

**Indiana University**  
**Request for a New Credit Certificate Program**

Campus: Indiana University Bloomington

Proposed Title of Certificate Program: **Preparing Educators for Students with Autism (PESA)**

Projected Date of Implementation: Fall 2013

TYPE OF CERTIFICATE: (check one)

UNDERGRADUATE CERTIFICATES – These programs generally require 12-29 credits of undergraduate-level academic work.

**X GRADUATE CERTIFICATES** – These programs generally require 12-29 credits of graduate-level academic work or undergraduate academic work carrying graduate credit.

POST-BACCALAUREATE CERTIFICATES – These programs generally require 12-29 credits of undergraduate-level academic work, although students enrolling in these programs must have completed their baccalaureate degrees.

**I. Why is this certificate needed? (Rationale)**

There is a growing interest in autism spectrum disorders (ASD) within the field of Special Education. Among all developmental disabilities, ASD has the fastest growing prevalence rate. Although as recently as two decades ago, its prevalence was estimated at 1 out of every 10,000 children, recent studies conducted by the Centers for Disease Control now identify 1 in 88 children as having an ASD diagnosis (Rice, 2009). Individuals with ASD show wide diversity in communication, cognitive, and academic abilities.

The Preparing Educators for Students with Autism (PESA) program will incorporate current research, evidence-based practices in autism assessment and intervention, and personal perspectives of individuals with ASD and their families. The coursework is structured to bridge the research-to-practice gap, addressing a critical need identified by the National Autism Center (National Autism Center, 2009). The primary goal of the program is to strengthen the knowledge and skills of educators, professional practitioners, and others, such as family members, who support individuals with ASD.

The PESA program will be available to masters and doctoral level students. It will be fully online and available to students across Indiana, the U.S., and abroad, made possible by the now nearly universal use of the personal computer and Internet. The online venue is convenient for working educators and other practitioners, parents, and those who live in other time zones, as they can complete and post their work any time of day or night.

Successful completion of the five-course sequence will provide evidence that participants have mastered content related to core areas of difficulty in ASD – social interaction, communication, appropriate behavior, and academics. Students who complete the program will develop,

strengthen, and/or update their knowledge and skills in special education or aligned fields, leadership or advocacy activities, or in the provision of other forms of support for individuals with ASD.

## II. List the major topics and curriculum of the certificate.

Course Title	Number	Semester Offered	Description
1. Introduction to Autism Spectrum Disorders (ASD)	K631 (3 credit hours)	Fall	Provides a broad but substantive survey of research, issues, and trends; promotes critical examination of what is known and is unknown about ASD; and examines perspectives of individuals with autism spectrum disorders (ASD) and their families.
2. Promoting Social Competency in ASD	K632 (3 credit hours)	Summer	Focuses on social development in ASD, assessment and planning, creating supportive and inclusive learning environments, strategies for intervention, and case analysis and application.
3. Communication Development, Assessment, and Intervention in ASD	K633 (3 credit hours)	Spring	Explores unique developmental trajectories of social communication in ASD and assessment approaches that support individualized planning to build on strengths and interests.
4. Preventing and Intervening with Challenging Behavior for Students with ASD	K634 (3 credit hours)	Fall	Explores challenging behaviors associated with autism; examines both the internal and environmental correlates of such behaviors; explores preventive and intervening strategies to redirect challenging behavior and promote positive interactions.
5. Evidence-based Professional Practice to Support School-Based Learning for Students with ASD	K635 (3 credit hours)	Spring	Focuses on identifying meaningful outcomes, addressing family and individual priorities, collaborating across disciplines and with families, adapting inclusive settings to accommodate individual needs, building on strengths, and creating peer-supported learning opportunities.
Total credit hours: 15			

A Communication Guide supports orderly and active student participation by detailing expected roles and responsibilities, participation and timelines, procedures for communications, online discussion protocols, and criteria for written assignments. The guide also includes detailed guidance for navigating the course site and using its online features.

Course offerings will be implemented on the following schedule indicated in the table above, as enrollments allow. If a needed course cannot be offered, a coordinator-approved Indiana University-offered course may be substituted. Students should be able to complete the course sequence in one year.

## III. What are the admission requirements?

Applicants to the PESA program must submit documentation of the following:

- Undergraduate degree from an accredited institution with a minimum GPA of 3.0
- Completed online application, transcripts, personal goal statement, and letters of recommendation
- For international or non-native English speakers: TOEFL scores or at least 600 for paper test, 250 for computer test
- GRE scores are not required

**IV. List the major student outcomes (or set of performance based standards) for the proposed certificate.**

Students will describe and demonstrate skills related to:

General knowledge of ASD:

- Unique strengths and challenges of individuals across the ASD spectrum
- Characteristics, parameters, and prevalence of ASD
- Developmental and biological theory and evidence
- Intervention considerations across the age spectrum
- Family and individual perspectives

Promoting social competency for students with ASD

- Social challenges in ASD and how they align with essential skills for school settings
- Assessment of social skills and applying the results in writing meaningful and measurable social objectives,
- Intervention factors associated with beneficial social outcomes
- The use of single subject research methodology to evaluate outcomes of social skill interventions

Supporting communication competency for students with ASD

- The interaction between communication and behavior
- Early intervention emphasizing the social underpinnings of communication
- Assessment of social communication
- Classroom strategies to promote functional and socially oriented communication

