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**Doctoral Program in Educational Leadership (Ed.D.)**

**DISSERTATION IN PRACTICE**

**Student/Faculty Guide**

**Updated June 9, 2025**

1. **Introduction**

The dissertation in practice is the culmination of the Ed.D. Program, a practice-oriented doctoral program aligned with best practices as framed by the [Carnegie Project on the Education Doctorate (CPED).](https://www.cpedinitiative.org/what-is-a-dissertation-in-practice) Reflective of doctoral level study, it is a rigorous, intensive application of a field-based analysis and/or implementation of a structural change project related to educational leadership. The dissertation requires scholarly inquiry that reflects sustained thinking around a theoretical framework, literature-based problem, and related set of activities (e.g., program implementation or study procedures and findings) that are documented in the form of a comprehensive report (commonly referred to as the dissertation in practice or DiP) Each student conducts the dissertation under the supervision of a supervisory committee which approves the completed dissertation, and with support of program faculty through a dissertation seminar. Graduation and conferral of the Educational Leadership doctorate is dependent upon approval by the supervisory committee.

[“The professional doctorate in education prepares educators for the application of appropriate and specific practices, the generation of new knowledge, and for the stewardship of the profession.” - CPED](file://C:\Users\aew7\AppData\Local\Microsoft\Windows\INetCache\Content.Outlook\XM2ILI61\)

1. **Overview**

Traditionally, students complete a yearlong, practice-based dissertation, in which they address a tangible problem of practice during the third year. The dissertation synthesizes coursework and praxis-based study into a comprehensive product to capture the work completed, and can be either a continuation of praxis efforts or a new stand-alone project. The dissertation must be in addition to the student’s normal work expectations, which specifically demonstrates leadership at a higher level than that of their current professional context. Dissertations are required to be hands-on, problem-based, applied leadership endeavors with an equity lens, that inform current practice or policy at a national or local level (i.e., with potential influence greater than the local institution).

Although there is latitude in the design and scope, dissertations should be aligned with CPED’s framework, which defines the DiP as “a scholarly endeavor that impacts a complex problem of practice,” or “a persistent, contextualized, and specific issue embedded in the work of a professional practitioner, the addressing of which has the potential to result in improved understanding, experience, and outcomes.” CPED further clarifies that: “Such problems are addressed with applied research methods and the use of inquiry questions--questions that arise out of practice; are co-constructed and user-centered; focus on diversity, equity, and social justice; and are meaningful to the EdD student and their professional context” (CPED, 2025).

“Other unique features of a DiP include the use of literature as a tool to name and frame problems (versus traditional identifications of gaps or mastering of theory). Literature encompasses scholarly and professional literature, as both help students better understand the roots and history of their problems of practice from both academic and practitioner viewpoints. The literature also helps to clarify the inquiry questions. DiPs aim to design and implement change ideas that seek to improve PoPs. The results of a DiP go beyond the dissertation defense and committee, and are meant to be dispersed and shared in a variety of ways so that the learning is incorporated in professional practice and local settings” (CPED, 2025).

DiPs will be evaluated individually for their achievements by each student’s supervisory committee, in accordance with UW Graduate School requirements for the practice doctorate. This committee formally approves the dissertation proposal and final dissertation in practice. Each student will have a at least a 3-member supervisory committee, which includes a committee chair, a second University of Washington faculty member endorsed by the UW Graduate School[[1]](#footnote-1), and a credentialed, highly experienced, professionally relevant third member.

**Dissertation Proposal:**

Typically, in spring quarter of the second year, students enroll in *TEDLD 585: Proposing Relational Research,* the last course in the five-course research sequence. This class focuses on developing a full DiP proposal. At the end of the course, successful students will have completed a draft of their dissertation proposal, and will be ready to submit that to their dissertation chair(s), and, if the chair permits, to the full dissertation committee. The supervisory committee determines final approval of the proposal and, upon approval, grants permission to begin the dissertation process. This might include modifications of the proposal as required by the committee as well as approval to start the [Human Subjects Division](https://www.washington.edu/research/hsd/) review process and/or any related local approval processes (such as Tribal, school district, or related entity’s research approval process). Note that the Human Subjects Division approval may not be submitted until the proposal has been approved by the committee and the chair approves the submission process.

1. **Practice Doctoral Supervisory Committees (from** [Graduate School Policy 4.2: Supervisory Committee for Graduate Students](https://grad.uw.edu/policies/4-2-supervisory-committee-for-graduate-students/)**; see also** Policy 4.2.3)

The appointment of a practice doctoral supervisory committee indicates that the Graduate Faculty in the student's field finds his/her background and achievement a sufficient basis for progression in the doctoral program. A practice doctorate involves extensive coursework and a dissertation that is in lieu of a traditional Ph.D. dissertation. This dissertation is not filed with the Graduate School but is archived for public access through UWT Library Digital Commons.

