

## Visual Impairment and Orientation & Mobility Preparation in Texas

Information on how to become certified as a teacher of students with visual impairments or a certified orientation and mobility specialist

Certification to work with students with visual impairments is available, regardless of where you live in Texas. Training is provided through Texas Tech University and Stephen F. Austin State University.

For more information about VI and O&M preparation, please contact:

<b><u>General Information</u></b>	<b><u>Stephen F. Austin State University</u></b>	<b><u>Texas Tech University</u></b>
<p>Cecilia Robinson, Coordinator Personnel Preparation</p> <p>Outreach Programs Texas School for the Blind and Visually Impaired (512) 206.9464 <a href="mailto:robinsonc@tsbvi.edu">robinsonc@tsbvi.edu</a></p>	<p>Heather Munro, PhD (VI/O&amp;M) <a href="mailto:omvi@sfasu.edu">omvi@sfasu.edu</a></p> <p>Michael Munro, PhD (VI) (936) 468.1483 <a href="mailto:omvi@sfasu.edu">omvi@sfasu.edu</a></p> <p>Beverly Jackson (O&amp;M) (936) 468.5511 <a href="mailto:omvi@sfasu.edu">omvi@sfasu.edu</a></p>	<p>Rona Pogrund, PhD (VI) (806) 252.8026 <a href="mailto:rona.pogrund@ttu.edu">rona.pogrund@ttu.edu</a></p> <p>Nora Griffin-Shirley, PhD (O&amp;M) (806) 834.0225 <a href="mailto:n.griffin-shirley@ttu.edu">n.griffin-shirley@ttu.edu</a></p> <p>Phoebe Okungu, PhD (Deafblindness) (806) 834.0286 <a href="mailto:phoebe.okungu@ttu.edu">phoebe.okungu@ttu.edu</a></p>
<p><b>Website</b> <a href="#">Professional Preparation in Visual Impairments</a></p>	<p><b>Websites</b> <a href="#">Master of Education in Special Education (Online or Hybrid)</a>  <a href="#">Graduate-level Certification Prep</a></p>	<p><b>Website</b> <a href="#">The Virginia Murray Sowell Center for Research and Education in Sensory Disabilities</a></p>

## Who should read this?

- Have you been thinking about a career change? Are you interested in teaching, but want a **non-traditional** setting and job assignment?
- Do you have an interest in working with children with visual impairments (VI)?
- Have you considered being a teacher of students with visual impairments (TSVI) or a certified orientation and mobility specialist (COMS) but don't know how to get certified or get training?
- Are you an independent worker who enjoys collaborating with teams, a good problem-solver, and eternally curious?

**Then, a career working with students with VI might be for YOU!**

## What is in this packet?

Beginning your career as a TSVI or COMS through a university program has at least two steps: being accepted in a participating university *and* being accepted by the certification program. To assist you in this process, please review the following information prior to applying:

1. *VI and O&M Preparation* (this document)
2. [Typical Roles and Responsibilities of VI Professionals](#) (also on [page 17-21](#))

## What is my career or training options

There are two types of VI professional preparation at the university level:

- teacher of students with visual impairments (TSVI)
- certified orientation and mobility specialist (COMS)

## What are the training prerequisites for a TSVI and a COMS?

You may seek certification as either a TSVI or as a COMS. Although a VI professional may choose to become dually certified as both a TSVI and a COMS, each is a separate profession with separate professional standards. The prerequisites will vary depending on the training option you choose.

### Teacher of Students with Visual Impairments (TSVI) prerequisites

- Initial standard teaching certification, preferably in special education, elementary, or secondary education, **and**
- Bachelor's degree from an accredited university.

For information on how to obtain a Texas Teaching Certificate, click [Certification](#).

### Certified Orientation and Mobility Specialist (COMS) prerequisite

- Bachelor's degree from an accredited university.

## What will I be studying?

The specific program of study will depend on the training option (TSVI or COMS) and on other additional factors. Below is a basic listing of course topics. Exact course titles will vary by university and training option.

**Common courses for all VI professionals**

- All students will take the following courses:
  - Foundations in Visual Impairments
  - Structure and Function of the Visual System (Anatomy)
  - Methods for Students with Multiple Impairments
  - Basic Orientation and Mobility

**Teacher of students with visual impairments (TSVI)**

- In addition to the common courses, the VI certification program includes:
  - Braille,
  - Academic Methods, and
  - TSVI Internship/Practicum.

All TSVIs must learn braille to be fully certified and to have access to an *emergency permit*. You will be required to take the Braille TExES exam. You must take and pass the Braille TExES exam and VI TExES exam prior to being certified. The Braille TExES exam is offered four times a year, and you will be able to take that exam after successfully passing the course. The VI TExES exam is taken toward the end of your program.

If you have not taken an overview course in special education, you must also complete a Survey of Exceptionalities course to become a TSVI. Please coordinate your specific needs with your university advisor.

