 points)***

a. ***School District Case Study/Presentation:*** This will entail a detailed analysis of a school district to explore a real-world application of the issues covered in the course. Findings will be shared with the class.

b. ***Topic Deep Dive/Presentation:*** Exploration of a selected topic will result in a presentation shared in class. The instructor must approve the topic selected.

2a. School District Case Study/Presentation (150 points total – 125 points for content, 25 points for presentation style and professionalism):

Students choosing this option will select a school district in which to carry out a case study. The case study will provide students with an opportunity to explore how an individual school district responds to a variety of issues addressed in the course. Students will report information and data for each of the topics listed below in addition to interacting with the data by analyzing information with a *supervisor's eye*.
Students should keep in mind that, when engaging in case study research, it is important to work with data and information collected to identify themes, highlight trends, provide commentary, etc. For example, demographic data tell a story about a school district when thoughtfully analyzed. Students should aim to look beyond simple data by analyzing and elaborating on what the data reveals about the state of special education in the chosen district. Students are asked to think deeply about and comment on the information gathered, as this piece is intended to be something that can ultimately be included in a professional portfolio. Students should be prepared to present their findings at the end of the semester.
The case study report will address the following 12 elements:

1. Demographics of the school district, including number of students in special education
2. Representation of minorities in special education, including the calculation of over- or under-representation in the district
3. Qualifications and experience of the school district leadership in special education
4. Special education funding in the district (broken down by category)
5. School district pre-referral, referral, and placement procedures and data
6. Exact criteria used in the school district to determine the diagnosis of learning disabilities
7. Service delivery models used in the district and how resources required for full inclusion are reported
8. Participation rates/data of students with disabilities in statewide accountability assessments
9. The performance levels/results of students with disabilities on state assessments
10. The district's/community reaction to state assessment results
11. A review of changes that need to be made in special education from the perspective of someone in the district
12. A review of changes that need to be made in special education from your perspective as someone who has studied the district

2b. Topic Deep Dive /Presentation (150 points total – 125 points for content, 25 points for presentation style and professionalism):

Students selecting this option will identify an area of special education programming or policy to explore independently. The project aims to provide an opportunity to think critically about an issue in a manner that acknowledges an understanding of all sides of the issue, including important past, present, and future implications relating to the topic. This issue can be one selected from topics covered in the course or an additional field-related topic of personal interest. The information presented should be grounded in research, yet be relevant and practical. If an issue already covered in the course is selected, the review should go beyond the points already discussed. Students might consider selecting a topic about which they may truly want to present at a professional in-service or conference. Students should be prepared to present their findings at the end of the semester.

Assignment Submission and Grading Policies

Assignments should be completed and submitted on time by the due date. Assignments should be submitted electronically via Canvas. Special circumstances will be considered if communicated with the instructor **prior** to the assignment being late. Late assignments will earn **50% reduced point value** unless arranged in advance with the instructor.

Friendly/Encouraging Note: My intentions with the submission policy are meant to encourage students to be in communication with me while ensuring additional time can always be taken…while still maintaining some level of accountability. Most importantly, the submission policy for my class is structured in a way that makes it so that students do not ever need to lose credit at all for late submissions because all that is required is a request for an extension prior to the due date. So, if you find that you need more time, please, let me know. I will always work with you. But, after the due date passes, if there has not been any communication, I will need to follow the policy as outlined above.

APA style formatting should be used for papers including citations and references where appropriate.
Grades will be assigned as follows:

Percentage of Points Earned	*Letter Grade*	*Level of Attainment*	*Grade Points*
100+	A+	Honors	4.00+
94-100	A	Satisfactory	4.00
90-93	A-		3.75
88-89	B+		3.25
83-87	B		3.00
80-82	B-		2.75
78-79	C+		2.25
73-77	C		2.00
70-72	C-	Unsatisfactor	1.75
<70	F		

Academic Integrity

Students in this course will be expected to comply with the University of Pittsburgh's Policy on Academic Integrity. Any student suspected of violating this obligation for any reason during the semester will be required to participate in the procedural process, initiated at the instructor level, as outlined in the University Guidelines on Academic Integrity. This may include, but is not limited to, the confiscation of the examination of any individual suspected of violating University Policy. Furthermore, no student may bring any unauthorized materials to an exam, including dictionaries and programmable calculators.

Disability Services

If you have a disability that requires special testing accommodations or other classroom modifications, you need to notify both the instructor and Disability Resources and Services no later than the second week of the term. You may be asked to provide documentation of your disability to determine the appropriateness of accommodations. To notify Disability Resources and Services, call (412) 648-7890 (Voice or TTD) to schedule an appointment. The Disability Resources and Services office is located in 140 William Pitt Union on the Oakland campus.

Statement on Classroom Recording

To ensure the free and open discussion of ideas, students may not record classroom lectures, discussion and/or activities without the advance written permission of the instructor, and any such recording properly approved in advance can be used solely for the student's own private use.

Religious/Cultural Observations

Respectful consideration will be afforded any individual who requests to be excused in advance. It is understood that the student will contact the instructor prior to the observance and will be responsible for making up any missed work.

Attendance

Attendance is required for each face-to-face session of this hybrid course. If you are unable to attend the class you must notify the instructor in advance of the class session that you will be missing. Under approved circumstances the classwork may be made up in the form of a written assignment.

Your Well-Being Matters

College/Graduate school can be an exciting and challenging time for students. Taking time to care for yourself and seeking appropriate support can help you achieve your academic and professional goals. You are encouraged to maintain a healthy lifestyle by eating a balanced diet, exercising regularly, avoiding drugs and alcohol, getting enough sleep, and taking time to relax.