The practice doctoral supervisory committee consists of a minimum of three members. At least two committee members, including the Chair, must be members of the UWT Graduate Faculty. The chair and 2nd committee member must hold an “endorsement to chair” doctoral committees and at least half of the total number must be members of the Graduate Faculty. The following applies to all practice doctoral supervisory committees:

* The 3rd committee members who are not Graduate Faculty must be confirmed by the student's Chair and/or other Ed.D. faculty as productive scholars or expert practitioners in the student's major field and/or subfields.
* The Chair of a committee must be able and willing to assume principal responsibility for advising the student. In addition, the Chair should have adequate time available for this work and should expect to be accessible to the student.
* A Graduate School Representative (GSR) is not required.

The Ed.D. Program will support students who require additional guidance in identifying their 2nd and 3rd committee members. In selecting their 2nd and 3rd committee members, students may consider a wide-range of relevant faculty members across the University of Washington Tacoma campus, with encouragement for students to consider faculty in the School of Education. The 2nd committee member must be a UW Graduate faculty member, while the 3rd committee member should represent a professionally relevant content expert. In consultation with the chair, students make recommendations for the 3rd committee member. Students will complete the Supervisory Committee Member forms to formalize their committee chair and committee members with the Director of the Ed.D. Program. The Ed.D. program advisor notifies the Graduate School of the final committee membership.

Responsibilities of the practice doctoral supervisory committee include approval and oversight of the student’s dissertation proposal and approval of the completed dissertation. After the practice doctoral supervisory committee has evaluated the final project/dissertation, if a majority of the supervisory committee members agree that the evaluation is positive, the recommendation is made to The Graduate School (via the warrant) that the degree be awarded. If members of the practice doctoral supervisory committee do not agree with the majority recommendation, the minority report portion of the warrant must be used.

**Role of Committee members**

The **Supervisory Committee Chair(s)** leads the support and evaluation efforts, helping to ensure the student makes satisfactory progress toward completion of the dissertation. Though the chair(s) may work directly with students in developing their proposal, official duties begin with the acceptance of the proposal and continue until approval of the dissertation. The chair will, in consultation with other members, determine roles and responsibilities regarding reading, editing, and providing guidance on the applied project, project report, and article. The chair will submit a grade (Credit/No Credit) for the student each quarter as part of *TEDLD 801: Dissertation in Practice*.

Additional committee members support the student throughout the project and collaborate with the chair as needed.

**Sample Supervisory Workload**

The following is an example of potential workload expectations, though it is expected that each committee member will have varying roles throughout the year depending on the student, the dissertation, the topic, and the committee.

**Chair:**

* Monthly meetings with students: 1 student x 1 hour = 3 hours/quarter
* Reading and providing written feedback: 3 hours/month = 9 hours/quarter
* Committee meetings 2 per year, 2 hours each = 4 hours per year

**2nd Faculty (committee) member:**

* Occasional meetings with student (approx. 1 per quarter and 2 in Spring quarter) 4 x 30 min =

2 hours

* Reading and providing written feedback spring quarter: 8 hours
* Committee meetings 2 per year, 2 hours each = 4 hours per year

**3rd Committee member:**

* Occasional meetings with student (approx. 1 per quarter) 3 x 30 min = 90 min.
* Reading and providing written feedback spring quarter: 6 hours
* Committee meetings 2 per year, 2 hours each = 4 hours per year

**Timeliness of Submitted Work**The chair should clearly communicate with their students that faculty members require sufficient time to read and provide feedback on submitted work and provide clear expectations up front about their expectations and preferences. Consequences for late or last-minute submissions are the responsibility of the student. The supervisory committee chair should work with the student to develop reasonable goals and sub-deadlines for the process.

**Meetings**

At a minimum, the committee will meet to formally approve the final plan for implementation of the proposal and again to formally approve the final products. Meetings may be conducted digitally if needed. It is up to the student, with support of the chair, to arrange these meetings.

1. **DiP-Related Coursework**

**TEDLD 801: Dissertation in Practice**

Beginning as soon as committee formation is approved, students enroll in *TEDLD/TEDNUR 801: Dissertation in Practice*. Students work on dissertations, including project application, inquiry, and writing are encompassed in this course, with credits gradually increasing through Spring quarter. Instructors of this course will be the Committee chairs (and have taught TEDLD 585 in the spring of the 2nd year) and are responsible for submitting Credit/No Credit grades at the end of each quarter.

**TEDLD 802: Dissertation in Practice Seminar**

During the academic year, students enroll in a one-credit course to support the dissertation process. This course includes peer coaching, process support, peer review of drafts, and general advice in relation to completion of dissertation efforts.The instructor for this course is also the chair of the Committee and will be done in a cohort model by specialization/interest area.