**Certified orientation and mobility specialist (COMS)**

In addition to the common courses, the O&M program of study requires additional coursework. SFASU and TTU address the same competencies; however, they arrange their courses a bit differently.

<b>TTU</b>	<b>SFASU</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• O&amp;M Seminars (6 credit hours)</li> <li>• ‘Blindfold’ or ‘Cane’ (6 credit hours)</li> <li>• O&amp;M Internship (3 credit hours, 350 supervised hours)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• ‘Blindfold’ or ‘Cane’/Beginning Clinical Practicum (6 credit hours across both summer semesters)</li> <li>• Intermediate Clinical Practicum (3 credit hours)</li> <li>• Advanced Clinical Practicum (3 credit hours)</li> <li>• Internship (6 credits, 350 supervised hours)</li> </ul>

If you already hold a VI certification and were trained at a university, have already taken the common courses, and have worked in the field since you completed your training, you may not need to take them again. However, it is important to confirm with either SFASU or TTU that credits earned

for courses previously taken have not expired per university policies. Most districts do not require COMSs to hold a teacher certification; however, they require ACVREP certified orientation and mobility certification.

### **How much will the program cost? Is financial assistance available?**

Both SFASU and TTU have funds to assist with the cost of tuition for Texas residents. Each university distributes funds according to university program guidelines. The specific method used and amount of stipends vary by university. This is a competitive process. You should discuss it with the faculty advisors at the university of your choice.

**TTU students will be required to travel to Lubbock and Austin as part of some courses.** Students are responsible for these required travel costs. For COMS students who receive grant funding, tuition, a stipend for room and board for summer cane courses may be covered, pending funding. O&M students are required to come to Lubbock for 4 1/2 weeks of training in the summer.

**SFASU O&M candidates will be required to come to the Nacogdoches campus for 6 weeks of training in the summer.** No other travel to the university is required for either the TSVI or the O&M program. Room and board are the *financial responsibility of the candidate*. Candidates are also responsible for any required travel costs to and from summer blindfold training. Contact the program facilitator for more information about room and board/lodging options for SFASU O&M cane classes.

Candidates will be responsible for ordering and paying for their books. However, some ESCs have either books to loan or funds to help defray the cost of the books. Contact your regional education service center for more information ([page 22](#)).

### **How are courses offered?**

Courses are offered through a blend of distance learning strategies via the internet, Zoom or fully online, therefore the programs are called hybrid programs. The exact blend will depend on your location, the university, and specific course. For more information, you should contact the universities listed on the first and last pages of this newsletter. TTU's O&M program has 2 face-to-face courses each summer in Lubbock. The visual impairment internship requires one hour a week of meeting on Zoom during the internship semester(s).

SFASU graduate O&M courses (other than the "blindfold"/cane skills course) are offered online in a hybrid format (online and livestream/synchronous meetings).

### **Is coursework available in deafblindness?**

Texas Tech University offers a Deafblind Graduate Certificate Program. The coursework is available as a stand-alone TTU certificate or an area of emphasis with the [Special Education - Deafblindness \(M.Ed.\)](#). For additional information, click [Deafblindness - Graduate Certificate](#).

### **Should I contact my regional education service center (ESC)?**

Each regional service center has at least one VI contact. You are **strongly encouraged** to contact the VI consultant at your regional educational service center (ESC) for various reasons.

- The VI contact person or team at your ESC will be a source of support and resources for you in the future.
- VI programs at your ESC have resources that may be helpful. Resources may include reference materials, journals, and specialized equipment. Some ESCs provide assistance with textbooks.
- VI programs at the ESC frequently sponsor workshops. They also help support professional development for VI professionals in their region. “Support” may include travel assistance to attend statewide conferences.
- ESC personnel tend to know about TSVI and COMS positions available in their region.

If you would like to find out more about regional VI services, the VI staff, or other information, go to [page 22](#) for a list of the contact information for each ESC.

### **Who should apply?**

Applicants must have an interest in and a commitment to working with children with visual impairments. Most VI professionals work as itinerant professionals. Therefore, as a TSVI or a COMS, you must be prepared for **on-the-job travel**.

In addition, you must realize that this is an **intense** program. The instructional content is the same as traditional courses on campus. While the length of instruction is the same, SFA’s hybrid (online/livestream) courses may require less time in course meeting times than a face-to-face option would require. Remember that online courses also require a substantial time commitment.

### **How do I apply?**

Each university has specific requirements and procedures. You must contact the faculty at the university or visit their website for information. You can find more information at the following sites.

#### **SFASU**

##### **1. APPLY TO THE SFASU GRADUATE SCHOOL**

- a. Use the Texas Common Application found at [ApplyTexas](#). There is a \$75 application fee.

- b. Apply to [Application - Visual Impairment Preparation at SFA](#).
- c. Please email [OMVI@sfasu.edu](mailto:OMVI@sfasu.edu) to request any other needed information for the VIP concentration.

