

ELEMENTARY EDUCATION AND SPECIAL EDUCATION, BSE

WISCONSIN EXPERIENCE

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UW–Madison’s vision for the total student experience, the Wisconsin Experience (<https://wisconsinexperience.wisc.edu/about/>), combines learning in and out of the classroom. Tied to the Wisconsin Idea (<https://www.wisc.edu/wisconsin-idea/>) and steeped in long-standing institutional values – the commitment to the truth, shared participation in decision-making, and service to local and global communities – the Wisconsin Experience describes how students develop and integrate these core values across their educational experience.

UW–Madison encourages students to mindfully engage in four core concepts throughout their time on campus: Empathy & Humility, Relentless Curiosity, Intellectual Confidence, and Purposeful Action (<https://wisconsinexperience.wisc.edu/intellectual-confidence/>).

Since its inception, the School of Education has embraced the concepts of the Wisconsin Experience, providing opportunities for students to learn in venues beyond the traditional classroom. Our students also independently seek out related activities and experiences, thus creating their own unique Wisconsin Experience.

ELEMENTARY EDUCATION AND SPECIAL EDUCATION (ESEE) AND THE WISCONSIN EXPERIENCE

Community-Based Learning

RP & SE 300 Individuals with Disabilities offers a field-based experience where students work directly or indirectly with individuals with disabilities. Each year, hundreds of students are placed in various community settings across Madison. This experience provides students with valuable, first-hand knowledge of the services and contributions made to support individuals with disabilities, encouraging learning beyond the traditional classroom. These real-world experiences allow students to better understand the community and its needs, extending their education beyond textbooks and lectures.

Learning from Current Practitioners

Teacher candidates in the elementary education and special education programs gain extensive field experience in schools, culminating in a full-time student teaching assignment alongside a cooperating teacher. The strong partnership between the teacher candidate, their field supervisor, and the cooperating teacher in Madison-area schools ensures robust support from day one. Many graduates are offered teaching positions by the schools where they completed their fieldwork.

Guest Speakers

Guest speakers contribute to learning in many ESEE courses, providing insights into the daily lives of individuals with disabilities and discussing the range of community organizations that support and advocate for them.

Through these interactions, students gain a better understanding of how these organizations operate and their broader social impact.

Additionally, a wide range of guest speakers participate in Special Education practicum and student teaching seminars. These guests may include school district personnel, parents and family members, teachers, and individuals with disabilities.

Field Experiences

Students in the ESEE program engage in multiple field experiences in K-12 schools, culminating in a full-time student teaching assignment. These experiences allow students to apply their classroom learning in real-world educational settings, enhancing their professional development and deepening their learning beyond the classroom.

Partnering with Community Organizations

The ESEE team collaborates with local organizations to assist with food delivery and support families in need. Students also volunteer with organizations like Special Olympics, Camp Kesem, and Girls on the Run, which empowers girls of all abilities to build social, emotional, and physical skills. These volunteer opportunities give students the chance to engage with diverse community experiences, extending their learning beyond academics and encouraging personal growth through service and active involvement.

Community Employment

The Department of Rehabilitation Psychology and Special Education has strong connections with the community. Students in the department often find both paid and volunteer opportunities in school and community organizations that serve children with disabilities and their families. Examples include the Schools of Hope Tutoring Program, Madison School and Community Recreation, and Gio’s Garden.

Field Trips

While completing field experiences, students enjoy trips to places in the Madison community, such as the Madison Children’s Museum (<https://madisonchildrensmuseum.org/>), Madison Public Library’s Play Lab (<https://www.madisonpubliclibrary.org/spaces/playlab/>), Allen Centennial Garden (<https://allencentennialgarden.wisc.edu/>), Centro Hispano (<https://www.micentro.org/>), and the Madison Literacy Network (<https://www.litnetwork.org/>). These outings offer diverse learning opportunities outside the classroom, fostering new perspectives and deepening their understanding of the community they serve. The trips also encourage students to take initiative in discovering more about the world around them.

Study Abroad

We encourage students to explore different cultures and educational systems through study abroad opportunities. If a full semester or year-long program is not feasible, the School of Education offers several short-term, faculty-led, study abroad programs. These experiences give students a global perspective, expanding their educational journey beyond local or traditional settings.

Clubs and Organizations

ESEE students have numerous opportunities to join campus organizations, such as Aspiring Educators of Wisconsin and Game Design and Development. These clubs provide students with additional avenues to connect with like-minded peers, develop practical skills, and deepen their understanding of their field. By independently selecting activities that align with their personal interests and goals, students enhance their educational experience and foster a well-rounded Wisconsin Experience.