

Rutgers University
Graduate School of Education
Department of Educational Psychology, Special Education
15.293.522 Learning Disabilities-ONLINE
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Instructor: Stephanie DeLuise
Email: steph.deluise@gmail.com

COURSE DESCRIPTION

This advanced level graduate course provides an overview of the field of learning disabilities (LD). The focus of the course is on causes, characteristics, assessment, and instructional needs of students with LD. Topical coverage addresses cognitive characteristics that distinguish students with LD in areas of attention, memory, and organization, and the academic needs of students in writing, reading, and math, and social competence. The needs of students with LD across the continuum of educational placements will be examined. Ongoing developments in the field with changing conceptualizations of LD and alternative identification methods to IQ-achievement discrepancy (e.g., RTI) will be covered in depth.

COURSE LEARNING OBJECTIVES

Upon completion of this course, students can expect to:

- Identify and describe the historical milestones, legal basis, and current issues in educational programs for students with learning disabilities;
- Understand the current educational definition of individuals with LD, including identification criteria, labeling issues, and current incidence;
- Understand the psychological characteristics of students with LD across the lifespan, including intelligence, perception, memory, metacognition, attention, and language development;
- Understand the academic characteristics of individuals with LD in reading, written language, and mathematics;
- Understand the social-emotional characteristics of individuals with LD, including emotional self-awareness and self-regulation, self-concept, social imperceptiveness, and learned helplessness;
- Identify and describe basic research supported instructional strategies and practices for teaching individuals with LD;
- Identify professional organizations, governmental agencies, and advocacy groups relevant to providing services and supports to individuals with LD, as well as related journals and Web-based resources.

OVERVIEW OF COURSE ACTIVITIES

The course includes substantial weekly readings, structured review and discussion of readings and associated topics, quizzes on the readings, student-produced study guides, Website resource review project, field observation project, and a final exam. PowerPoint slides that highlight select content from each week's assigned readings,

reinforcing key concepts and providing a partial review will be posted on the eCollege site by the instructor. Each week of the course will run from Monday morning through Sunday night (with the exception of the first week, which begins on Tuesday, January 17th). **Students are strongly encouraged to complete all or most of the assigned week's course readings during the weekend preceding week of the course.**

COURSE MATERIALS

- Mercer & Pullen (2009). *Students with Learning Disabilities* (7th edition). Merrill. ISBN 0132228424 (The text is referred to as M&P in the readings assignments section)
- Swanson, Harris, & Graham (2006). *Handbook of Learning Disabilities* (Paperback). ISBN 1-59385-303-3 Guilford Press.
- Other required readings available online in the eCollege course site.

ONLINE STUDY GROUPS

Students are encouraged to form online study groups. All students who wish to exchange names and email addresses to help find study group partners should email the instructor who will post the list of names and email addresses on the class eCollege site, available to all enrolled students. After that, students can contact one another about forming study groups.

Q & A FORUM

Students are encouraged to post questions they have about the more challenging parts of the assigned readings, as well as related topics the class covers, in the online **QUESTION and ANSWER Forum**. It is always a good idea to first try to answer your own questions by rereading content and conferring with fellow students—hopefully, you are part of a study group. But if you can't resolve the issue, post the question and the instructor will usually post an answer that day (or sometimes the next day, depending on when the question was posted). Chances are that if you are confused about part of the readings, some fellow students are also confused, so everyone can benefit from this feature of the course.

PROFESSIONAL DISCOURSE

As current and future teaching and allied field professionals, students are expected to present themselves and act in the online class discussions as they would in a professional meeting in the school district where they work. This applies to several dimensions of professional conduct:

- Students are expected to be respectful of divergent beliefs and opinions that may be voiced in online class discussions, offering constructive questioning and feedback as appropriate.
- Except where otherwise customary (e.g., deaf community terminology), students are expected to use *person-first* language when speaking of students with disabilities (e.g., *student with a learning disability*, **NOT**, *LD student*), and never use demeaning terms such as *retard*. Students should avoid language that objectifies human beings as “things” of pity, such as, *wheelchair-bound*, *confined to a wheelchair*, or *suffers a disability*.

LATE ASSIGNMENTS POLICY

All assignments are expected on time. Late assignments will receive a reduced grade, generally, a flat reduction in grade equivalent to 10% of the total possible assignment grade per day late (or part thereof).

Students with bona fide emergencies should contact the instructor as soon as possible to discuss special arrangements in order to avoid grade penalties. The instructor will work constructively and collaboratively with students who **communicate early** regarding special problems completing assignments on time, with no grade penalties in special situations where advance communication takes place and the circumstances are deemed reasonable, but **will not be supportive of last minute requests for extensions on assignment due dates.**

STUDENT CONDUCT and ACADEMIC HONESTY

The Rutgers University Code of Student Conduct can be accessed at:
<http://studentconduct.rutgers.edu/university-code-of-student-conduct>

For information on the Rutgers University academic integrity policy, please go to:
<http://studentconduct.rutgers.edu/academic-integrity>

Related policies and procedures may also be found in the Rutgers Graduate School of Education Catalog:
http://catalogs.rutgers.edu/generated/gse_current/pg32.html

For any and all assignments and class activities, **no copying of any kind is allowed**, unless copied text is placed within quotations and author/source is appropriately cited. Excessive use of quoted material in essay assignments, quizzes, and tests is strongly discouraged and this will tend to result in lower grades (students need to express themselves using their own language).