## **2. OTHER SFASU PROGRAM AND SCHOOL INFORMATION**

- a. The Visual Impairment Preparation (VIP) concentration at SFA operates on a cohort system. Prospective candidates apply in the spring of each year (March 1 deadline for grant funding for Texas applicants), and, once accepted to the university and the concentration, begin coursework in the following first summer semester. All accepted candidates will be considered for grant awards (*VIP Grant*) that are used to cover tuition. Grant awards are offered to Texas residents only, are competitive, and are not guaranteed to be awarded to all who apply. The deadline for application for each year's cohort is March 1.
- b. Students who want to join the program at other times will be considered but may not be eligible for grant monies. For more information on the TSVI/O&M program and how to apply for the competitive grant funding, email [OMVI@sfasu.edu](mailto:OMVI@sfasu.edu).

## **TTU**

### **1. APPLY TO THE TTU GRADUATE SCHOOL**

Go to [Texas Tech Graduate Admissions - How to Apply](#). Follow the instructions to apply to the Graduate School. There is a \$75 application fee, and it can be completed online. You will not need GRE scores for certification or for master's programs.

### **2. IF SEEKING A CERTIFICATION**

- a. Under "Select Your Major," choose "**Teaching Certificate in College of Education**" even if you already have your teacher's certification. Under "Major Area of Interest" choose "**Visual Impairment**" or "**Orientation & Mobility**".
- b. You can check your admission status online. For assistance, the Graduate School Admissions phone number is 806.742.2787. If you are having application problems, please contact Anita Page at 806.834.1515 in the College of Education for help.

### **3. IF INTERESTED IN A MASTER'S DEGREE IN SPECIAL EDUCATION**

You need to also go to [Texas Tech Graduate Admissions](#) and choose the Degree option and then master's degree (M.Ed.) in Special Education with a concentration in either Visual Impairment, Orientation & Mobility, or Deafblindness. The master's degree includes all the certification courses and requires several more (3-5) additional courses.

### **4. APPLY TO THE REACH ACROSS TEXAS PROGRAM FOR THE VI or O&M PROGRAM**

You can complete the online application by clicking [Information about the Application Process for Certification Students](#).

The application for a competitive stipend award for tuition assistance for certification courses only for Texas residents needs to be completed, scanned, and submitted to:  
[reachacrosstexas@ttu.edu](mailto:reachacrosstexas@ttu.edu).

If you have application problems, please contact Gabriella Davis at 806.834.1725 for help. **The deadlines for Reach Across Texas applications are: summer- April 15, fall- June 1, and spring- November 1.**

**Note: Both universities** require **official** transcripts from **all** previous universities you attended (including community colleges). You can upload unofficial transcripts for the TTU application, but official transcripts will be due in your first semester. You should order an **official copy of your university transcript(s)** to be sent directly to the university.

- For **TTU**, make sure transcripts are sent to the **TTU Graduate School Admissions Office** as soon as possible, even if you have not completed your university or program application.
- For **SFA**, make sure the transcripts are sent to the **SFASU Graduate School**. Transcripts can be sent via secure platforms such as Parchment or by email to [gschool@sfasu.edu](mailto:gschool@sfasu.edu) or by mail to Graduate School, P.O. Box 13024, SFA Station, Nacogdoches, TX 75962.

Frequently, it takes time to have your request processed and sent. Don't let this hold up your application. Most universities now have electronic transmission of official transcripts that can be ordered online. Keep the receipt of proof you paid to have transcripts sent.

### **Can I get a master's degree?**

Both Stephen F. Austin and Texas Tech universities offer master's degrees in special education (M.Ed. in Special Education).

The courses described here will contribute to certification as a VI professional either as a TSVI or a COMS. The courses will not provide all the requirements for a master's degree in either of those areas, but those at the graduate level can apply towards a master's degree.

If you are considering a master's degree, even if you are not sure, you should talk to the advisor at the university of your choice as soon as possible. This information may affect how you complete the application procedures.

Please note the grant provides support for certification courses only. Students seeking a master's degree will need to self-pay or seek funding elsewhere for the additional courses required beyond those for the certification.

### **What are the acceptance criteria?**

**The goal of this program is to train and employ VI professionals to work with students with visual impairments, including students who are deafblind.** Therefore, to be accepted, you will have to **make a commitment** to work with children with visual impairments in Texas if you accept any scholarships from the program.

Each university has specific acceptance criteria and procedures. These are also affected by whether you want certification-only or want a master's degree. To be accepted into the VI certification program at TTU, you need at least a 2.75 GPA from prior university coursework. For the O&M certification program at TTU, you need at least a prior 2.50 GPA. Also, each university has timelines for submitting documentation. **You must contact the university of your choice for requirements and timeline information.** Contact information is on the first and last pages of this newsletter.