Promoting behavior that supports meaningful interaction

- The relationship between core vulnerabilities of autism spectrum disorder and challenging behaviors
- Preventive strategies, Functional Behavior Assessment, Positive Behavior Supports, behavioral intervention strategies, and cognitive behavior interventions
- Stereotyped and repetitive behaviors, tantrums, aggression, self-injury
- Challenging behavior prevention and management across developmental levels, the autism spectrum, and settings

- Importance of working with families to design and implement interventions

Promoting learning in school settings

- Planning and implementing instruction in inclusive environments
- Preparing ASD-sensitive accommodations that support learning
- Collaborative planning to maximize student success in inclusive environments
- Promote literacy with an emphasis on comprehension and social understanding

**V. Explain how student learning outcomes will be assessed (student portfolios, graduate follow up, employer survey, standardized test, etc.) and describe the structure/process for reviewing assessment findings for the purpose of ensuring continuous improvement of the certificate.**

Coursework is centered around weekly asynchronous guided discussions, live videoconferences, peer-review of others' work, and individual and collaborative project-based activities. Weekly units provide posted readings, guided activities, asynchronous and synchronous discussion, small group collaboration, audio introductions to the unit, and explicit feedback on discussions and assignments. Each course includes additional projects or papers. Examples are literature reviews and observation and planning projects. The latter include development of profiles of individual's communication, inclusion in academic work, social competence, and the functions that challenging behavior serves. These individual analyses are accompanied by intervention plans that use information gathered from the profile and from course readings.

Student learning will be assessed via the same means we use for campus-based programs:

- Detailed feedback on papers written and presented as part of seminars and other courses, assessed by the instructor of the course
- Project-based performance on research projects carried out within courses, assessed by the instructor of the course.

**VI. Describe student population to be served.**

The program will be open to post-baccalaureate students who are prepared to engage in upper level graduate study with a concentration in autism spectrum disorders. Students may enroll in the program to fulfill the full course sequence or may take individual courses on a stand-alone basis. The courses are expected to attract:

- Master's and doctoral students in Special Education
- Graduate students in the School of Education
- Graduate students across the Bloomington and other IU campuses across the state
- Post-baccalaureate educators, other professionals, and family members who are interested in extending their knowledge of ASD

**VII. How does this certificate complement the campus or departmental mission?**

The five PESA courses are appropriate for Special Education master's and doctoral students. The courses could comprise an area of concentration for the Special Education for Indiana Schools Today (SPEDFIST) master's program or a focus area for Special Education doctoral students. The PESA certificate will not, in itself, be a teaching license but will complement teacher education course offerings, making students more marketable. Students pursuing Special Education graduate teaching certification, a master's degree, or a Ph.D. may use PESA courses as electives or as a complementary certificate. By attracting additional students to Special Education's graduate courses, PESA will contribute to the strength of the program.

PESA courses, individually or as a whole, are also expected to attract students from related programs across the School of Education and the Bloomington campus, including those in the Department of Speech and Hearing Sciences, the School of Psychology and Brain Sciences, the School of Public Health, and others. Beyond the Bloomington campus, the program is expected to complement course offerings from graduate programs on other IU campuses throughout the state and for teachers in the field who want to upgrade their knowledge and skills. In addition, the program will have a national and international reach, attracting new students to Indiana University's special education courses.

**VIII. Describe any relationship to existing programs on the campus or within the university.**

The PESA courses will be listed as online electives with the Special Education for Indiana Schools Today (SPEDFIST) master's program and the Special Education doctoral program. The courses will count toward both degrees.

**IX. List and indicate the resources required to implement the proposed program. Indicate sources (e.g., reallocations or any new resources such as personnel, library holdings, equipment, etc.).**

The School of Education's New Initiative for Distance Education Advancement (New IDEA) Development & Implementation grant supported development of the PESA Academy. The grant funded course development, technical support, resources, and personnel. The existing human and financial resources are sufficient and a small amount of remaining funds will be dedicated to ongoing marketing activities. The School of Education has resources to further support these activities, increasing the potential for sufficient enrollment to support regular course offerings. No additional university resources will be needed for the implementation of the PESA Certificate.

**X. Describe any innovative features of the program (e.g., involvement with local or regional agencies, or offices, cooperative efforts with other institutions, etc.).**

PESA directly addresses the rapidly increasing needs of this growing field. A primary contribution is PESA's focus on bridging the research-to-practice gap by grounding students in a strong emerging research base that can help them interpret the wealth of information and misinformation broadly accessible through the internet and popular media sources. As a flexible completely online program, it is adaptable to the busy schedules of potential students. Its highly

interactive, online structure is designed to actively support critical thinking and provide convenient access to online libraries, synchronous and asynchronous discussions, and fruitful and productive interactions among professors and students. PESA's two primary faculty members bring extensive experience in autism research, scholarly publication, online instruction, and field-based practice and additional adjunct faculty knowledgeable in ASD have been recruited.

#### References

- National Autism Center. (2009). *The National Autism Center's National Standards Project: Findings and conclusions*. Randolph, MA.
- Rice, C. (2009). Prevalence of autism spectrum disorders -- Autism and Developmental Disabilities Monitoring Network, United States, 2006. *MMWR Surveillance Summaries*, 58(SS-10), 1-24.