Clear evidence of extensive plagiarism will likely result in a grade of F for the assignment AND course.

ACCOMODATIONS FOR DISABILITIES

Students requiring accommodations related to disabilities will be provided all necessary supports and accommodations. In such circumstances, students should make sure that they communicate their needs in advance to the instructor in coordination with the Rutgers Office of Disability Services to ensure that they receive appropriate supports commensurate with their needs.

COURSE GRADING PLAN

1. Class discussion participation (@ 4 points per class x 14 sessions = 56 points).
2. Quizzes (12 quizzes at 10 points each = 120 points)
3. Student-produced study guide (20 points)
4. Website Review Sheets (24 points)
5. LD Class Observation Project (60 points)
6. Take-home final exam (60 points)

Course Grades: (out of 340 possible points)

GRADE	PERCENT	POINTS
A	93.00 – 100.0 %	Point totals will be converted to percentages. N.B. A grade of 86.99 earns a B, not a B+ Any mid-course modification of course assignments will be reflected accurately as percentage of total possible points earned.
B+	87.00 – 92.99 %	
B	81.00 – 86.99 %	
C+	77.00 – 80.99 %	
C	70.00 – 76.99 %	
F	Under 70 %	

ASSIGNMENT/GRADING REQUIREMENTS: ADDITIONAL DETAILS

- 1. Participation:** Students are required to participate in weekly online class discussions. For each weekly session, the instructor will post 3-5 discussion prompts. For each discussion prompt, each student is required to post an original contribution (about 4-6 sentences), and also at least one reply to another student's original posting or student's response to another student's original posting (also about 4-6 sentences). Students' will be graded on the thoughtfulness, originality, and overall quality of their postings/replies to others. Students must post all of their comments for that week by 10pm ET Sunday night. Students are required to read all student postings.

EXAMPLE DISCUSSION PROMPT: Discuss what you see as potential promises and pitfalls associated with RTI.

EXAMPLE high-quality posting: I believe that RTI is not a panacea, but rather, an unproven approach to LD identification and prevention of early reading problems that may hold promise. Using early screening and intervention for emerging reading problems, avoiding a "wait-to-fail" approach, RTI can help change the learning trajectory for many early elementary students for the better. But to do this well would require a massive commitment of financial and human resources, professional development, staff buy-in, and administrative leadership in the schools. And the question remains, once a student receives remediation through multiple RTI tiers, and is subsequently referred, evaluated, and classified as having a learning disability, what types and intensities of academic services will they receive, compared to those in the RTI tiers to which they were not fully responsive? We also need to consider the new roles for both general and special education teachers under an RTI approach and the data management systems necessary to help make it all work well.

EXAMPLE low-quality posting: I like what Robert said about RTI and I agree with most of his points. His response was very thoughtful. I mean, you can't expect schools and teachers to solve all of the world's problems—there really are limits. And what about the parents? What are their responsibilities to help kids learn to read early on? Everybody needs to work together under an RTI model to help kids succeed.

- 2. Quizzes:** The course includes 12 brief weekly quizzes (weeks 2-13) based on the assigned readings. The quizzes are designed to help students engage in structured review of critical content from each week's assigned readings. Students will be required to demonstrate a complete knowledge of key points and issues in the readings and also to apply this knowledge with critical thought. Quizzes will be *open notes, open book*, but students are not allowed to use the Internet and they are not allowed to consult with other people regarding the quiz questions. Any questions regarding the quizzes must be directed to the course instructor.
- 3. Student-produced Study Guide.** Beginning at session #2, 1-2 students per week will each post a 5-6 page, single spaced, outline form, bulleted study guide for a particular reading from that week. Each student will be assigned a different reading. The student-produced study guide will be posted on the class eCollege site, available to all students enrolled in the course. A grading rubric will be posted on the site as well as an exemplar completed study guide assignment.
- 4. LD Class Observation:** Each student will spend a **minimum of 3 hours of total** observational time across a **minimum of 4 separate visits** in an inclusion class, resource room, or self-contained special education room addressing the needs of several students with LD. **The target students for the observation must be formally classified as having a learning disability.** The observations must be with the same teacher. The graduate student will interview the teacher and will also collect samples of teaching and assessment materials as permitted. **The student will write a 12-17 page paper (double spaced) that examines how the needs of the target students with LD are being served**, based on the observations, interview, and document review. A project rubric with greater detail on the assignment and the required report format will be posted online on the class ECollege site. **The project is due by the end of class week #13.** Students need to arrange their

own school access where possible, but those needing help securing school placements should contact the instructor.