### **Can I get an emergency permit?**

#### **Teacher of students with visual impairments (TSVIs)**

It is possible to get an emergency permit to work as a TSVI. To serve as a TSVI in a district before completing the TSVI program, a district can apply to TEA for an emergency permit for an individual with the agreement that they will then complete the remainder of the courses required for full certification as a TSVI. **To be eligible for the emergency permit** to teach students with visual impairments in Texas, you must be currently certified in elementary, secondary, or special education and have satisfied the following **requirements: (a)** completed six semester credit hours directly related to teaching students with visual impairments (braille + one other vision course) and **(b)** have one creditable year of classroom teaching experience. You must have demonstrated competency in literary braille and basic Nemeth Code by passing the TExES Braille exam, holding certification as a literary braille transcriber by the Library of Congress, or passing one university course in braille. The University Certification Office will provide the hiring district a Deficiency Plan upon request, noting the remaining courses needed by the person being hired. Both the Braille and VI TExES exams must also be passed before becoming fully certified.

Click [Process for Obtaining the Emergency Permit for TSVIs](#) for more information.

**There are no emergency permits for COMS.**

### **How will the lecture portions of the courses be taught?**

The courses are a blend of lectures and skill-based learning. The lecture portion will be taught through a blend of internet and/or in-person meetings. More information about the skill-based training is as follows:

## Online

The Internet is used throughout the programs, either for part or all the courses. The instructor will be available via phone, discussion board, and/or email.

You will be able to participate in the Internet-based courses and activities at your convenience. Specific deadlines will be set for each module or unit. You must meet the deadlines; this is not an independent study course. It will be very important for you to develop and stick to a schedule.

SFASU uses Internet-based interactive platforms, Zoom and Brightspace/D2L, as the method of delivering the VIP preparation program courses. This platform will be used to provide instruction during the fall, spring, and summer semesters. The real-time, synchronous classes are held in the evenings. Graduate-level TSVI and O&M courses (other than required face-to-face O&M courses) are offered in an internet-based delivery model.

## Face-to-face

TTU requires skill-based weekend instruction at Texas Tech in Lubbock or in Austin at TSBVI for specific modules in three of the courses.

SFASU's TSVI and COMS graduate courses (other than cane skills training course for O&M) are delivered online/hybrid only. No weekend travel to the university is required.

### **How will the skill-based portions of the training be taught?**

Several courses that have skill-based components are taught face-to-face.

## Basic O&M

During Basic O&M at TTU, students will meet in person with a facilitator for approximately 20+ hours of instruction. Scheduling will vary by university. The skill-based training will be conducted at a university or an off-campus site.

## Cane Courses

COMS take a total of 6 credit hours of instruction on how to use the cane and other advanced travel skills while under blindfold. TTU offers two separate 3-credit courses. Both are taken in a single summer session. SFASU's summer blindfold course is offered as one summer semester enrollment of 6 credit hours expanding across both summer semesters.

The cane courses must be conducted on a face-to-face basis. These courses will be offered at the TTU and SFASU campuses. **Pending availability of funds**, TTU students who attend these

courses **on-campus** may be provided with a stipend to cover **some** or all their tuition, housing, and/or assistance for travel. SFASU does **not** provide any stipend for housing/lodging, nor assistance or reimbursement for food or travel.

### **Anatomy of the Eye**

At TTU, the eye course requires a weekend in Lubbock for hands-on and interactive training such as dissecting a cow's eye, learning how to do a functional vision evaluation and a learning media assessment, using optical devices, etc. SFASU offers these components online only with no face-to-face or travel needed to complete requirements for the anatomy of the eye course.

### **Academic Methods**

At TTU, the academic methods course for TSVI requires a weekend in Austin for the Assistive Technology component of the course, which includes hands-on learning about the latest technological advances used with students with visual impairments. SFASU offers these components online only with no face-to-face or travel needed to complete requirements for the academic methods course.

### **Practicum or Internship**

The VI and O&M training options both require clinical field experience, known as either a practicum or internship. These will be arranged on an individual basis. Typically, the practicum/internship will be in the local area. However, each practicum/internship experience must meet certain basic requirements. **As a result, it may be necessary to travel from your existing job location for a portion or all of the practicum/internship. It is possible that COMS will need to go out of their area or even out of Texas.**

#### *O&M internship*

In O&M, the field experiences (internship and practicum) are completed under the supervision of a COMS who meets the criteria for internship supervisors and who has been selected by the university to do so. Internship involves providing orientation and mobility services on a full-time basis. **This important experience usually happens away from your home community. The faculty will make all arrangements. Candidates should not make any arrangements for internship placement. PLEASE refer to your university contact for internship arrangement information.**

#### *VI practicum/internship*

Teachers of students with visual impairments complete a practicum/internship. It will be supervised by university faculty or by a university designee. During that period, you will need to work as a TSVI, completing a series of professional experiences. It is possible that you will need to travel beyond your district for a limited period to complete those experiences. For those candidates already working as a TSVI with an emergency permit, their internship can be done with their existing caseload of students.

### **Does it make a difference which university I attend?**

No. Both university programs address the same set of professional competencies, respond to the same set of accountability measures, and offer training which will enable you to be certified as either a TSVI or a COMS.

