

**University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign
Department of Special Education**

Prior Experience Guidelines for Applicants to Master’s Programs

Applicants to master’s programs in the Department of Special Education are required to complete relevant experiences in the field before applying. We hope this allows applicants to sample the possibilities in this profession and gain personal insight to confirm their career choice. When evaluating an applicant’s experiences, we consider the following:

- **Sustained interaction**
A goal of this requirement is to assist applicants in developing insight into the impact of disability on the lives of individuals. As such, sustained, long-term interactions are needed and are preferred over short-term or single day opportunities of the same amount of clock time
- **Settings**
We encourage applicants to seek school-based experiences in order to gain an initial idea of the roles and responsibilities of special educators in the US. We also value experiences that lead to a broad understanding of the many different settings in and outside of school in which special educators might provide service. We will, therefore, equally consider experiences gained in other activities (e.g., community-based recreation, respite care, etc.).
- **Variety**
We recognize that one single experience could not expose applicants to the range of possibilities in the field. As such, we encourage applicants to seek experiences with individuals of different ages and different disabilities.

Examples

More Desirable	Less Desirable
Ongoing recreation support with one or more individuals for a few hours each week across a 6-8 month time period (e.g., coaching a team, providing individual supports for participation in community activity)	Same number or more clock hours accrued through “one time” only events sponsored by a park district (e.g., volunteer at holiday parties or Special Olympics)
Tutoring, respite care, or babysitting with one individual or family for an extended period of time. For example, full-time childcare during summers or for multiple years, targeted tutoring with one individual in a few subject areas that continues throughout a school year. The development of individual relationships is the key dimension.	Providing similar services on an intermittent basis in which the same children or families may or may not attend from time to time. Examples: tutoring in a study lab and helping whoever shows up, working with a volunteer agency to provide child care for special events or parent meetings
Working as a teaching assistant for students with disabilities in an early childhood center or a school for a school year or summers.	Volunteering in a classroom once or twice a week for an hour or completing 30 hours of observation for an undergraduate course on exceptional children.