DESCRIPTION

This course provides an analysis of historical and contemporary trends in theory and research in the field of special education, with particular emphasis on language and learning disabilities. Students are encouraged to evaluate alternative theoretical frameworks for conceptualizing atypical children and to engage in the analytic reading of research in the field of special education. The major topics covered will be: alternative theoretical perspectives on ‘high incidence’ disabilities; general methodological issues in the study of atypical children; and an introduction to the history of research on atypical patterns of development of oral language, reading, written language, math, and social behavior. Within each area, history and trends in the field will be outlined, specific research design and measurement issues will be addressed, theoretical and methodological controversies will be highlighted, and selected empirical studies will be critically examined. Students will be expected to produce three papers: a brief critique of an individual research article, a comparative critique of two related research studies, and a critical review of the research literature addressing a specific substantive issue in the field of special education. In addition, students will give an oral presentation based on their final paper.

METHODS OF EVALUATION

Two article critiques (20% of grade), a term paper (30%), a class presentation (15%), and participation in class discussion (35%).

COURSE OBJECTIVES

1. To appreciate the sociohistorical context of the field of Special Education, with an eye to contextualizing past, present, and future trends in the field.

2. To identify and discuss major theoretical and empirical issues in the study of language and learning disabilities, both historically and currently;

3. To refine skills for analyzing research studies in the area on both conceptual and methodological grounds;

4. To develop critical thinking and effective scholarly communication—both oral and written.

COURSE REQUIREMENTS

Required Readings

Individual chapters and research articles.
**Recommended Resources**

A recent text on research design (see me if interested).

**Article Critiques**

Students will write two short papers in which they provide a detailed summary and analysis of research studies. The first paper (approx. 3 to 4 pages) will focus on a single study, while the second paper (approx. 5 to 6 pages) will provide a comparative critique of two related studies. Each study should be described in enough detail so that a naive reader could understand the hypotheses, methodology, findings, and conclusions presented. Following this summary, you should provide an analysis of the strengths and weaknesses of the study, concentrating on the clarity and significance of the research question(s), the adequacy of the subject selection and description, the appropriateness of the tasks and procedures, and the interpretation of results. In the case of the comparative paper, each of the articles should be summarized briefly, but the heart of the paper will be a critical evaluation of the articles, both internally and in comparison with each other. The target articles for both papers should be approved in advance, and you should turn in a copy of the articles along with your paper.

**Research Review Paper and Presentation**

Students will complete one longer paper (approximately 15-20 pages) and conduct a one-hour class session on the topic. The paper will consist of an analytic review of theory and research related to a topic of relevance to the field of language or learning disabilities. Prior to your class session, you should identify a key paper (theoretical or empirical) that all students will read in advance. The class session will involve the coordination of a group discussion about the issues raised in the target paper and in your broader review.

A draft of the final paper will be due two weeks in advance of the final deadline. The draft will be returned with comments and suggestions for revision. You will then incorporate that feedback into the final version of the paper.
DISCUSSION TOPICS AND ASSOCIATED READINGS

Topic 1: Historical and Conceptual Issues


Chapter 2: Legal and epistemological underpinnings of the construction of disability.


Topic 2: General Theoretical Issues


Topic 3: Behavioral and Neuropsychological Perspectives on Disability


Topic 4: Information Processing and Constructivist Perspectives on Disability

**Topic 5: General Methodological Issues**


**Topic 6: Oral Language Disorders**


Article Critique #1 Due
Topic 7: Reading Disabilities


Topic 8: Writing Disabilities


Article Critique #2 Due

Topic 9: Math Disabilities


Topic 10: Social Factors in Language/Learning Disabilities


Outline of Term Paper Due
Topic 11: Current Issues/Controversies: Identification and Assessment


Draft of Term Paper Due

Topic 12: Current Issues/Controversies: Service Delivery Models


Topic 13: Current Issues/Controversies: Reforming the System?


Selected chapters from *Rethinking special education for a new century*.

Final Paper due