There are differences. You must evaluate both programs and determine which best meets your needs. Stephen F. Austin State University admits new students and groups them into cohorts that begin taking classes in summer semesters. Other students may be admitted on a case-by-case basis. This block of students, known as a cohort, take classes together via the Internet. Certification can be completed in three consecutive semesters (summer, fall, and spring). Texas Tech University accepts new students year-round and offers courses predominantly via the Internet.

**IMPORTANT:** Additional information is available from both universities. Please contact the universities to determine which is best for your situation:

- **SFASU:** [Academics: Master of Education in Special Education \(Online or Hybrid\)](#) and [Visual Impairment Preparation at SFA](#).  
**Note:** For assistance or questions, please call 936.468.1145.
- **TTU:** [The Virginia Murray Sowell Center for Research and Education in Sensory Disabilities, Special Education-Visual Impairment](#) and [Special Education-Orientation and Mobility](#).  
**Note:** For assistance, please contact Anita Page: 806.834.1515 or [anita.page@ttu.edu](mailto:anita.page@ttu.edu) or Gabriella Davis: 806.834.1725 or [gabriella.davis@ttu.edu](mailto:gabriella.davis@ttu.edu).

### **Master's degree students**

If you are interested in getting a master's degree as a TSVI and/or a COMS, you **must** discuss this with the faculty at SFASU and TTU. Each university has different requirements. You will be able to complete the extra coursework required for the master's via online courses.

To help you make that decision, you should contact each university to discuss its application and acceptance policies. If possible, it is preferred that you declare whether you are seeking a degree during the first semester.

### **What are the deadlines for enrollment?**

There are **at least TWO** steps you must complete:

1. Applying and being accepted by the university, **AND**
2. Being accepted to the *Reach Across Texas* Program at TTU or the *VIP Grant* at SFASU, if you are interested in applying for a competitive scholarship award.

These are separate procedures. You **MUST** complete all the steps according to the chosen university's procedures by deadlines. To learn more about the steps for enrolling in the university, visit the websites for the VI programs at SFASU and TTU.

### **Stephen F. Austin State University (SFASU)**

At SFA, VI and O&M professionals typically take their courses as a group, or cohort. This means that most students start together (in the summer) and take their classes in a set sequence. Other students can join the concentration in other semesters on a limited basis based on prerequisites. The cohort applications are accepted in Spring 2024 and courses start the first summer session. You must apply no later than **March 1, 2026 in order to be considered for grant funding for those living in Texas**. Once you have applied to the SFASU graduate school using the [Apply Texas](#) common application, you can then apply for funding from the *VIP Grant*.

For more information, click [Graduate-level Certification Prep](#).

### **Texas Tech University (TTU)**

Texas Tech University accepts students throughout the year. You must apply to the university and to Reach Across Texas Program no later than **April 15, 2026 for the Summer 2026 semester, June 1, 2026 for the Fall 2026 semester, and November 1, 2026 for the Spring 2027 semester**. Many students start the TSVI program in the summer, taking braille and the foundation course, so that they can start a job as a TSVI in the fall with an emergency permit. Once accepted, you must contact your program advisor and then register for the designated courses.

For more information about certification preparation, visit [Graduate Certification Preparation: Visual Impairment](#) or [Graduate Certification Preparation: Orientation and Mobility](#).

### **Deadlines**

#### **SFASU**

- **2026 VI & O&M Cohorts - March 1, 2026**
- **For limited admission other semesters - contact the program**

#### **TTU**

- **SUMMER 2026 - April 15, 2026**
- **FALL 2026 - June 1, 2026**

- **SPRING 2027 - November 1, 2026**

### **Will I need to get my transcripts?**

**Yes.** You will need to arrange for an **official copy of all your transcripts** to be sent to the Graduate School at the university of your choice. The holder of your transcripts (all previously attended universities, including community colleges) will send them directly to SFASU or TTU Graduate School Admissions (most universities can send transcripts electronically now). Since it may take time for your request to be processed, you are strongly advised to start this process **as soon as possible**. **Do not wait!** You might miss a deadline! At TTU, you can submit unofficial transcripts when applying, but you will still need all official transcripts sent during the first semester to be able to register for any other semesters, so it is best to get them all ordered sooner rather than later.

### **Will I have a mentor?**

In Texas, all candidates are paired with a trained, experienced professional who serves as their mentor. Individuals who are new to the VI profession are assigned a mentor when they are hired by a school district as a TSVI or COMS. The mentor relationship continues through the protégé's practicum/internship period and extends one year beyond certification as a VI professional in Texas schools. In general, the mentor/protégé assignment lasts for two years. Any TSVI working on an emergency permit is assigned a mentor right away. To the degree possible, the mentor will be from your home region.

