

**Profile of the
Special Education Department
University of Wisconsin–Whitewater
2024 Regents Teaching Excellence Program Award Recipient**

Highlights from nomination materials:

- Designated in 1973 by the UW Board of Regents to provide services for students with disabilities; for 50 years, has prepared special educators in response to changing needs of special education.
- Only department of its kind in the university system; mission: “To prepare professionals to become change agents who use evidence-based practices and critical thinking to support individuals with disabilities and their families across a variety of contexts.”
- Dr. Amy Stevens, current department chair; Professor Rowand Robinson, interim chair at the time of the department’s nomination.
- The department has evolved through the following practices: weekly instructional reflections, biweekly teaching topics, fieldwork programming team, and curricular mapping.
- High-impact practices (also described as active learning) include community-based learning, internships, international field experiences, student research, and writing.
- International experiences with three education partners in Ecuador, Jamaica, and Sweden.
- Recruitment, retention, and graduation rates are high; underrepresented minority student retention exceeds all other majors in the College of Education and Professional Studies.
- 100 percent post-graduation employment rate; 100 percent of both undergraduate and graduate students report working in their field after graduation.
- One of the department’s unique programs is LIFE (Learning Is for Everyone), which provides a two-year college experience for young adults ages 18-25 who have an intellectual disability. Students participate in traditional student organizations, engage in traditional coursework, join volunteer events, and live in typical university residential halls. The LIFE program is recognized as a Comprehensive Transition and Postsecondary Program by the U.S. Department of Education.
- UW-Whitewater’s Special Education Department has flourished over 50 years; the department thrives with a robust staff of faculty and academic staff that actively recruits, retains, and graduates a steady flow of students as Special Educators. The department integrates several programs, including international field opportunities in Ecuador, Jamaica, and Sweden, community-based learning, and other high-impact practices.
- Recruitment through middle school outreach, high school programs such as the “I Want to Be a Teacher Camp,” Partners in Education dual-enrollment courses, pathways for paraprofessionals/adult learners and for add-on licenses (such as Cross-Cat4U), Grow-Your-Own partnerships with school districts, and advertisement with professional organizations (such as Reading League of Wisconsin, Wisconsin Council for Exceptional Children).
- Students stay connected with the department in many ways, including serving as cooperating teachers, adjunct instructors, and stakeholders for advisory committees. Several former graduate students completed their doctoral degrees and connect with faculty professionally through their research at other universities; a former undergraduate student recently returned as a faculty member.

In the words of a colleague:

- “In my role as interim dean of the College of Education and Professional Studies, I am regularly contacted by administrators from P-12 schools in our region. They reach out to praise us for how well prepared our teacher candidates are and to ask who we have graduating in that term who might be a good fit for their school. Frequently, special educators are who they reach out about. Something I hear quite regularly is how well prepared these teacher candidates are in the areas of classroom/behavior management and in assessment.”
—Lana Collet-Klingenberger, Professor and Interim Dean, College of Education and Professional Studies, UW-Whitewater