It can be helpful to remember that we all benefit from assistance and guidance at times, and there are many resources available to support your well-being while you are at Pitt. If you or anyone you know experiences overwhelming academic stress, persistent difficult feelings and/or challenging life events, you are strongly encouraged to seek support. In addition to reaching out to friends and loved ones, consider connecting with a faculty member you trust for assistance connecting to helpful resources. The University Counseling Center is also here for you. You can call 412-648-7930 at any time to connect with a clinician.

If you or someone you know is feeling suicidal, please call the University Counseling Center at any time at 412-648-7930. You can also contact Resolve Crisis Network at 888-796-8226. If the situation is life threatening, call Pitt Police at 412-624-2121 or dial 911.

For more information and resources to support student well-being, visit the University Counseling Center's website and look for more information in upcoming newsletters.

TLL Departmental Grievance Procedures

The rights and responsibilities of faculty and students are described in the University's Academic Integrity Guidelines at: https://www.provost.pitt.edu/academic-integrity-guidelines

The purpose of the guidelines is to ensure the rights and responsibilities of faculty and students in their relationships with each other. When a student in TLL believes that a faculty member has not met their obligations (as an instructor or in another capacity) as described in the Academic Integrity Guidelines, the student should follow this procedure:

1. The student should talk directly to the faculty member to attempt to resolve the matter.
2. If the matter cannot be resolved at that level, the student should talk to the relevant program coordinator.
3. If the matter remains unresolved, the student should talk to Dr. Sheila Conway, TLL Student Liaison.
4. If needed, the student should next talk to the SOE associate dean of students (currently Dr. Andrea Zito).
5. If the matter still remains unresolved, the student should file a written statement of charges with the dean's designated Academic Integrity Administrative Officer (currently Dr. Andrea Zito)

CEC Special Education Supervision Certificate Mapping

ASCI1 K1	IL 3542	Evaluation process and determination of eligibility.
ASCI1 K2	IL 3542	Variety of methods for assessing and evaluating the performance of individuals with exceptionalities.
ASCI1 K3	IL 3542	Strategies for identifying individuals with exceptionalities

ASCI3 K3	IL 3542	Continuum of program options and services available to individuals with exceptionalities.

ASCI3 K4	IL 3542	Pre-referral intervention processes and strategies.

SEA5 K1	IL 3542	Models, theories, and philosophies that provide the foundation for the administration of programs and services for individuals with exceptionalities and their families.
SEA7 K3	IL 3542	Importance and relevance of advocacy at the local, state, and national level for individuals with exceptionalities and their families.

Course Schedule

Dates	Readings/Topics	Assignments
Weeks 1-2 (8/25 - 9/5)	Syllabus Chapters 12, 14 & 15 (Bateman/Yell) ● Preparing General Education Teachers to Work with Students with Disabilities ● Teacher Shortages and Teacher Attrition ● Preparing Future Leaders and Administration	1. Introduction Activity ● Due Thursday, 9/4 ● 10 pts. 2. Find at least one current article on a topic and bring to class ● 10 pts.
Class Meeting 1	**Saturday, 9/6 (1 - 5 pm) 5602 WWPH** Class #1 Agenda	1. Share article in class
Weeks 3-6 (9/7- 10/3)	Chapter 1-4 (Bateman/Yell) ● Special Education Law, Litigation, and Policy Guidance ● Ci3T, RTI, MTSS ● FAPE ● Working with Parents Chapters 1-2 (Nario-Redmond) ● Defining Ableism ● Origins of Ableism	1. #1 Reflection -**or-** Zoom Discussion ● Due Thursday, 10/2 ● 30 pts. 2. Find at least one current article on a topic and bring to class ● 10 pts.
Class Meeting 2	**Saturday 10/4 (1 - 5 pm) 5602 WWPH** Class #2 Agenda	1. Share article in class 2. Begin Presentation ● **Option #1**- Upload Case Study Starter Doc ● **Option #2** - Upload Topic for Deep Dive Doc ● Due Thursday, 10/9 ● 5 pts.
Weeks 7-11 (10/5 - 11/7)	Read Chapter 5-8 & 13 (Bateman/Yell) ● Transition to Adulthood ● Discipline ● Research-to-Practice Gap ● Accountability ● School-to-Prison Pipeline Read Chapters 3 & 4 (Nario-Redmond) ● Justifying Ableism ● Stereotypes	1. #2 Reflection -**or-** Zoom Discussion ● Due Thursday, 11/6 ● 30 pts. 2. Find at least one current article on a topic and bring to class ● 10 pts. 3. Continue work on Presentation
Class Meeting 3	**Saturday, 11/8 (1 - 5 pm) 5602 WWPH** Class #3 Agenda	1. Share article in class 2. Continue to work on Presentation

Week 12-14 (11/9 - 12/5)	Read Chapter 9-11 (Bateman/Yell) ● Early Childhood Special Education ● Bully Prevention and Positive School Climate & Culture ● School Mental Health Read Chapters 5-8 (Nario-Redmond) ● Attitudes and Interactions ● Contending with Ableism ● Interventions to Reduce Prejudice ● Social Change and Disability Justice	1. #3 Reflection -**or-** Zoom Discussion ● Due Thursday, 12/4 ● 30 pts. 2. Find at least one current article on a topic and bring to class ● 10 pts. 3. Continue work on Presentation
Class Meeting 4	**Saturday, 12/6 (1 - 5 pm) 5602 WWPH** Class #4 Agenda	1. Share article in class 2. Case Study / Topic Deep Dive Presentations (150 points)