All participants in either the TTU VI or O&M program or the SFASU VI or O&M concentration are invited to attend a Mentor Center during their training and up to a year after completion. Mentor Centers are hosted at TSBVI where you can observe TSVIs and COMS working with students at TSBVI. TTU Reach Across Texas recipients are required to attend at least one Mentor Center while in the program.

This is a non-evaluative mentor program. This means that your mentor will typically not be called upon to provide an evaluation of your skills, either by the university or your district. This is a person to whom you can turn when you have questions and/or concerns about content or skills.

**When will courses be offered?**

<b>Texas Tech University</b>	<b>Stephen F. Austin State University</b>
<p><b>Spring</b>                      Braille (Internet)                      Academic Methods (via distance education with AT weekend in Austin)                      Eye Anatomy (Internet +face-to-face weekend at TTU)                      Visual and Multiple Impairments Methods (Internet)                      Advanced O&amp;M Seminar (Internet)                      VI Internship (Off campus; sites vary; Zoom meeting once a week)                      O&amp;M Internship (Off campus; sites vary)</p> <p><b>Summer I</b>                      Cane I &amp; II (TTU campus in Lubbock)                      Braille (6 weeks) (Internet)                      Basic O&amp;M (internet + Austin weekend)                      O&amp;M Internship (all summer; off campus; sites vary)</p> <p><b>Summer II</b>                      Foundations (Internet)</p> <p><b>Fall</b>                      Eye Anatomy (Internet + on-campus Lubbock weekend)                      Foundations (Internet)                      Braille (Internet)                      Basic O&amp;M (Internet + on-campus Lubbock weekend)                      Visual and Multiple Impairments Methods (Internet)                      Intermediate O&amp;M Seminar (Internet)                      O&amp;M Internship (Off campus; sites vary)                      VI Internship (Off campus; sites vary; Zoom meeting once a week)</p>	<p><b>Spring</b>                      Basic Concepts of O&amp;M (Internet)                      Programs and Methods for Working with Students with VI (Internet)                      Practicum in VI (Internet + various sites)                      Advanced Clinical Practicum in O&amp;M (3 hours) (Internet + various sites)                      Low Vision (Internet)                      Visual Impairments in Infants and Toddlers (Internet)                      Special Studies in Special Education (Research) (Internet)</p> <p><b>Summer</b>                      Anatomy of the Visual System (Internet)                      Braille (Internet)                      Clinical Practicum in O&amp;M/Blindfold (6 hours) (on SFA campus)                      Internship in O&amp;M (6 hours) (off campus; sites vary)</p> <p><b>Fall</b>                      Instructional Methods for Students with Multiple Impairments including VI (Internet)                      Foundations in VI (Internet)                      Practicum in VI (Internet + various sites)                      Intermediate Practicum in O&amp;M (3 hours) (Internet + various sites)                      Assistive Technology for VI (Internet)                      Expanded Core Curriculum (Internet)                      Special Studies in Special Education (Research) (Internet)</p>

## Let's review your action steps

- **Read** the [Typical Roles and Responsibilities of VI Professionals](#).
- **Determine** which university program fits best with your lifestyle and learning style and other factors. Contact each university for more information.
- **Order** an OFFICIAL copy of your transcript(s) to be sent to the Graduate School Admissions Office at the university of your choice. You may choose to have the transcripts sent directly to the university (most universities now can send official transcripts electronically).
- **Apply** to the university of your choice:
  - **SFASU**: Click [SFASU Admissions & Aid](#)
  - **TTU**: Click [Texas Tech Graduate Admissions](#), go to "Apply Now"
- **Talk** to your advisor at the university. It is likely to be one of the university faculty listed below.
- **Register** for the first course(s).
  - **SFASU students**: Do not register until you receive an email telling you which class, section, and CRN # to use in registration.
  - **TTU students**: Your advisor will help you understand what course(s) to take and the procedures for completing this step online.
- **Complete** all the scheduled activities.

## How can I get more information?

Please contact the following programs if you have a special circumstance or need more information.

### General Information

Cecilia Robinson, TSBVI Outreach

512.206.9464 or [robinsonc@tsbvi.edu](mailto:robinsonc@tsbvi.edu)

### Texas Tech University Program

Nora Griffin-Shirley, Ph.D. (O&M)

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Phoebe Okungu, Ph.D. (Deafblindness)

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## **Stephen F. Austin State University Program**

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## Typical Roles and Responsibilities of VI Professionals

Adapted by Rona Pogrund (2024) from *Quality Programs for the Visually Impaired*, developed by Nancy Toelle.

