

University of Kentucky Educator Preparation Unit
Executive Summary
Teacher Preparation Program in Visual Impairments
Graduate Alternate (Option 6) Certification

The Graduate Alternate (Option 6) Certification Program in Visual Impairments will train candidates with the skills and knowledge to provide educational services to students who are blind and visually impaired, including those with additional disabilities, while working on the job. Teachers who are certified to work with students who are blind and visually impaired often work one-on-one with students in several schools across a district. These itinerant Teachers of the Visually Impaired (TVIs) provide modifications so that the student can fully access the core curriculum in their local classroom. The TVI also provides instruction in the Expanded Core Curriculum (ECC) by teaching skills such as braille, use of low vision devices, use of assistive technology, organizational skills, social interaction skills, sensory efficiently skills, and recreation and leisure.

The Teacher Preparation Program in Visual Impairments is a hybrid program, including both face-to-face and on-line courses. The program is designed to be integrated with the unit theme of Research and Reflection for Leading and Learning. In each component of the program, attention is given to providing candidates with opportunity to develop skills in research-based practice that encourages growth as reflective leaders focusing on improved learning for individuals with visual impairments. Coursework reflects best practices in the field and is continually updated based on new research. In addition, candidates are taught to critically analyze their own teaching so they may engage in ongoing self-improvement. It is the goal for candidates to leave the program actively engaged in the field of blindness and visual impairment where they have the resources for continued professional growth.

The Teacher Preparation Program in Visual Impairment's continuous assessment plan is designed to assess candidate proficiency and program effectiveness. Continuous assessment of candidates involves a developmental approach to educator preparation in which candidates are expected to progress toward mastery of standards as they practice and gain competence with increasingly complex pedagogical and professional tasks. A wide range of basic data items, i.e., grade point averages (GPAs), admissions test scores, student teaching evaluations, and certification examination pass rates, is reviewed by the Visual Impairment (VI) Program Faculty, audited and monitored at the unit level, and fed into the unit's comprehensive data system. These data sources constitute important information for program development and unit operations.

There is a great need for this program due the critical shortages of TVIs across the country, including here in Kentucky. Rural areas are especially impacted, thus the rationale for offering a hybrid program in which candidates from across the state can access. This would be the only program in Kentucky that offers a certification in visual impairments. Furthermore, it allows candidates who have experience in blindness and visual impairment to make a career change into education, build on the knowledge they already have, and provide quality instruction for students who are blind or visually impaired who may otherwise go without a TVI.

The program is designed for candidates who have a minimum of a bachelor's degree in a field other than education, but have a background in working with individuals with blindness and visual impairment. Candidates in this program will work as a TVI while going through the program and will be provided mentoring both by the school district and university to ensure their success. Admissions requirements for the Teacher Preparation Program in Visual Impairment meet the same rigorous standards as other teacher preparation programs at the University of Kentucky, including all testing requirements, dispositions, 4c's, and code of ethics requirements. Program completion requires passing grades in all coursework with an overall GPA of 3.0, successful field experiences, and demonstration of attainment of all required standards.

In addition to the core visual impairment (VI) courses, which cover braille codes, the ECC, assessment, anatomy and physiology of the eye and the impact of vision loss on learning, and modification to the core curriculum, seven other courses are required. Four of these courses address core special education concepts and skills by providing the candidates with an overview of special education, collaboration and inclusion, behavior

management, and legal issues in special education. Candidates also will take courses in child development, teaching reading, and teaching math in order to provide them with a thorough grounding in general teacher education. This comprehensive program results in the completion of 33 credit hours of VI specific coursework over five semesters, and 21 credit hours in special and general education. At least four classes in the special and general education areas must be completed prior to entering the program.

During coursework, candidates complete a minimum of 120 hours of field experiences (practicum), followed by a 40 day culminating field experience which is supervised by the mentor and university. Through careful tracking using the OTIS On-line Electronic Portfolio System, the Teacher Preparation Program in Visual Impairments ensures that all candidates have practicum experiences that fulfill the seven required categories of field experience, in addition to opportunities to interact with students at various grade levels, abilities, socioeconomic statuses, and race and nationalities other than their own. Over 80 hours of field experiences (practicum) occur in conjunction with the Kentucky School for the Blind and Kentucky Deaf-Blind Project summer programs that provide instruction to students who are blind and visually impaired from across the state.