5. **Website Review Sheets:** Students will review selected LD and related special education resource Websites, filling out a review sheet on each Website (review sheets posted on the course eCollege site). Students will complete the review sheets individually and **turn them in at class session #12**.
6. **Final Exam:** The final exam will contain three sections: (1) **Test of Specific Knowledge** (25 T-F/Mult. Choice), (2) **Framing Issues** (One shorter essay response: 2 pages), (3) **Applying and Extending Knowledge to Problem-Solving:** Given a school-related prompt, students will describe possible answers/solutions, and discuss key issues (One longer essay response: 3 pages).

SCHEDULE OF WEEKLY READINGS AND CONTENT COVERAGE

M&P= Mercer & Pullen text

Handbook of LD = Swanson, Harris, & Graham text

All other assigned readings are available on the course eCollege site

SESSION #	CONTENT COVERAGE	READINGS (by informal, shortened name)
1 (1/17-1/22)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Course Introduction • Overview of Learning Disabilities 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • M&P Chapter 1 • LD: Historical Perspectives
2 (1/23-1/29)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Overview of LD (continued) • Medical Aspects of Learning Disabilities 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • M&P Chapter 2 • Handbook of Neurodevelopmental and Genetic Disorders in Children-Chapter 6 • Handbook of LD-Chapter 15 (Skim past anatomical and more technical terms; read for basic meaning & main findings) • Handbook of LD-Chapter 16 (Skim past more technical terms; read for basic meaning & main findings)
3 (1/30-2/5)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Early Identification and Intervention • Assessment 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • M&P Chapter 13 & 4 • LD Assessment-Speece & Hines (2007)
4 (2/6-2/12)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Challenges to Traditional Views • RTI and Evolving Views of LD 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>RTI: Definitions, Evidence, and Implications...</i> (2003) • Fuchs & Fuchs RTI Blueprint (2004) • Fuchs & Deschler: What We Need to Know About RTI (2007) • Fuchs et al: Blurring of Special Education (2010) • Smart RTI
5 (2/13-2/19)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Working with Families • Adolescents with LD • Transition Programming 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • M&P Chapters 12 & 14 • Transition: Why it does not work (2010)
6 (2/20-26)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Social-Emotional-Behavioral Issues 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • M&P Chapter 11 • Handbook of LD-Chapter 14 (Self-Concept) • Social-Emotional Learning and LD • Social-Emotional Side of LD

7 (2/27-3/4)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ADHD 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> M&P Chapter 3 ADHD-Pfiffner, Barkley, & DuPaul, Chapter 15 OSEP ADHD Guide
8 (3/5-3/9) Spring Recess 3/10-3/18	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Theory & Practice Addressing LD Educational Settings & Services Instructional Models <p>(HEAVY READING LOAD-- START THIS WEEK'S READING IN ADVANCE)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> M&P Chapters 5 & 6 Handbook of LD Chapter 23 (Cognitive Strategy Instruction) Handbook of LD Chapter 24 (stop@p.413) (Direct Instruction) Handbook of LD Chapter 25 (Cooperative Learning)
9 (3/19-3/25)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Spoken Language 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> M&P Chapter 7 Child and Adolescent Development for Educators Chapter 7 (Language Development) Early Language Development and Language Learning Disabilities
10 (3/26-4/1)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Cognitive, Metacognitive, and Memory Issues with LD 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Handbook of LD-Chapter 11 (Memory Difficulties) Metacognition and LD Handbook of Educational Psychology Chapter 12
11 (4/2-4/8)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Reading <p>(HEAVY READING LOAD-- START THIS WEEK'S READING IN ADVANCE)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> M&P Chapter 8 Handbook of LD Chapter 9 (RAN) Handbook of LD Chapter 10 (Cognitive Processes and Reading) Handbook of LD Chapter 17 (Remediation of Word ID and Decoding) Handbook of LD Chapter 18 (Teaching text structure)
12 (4/9-4/15)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Writing 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> M&P Chapter 9 Handbook of LD Chapter 21 (Handwriting/Spelling) Self-Regulated Strategy Development-Writing Instruction for Students with Disabilities
13 (4/16-4/22)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Math 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> M&P Chapter 10 Handbook of LD Chapter 12 (LD in Arithmetic: Problem-Solving Differences and Cognitive Deficits) Handbook of LD Chapter 19 (Enhancing Mathematical Problem Solving of Students with MD) Balancing Perspectives on Mathematics Instruction
14 (4/23-4/29)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Access to the General Education Curriculum 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Strategies to Improve Access to the General Education Curriculum Universal Design for Learning –Delaware SKIM Checkpoints 1.1 to 9.3 (EXPLORE 1 link from each of 9 Guideline sections) http://www.udlcenter.org/implementation/examples