The **Teacher of Students with Visual Impairments (TSVI)** has the following roles and responsibilities:

- Has primary responsibility for specialized instruction and services required to meet the unique educational needs of their students who are blind or have low vision.
- Possesses the skills and abilities necessary to provide and coordinate this specialized instruction.
- Assists the student, parents, special and general education personnel, and the student's sighted peers in:
  - Understanding the unique educational needs and learning characteristics of students who are visually impaired,
  - Becoming aware of services and support available from local programs for students who are visually impaired,
  - Acquiring information regarding local, state, and national resources for the education of students who are visually impaired, and
  - Interpreting the student's specific eye condition, the educational implications of the visual impairment, and the results of functional vision and learning media assessments.
- Consults regularly with the classroom teacher, other general and special education personnel, family members, and others to coordinate programs and services for the student who is visually impaired.
- Assists the site administrator and teachers in making environmental adjustments for their students in the school.
- Shares responsibility with classroom teachers in the identification of instructional areas in which the student requires assistance.
- Assures that large-type or braille texts, supplementary materials, educational aids, and equipment needed by the student who is visually impaired, and the classroom teacher, are provided in a timely manner to ensure the student's maximum participation in all classroom activities (appropriate educational materials may be prepared or adapted by the TSVI, or they may be obtained from educational, clerical, or transcriber services.)
- Provides instruction in the development and maintenance of expanded core curriculum (ECC) skills to meet the student's unique educational needs in the following areas, as indicated in the IEP:

- Assistive technology skills
- Career education skills
- Compensatory skills (concept development, communication skills, braille literacy, listening skills, organizational skills to access the general education curriculum)
- Independent living skills
- Recreation/leisure skills
- Self-determination skills
- Sensory efficiency skills (visual, auditory, tactile, as appropriate)
- Social interaction skills
- Support of orientation and mobility skills
- Prepares sequential and meaningful instruction geared to the student's assessed needs, IEP goals and objectives, functioning, and motivational levels. This instruction should be reflected in lesson plans prior to each lesson.
- Collects data and keeps progress notes on each student.
- Assists the classroom teacher in academic subjects and activities of the classroom that, as a direct result of the student's visual impairment, require adaptation for the student.
- Provides initial and ongoing assessment/evaluation:
  - Consults with assessment team to determine appropriate testing materials and modifications needed
  - Assists with assessments when needed
  - Interprets assessment results when needed
- Conducts functional vision evaluations/learning media assessments and produces written reports with the results.
- Attends ARD and IEP meetings for students with visual impairments.
- Schedules time efficiently for assessment, planning, instruction, preparation of materials, travel, and conferences with relevant school and other key individuals.
- Maintains ongoing contact with family members to assist them in the development of a realistic understanding of their child's abilities, progress, and future goals.
- Provides in-service training programs for school personnel and students and education for family members regarding the needs of students who are visually impaired and adaptations, programs, and services for these students.
- Makes available electronic links, pamphlets, and other public information materials that may be useful in developing realistic and unprejudiced attitudes toward students who are visually impaired.

- Coordinates with other personnel, such as transcribers, readers, counselors, O&M specialists, career/vocational education staff, rehabilitation counselors, and early childhood interventionists.
- Maintains a current reference library of professional materials and resources.
- Acquires information and training about current research, developments, and technology.

The **Classroom Teacher** (general education, special education, or resource specialist) has the following roles and responsibilities:

- Provides instruction in appropriate academic and non-academic content areas to the student who is visually impaired in the classroom.
- Works cooperatively with the teacher of students with visual impairments to:
  - Identify the student's areas of educational need, including unique education needs,
  - Coordinate instruction and services to meet these needs,
  - Provide, in a timely manner, classroom materials that need to be reproduced in another medium,
  - Determine mutually convenient times during the school day for scheduling the teacher of students with visual impairments to work with the student,
  - Modify classroom procedures and environment to meet the specific needs of the student who is visually impaired for participation in classroom activities, and
  - Exchange information concerning the student who is visually impaired with parents and other individuals on a regular basis.

The **Certified Orientation and Mobility Specialist** has the following roles and responsibilities:

- Instructs the student who is visually impaired in the development of skills and knowledge that enables them to move purposely and to travel independently, based on assessed needs and ability.
- Teaches the student who is visually impaired to travel with proficiency, safety, and confidence in familiar and unfamiliar environments.
- Consults regularly with sighted peers, family members, classroom teachers, physical education teachers, and/or other special education personnel to assist in home and classroom environmental modifications, adaptations, and considerations and to ensure reinforcement of appropriate O&M skills that will encourage the student to travel independently in these settings.
- Conducts a functional vision evaluation relating to independent travel.
- Conducts assessments that focus on both long and short-term needs of the student.

