



# **A Century of Excellence The Department of Special Education: The Department of Special Education, Eastern Michigan University**

*Nancy Halmhuber Ph.D., Lynne Rocklage Ph.D.*

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## **A Century of Excellence The Department of Special Education: The Department of Special Education, Eastern Michigan University** Nancy Halmhuber Ph.D., Lynne Rocklage Ph.D.

This is the story of the Eastern Michigan University's Department of Special Education, the oldest such department in the United States. The work of the department began in 1914, when Dr. Charles Berry organized a program to train teachers to work with students with disabilities. The program almost immediately came under the auspices of EMU (then the Michigan State Normal School). In the early 1920's, under the leadership of Professor Charles Elliott, the department was formally organized, and laboratory schools established, first in Detroit, and then on the campus in Ypsilanti. Pierce and Welch Halls housed some of these early facilities. Early programs trained teachers to work with students who were blind and deaf. In 1937, Professor Elliott obtained funding to establish the first school designed for training teachers of students with disabilities, the Rackham School. An occupational therapy program was developed soon thereafter, along with a speech-language pathology program. The Rackham Building remained the home of the department for a number of decades. Over the years, many leaders in the field of special education, known internationally, have taught or lectured at the department. The College of Education relocated to the Porter Building in 1999, just across the street from the Rackham Building (now on the Register of Historical Buildings). With 26 faculty members and numerous undergraduate and graduate programs, it remains the most comprehensive special education program in the state.

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