- Includes in the assessment report the needs and strengths of the student and an estimate of the length and frequency of service necessary to meet identified needs.
- Prepares sequential and meaningful instruction geared to the student's assessed needs, IEP goals and objectives, functioning, and motivational levels. This instruction should be reflected in lesson plans prior to each lesson.
- Prepares and uses equipment and materials, for example, tactile maps, models, distance optical devices, adaptive mobility devices, and long canes, for the development of O&M skills.
- Transports the student with parent permission to various community locations, as necessary, to provide meaningful instruction in realistic learning environments.
- Is responsible for the student's safety at all times and in all teaching environments while fostering maximum independence.
- Evaluates the student's progress on an ongoing basis with progress reports each 6/9 weeks as required.
- Collects data and keeps progress notes on each student.
- Participates in parent conferences and meetings.
- Provides in-service training to general and special education personnel, sighted peers, and family members concerning the O&M needs of the student, and appropriate methods and procedures for interacting with the person who is blind or has low vision that will foster maximum independence and safety.
- Provides O&M instruction, where appropriate, in these areas:
  - Body imagery, laterality
  - Environmental concepts
  - Gross and fine motor skills related to independent travel
  - Sensory awareness, stimulation, and training
  - Spatial concepts
  - Compass direction concepts
  - Guide technique procedures
  - Basic protective, alignment, and information-gathering techniques
  - Orientation skills
  - Map skills
  - Mobility device skills (e.g., wearable canes, adaptive mobility devices, long cane skills)
  - Use of vision in the environment
  - Optical devices related to travel skills
  - Urban, suburban, and rural travel
  - Travel in business districts
  - Procedures for crossing streets including how to handle traffic control signals
  - Use of public transportation systems
  - Procedures for use of the phone for information gathering and for emergencies

- Use of electronic orientation aids and systems (e.g., GPS)
- Procedures for interacting with the public
- Knowledge and application of community address systems
- Procedures for travel and independent functioning in places of public accommodation
- Independent living and recreation/leisure skills
- Sensory/motor skills in coordination with the physical or occupational therapist and TSVI

## Contact Information for Education Service Centers

Region 1 Education Service Center – Edinburg  
Alyssa Aguilar [alyaguilar@esc1.net](mailto:alyaguilar@esc1.net) or 956. 984.6165

Region 2 Education Service Center – Corpus Christi  
Janiel Brannen [janiel.brannen@esc2.us](mailto:janiel.brannen@esc2.us) or 361.561.8563

Region 3 Education Service Center – Victoria  
Mary Kathryn Garcia [mkgarcia@esc3.net](mailto:mkgarcia@esc3.net) or 361.573.0731

Region 4 Education Service Center – Houston  
Vandralyn French [vandralyn.french@esc4.net](mailto:vandralyn.french@esc4.net) or 713.744.6315

Region 5 Education Service Center – Beaumont  
Suzanne Martin [suzannemartin@esc5.net](mailto:suzannemartin@esc5.net) or 409.951.1784

Region 6 Education Service Center – Huntsville  
Michael Munro [mmunro@esc6.net](mailto:mmunro@esc6.net) or 936.435.8254

Region 7 Education Service Center – Kilgore  
Beverly Beran, Deputy Director [bberan@esc7.net](mailto:bberan@esc7.net) (VI support)

Region 8 Education Service Center – Mount Pleasant  
Carrie Gray [cgray@reg8.net](mailto:cgray@reg8.net) or 903.575.2766

Region 9 Education Service Center – Wichita Falls  
Tricia Lee Marsh [tricia.marsh@esc9.net](mailto:tricia.marsh@esc9.net) or 940.322.6928

Region 10 Education Service Center – Richardson  
Rodrigo Orta [rodrigo.orta@region10.org](mailto:rodrigo.orta@region10.org) or 972.348.1634

Region 11 Education Service Center – White Settlement  
Ben Davisson [bdavisson@esc11.net](mailto:bdavisson@esc11.net) or 817.740.7637

Region 12 Education Service Center – Waco  
Michelle Craig [mcraig@esc12.net](mailto:mcraig@esc12.net) or 254.297.1145

Region 13 Education Service Center – Austin  
Gabriella Ortuno-Haywood [gabriella.ortuno-haywood@esc13.txed.net](mailto:gabriella.ortuno-haywood@esc13.txed.net) or 512.919.5354

Region 14 Education Service Center – Abilene  
Brenda Lee [blee@esc14.net](mailto:blee@esc14.net) or 325.675.8632

Region 15 Education Service Center – San Angelo  
Katie Cortez [katie.cortez@esc15.net](mailto:katie.cortez@esc15.net) or 325.481.4004

Region 16 Education Service Center – Amarillo  
Catherine Pratt [catherine.pratt@esc16.net](mailto:catherine.pratt@esc16.net) or 806.677.5295 (VI support)

Region 17 Education Service Center – Lubbock  
Jamie Canales [jcanales@esc17.net](mailto:jcanales@esc17.net) or 806.281.5737

Region 18 Education Service Center – Midland  
Whitney Creekmore [whitney.creekmore@esc18.net](mailto:whitney.creekmore@esc18.net) or 432.567.3219

Region 19 Education Service Center – El Paso  
Jessica Martel [jmartel@esc19.net](mailto:jmartel@esc19.net) or 915.780.5344

Region 20 Education Service Center – San Antonio  
Mari Garza [Maricela.garza.adj@esc20.net](mailto:Maricela.garza.adj@esc20.net) or 210.370.5432

**Below is an image of the state of Texas divided into 20 regions.  
Each number represents the Education Service Center and its service area.**



For more information, click [Education Service Centers](#).