***Typical Course and Credit Timeline***

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| **Quarters During Year Three** | **801****Dissertation****Credits** | **802 Seminar Credits**  |
| Autumn | 4 | 1 |
| Winter | 6 | 1 |
| Spring | 7 | 1 |
| **Total Credits** | **17** | **3** |

Note: if the dissertation is not completed within the projected timeline, enrollment will continue in TEDLD 801 at the minimum credits (2) until final approval or unless a student takes formal leave from the university. See [Graduate School Policy 1.1.1: Requirements Applying to All Grad Degree Programs](https://grad.uw.edu/policies/1-1-graduate-degree-requirements/): “A student must be registered for credit the quarter in which any required exam or presentation occurs. A student must maintain registration as a full-time or part-time graduate student for the quarter the degree or certificate is conferred.”

1. **Human Subjects Division Review**

All research that involves human subjects must follow appropriate UW Institutional Review Board (IRB) policies and procedures. Prior to conducting any research related to the dissertation, students must have received human subjects’ approval by [UW’s Human Subjects Division](https://www.washington.edu/research/hsd/). Most students’ research will fall into one of three categories: (a) Exempt from IRB review, (b) Expedited/Minimal Risk, or (c) Not Research. Both categories require form submission to the IRB.

Students conducting research involving minors are additionally required to complete WA State and FBI fingerprint clearance using resources ***outside*** of the University of Washington. If a student needs assistance identifying where to complete a background check, they are encouraged to contact their program advisor for support. Students are responsible for any background clearance related costs.

1. **Committee Review Process**

Once the final comprehensive report is completed, a draft should be submitted to the committee chair. When the committee chair determines the final draft to be sufficient, the student may then submit the final draft to the full committee. Once approval is granted, the student and the committee chair are responsible for ensuring the final report adheres to both Graduate School and library archival policies. A final approval meeting, in which a presentation of the project to committee members and any other student-invited parties will be conducted. Assuming that all other graduation requirements are met, approval of the dissertation (through the electronic approval process of MyGrad) formally signifies completion of the Ed.D.

1. **Library Archive**

Dissertations are archived digitally through the UW Library. The current system is called Digital Commons. These procedures serve to both protect student work and to expand the audience of student work. UW Tacoma Libraries will provide digital archival supports and training prior to required submissions. <https://guides.lib.uw.edu/tacoma/digitalcommons>

## Publishing Upon Graduation

Following graduation, students may choose to revise and submit their work for publication. It is expected that under most circumstances, the student will invite the chair to be a co-author, particularly if the chair chooses to continue to work with the student through to submission. If other committee members have made significant contributions to the intellectual body of the work, they should also be considered as potential additional authors. Our program guideline is that the student is first author, the chair second and others may follow by amount of work contributed or other arrangement.

## Unsatisfactory Progress

If the student does not make satisfactory academic progress, the Program will follow steps as outlined within the EdD Handbook and the [Graduate School’s Policy 3.7: Academic Performance and Progress](https://grad.uw.edu/policies/3-7-academic-performance-and-progress/#:~:text=Maintenance%20of%20a%20minimum%20cumulative,demonstrates%20steady%20and%20consistent%20progress.).

1. **Dissertation Timeline**

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Quarter** | **Student** | **Faculty** | **Program** |
| **Winter Year 2** | * Develops topic, research questions and literature review (TEDLD 583)
* Identify committee chair via instructor for TEDLD 585 specified section for student by specialization/area of interest (TEDLD 584)
* Develops methodology and approach to applied leadership activity (or set of leadership activities) that align around a central educational leadership issue of concern (TEDLD 584)
 | * TEDLD 583 professor supports development of topic, research questions and literature review
* TEDLD 584 professor supports development of methodology (and any remaining work on literature review)
 |  |
| **Spring Year 2** | * Develop proposal
* Prepare IRB application materials
* Identify the 2nd and 3rd committee members
 | * Director of the EdD program approve chair and committee members.
* TEDLD 583 professor (chair) supports development of proposal
* Committee approves proposal
* IRB paperwork submitted
 | * Add approved student committee to MyGrad
 |
| **Summer Year 2**  | * Finalize committee (if not finalized)
* Begin dissertation work (if committee approved and all paperwork completed)
 | * Committee approves proposal (if not yet approved)
 | * Add approved student committee to MyGrad
 |
| **Fall Year 3**  | * Begin dissertation
* Continue dissertation (if already approved)
 | * Committee approval
* Reflective seminar faculty (chairs) meet with students
* Meet with student(s) & committee (outside of seminar as needed)
 |  |
| **Winter Year 3** | * Continue dissertation work
 | * Meet with student(s) & committee
* Reflective seminar faculty (chairs) meet with students (outside of seminar as needed)
 |  |
| **Spring Year 3**  | * Dissertation public presentation
* Comprehensive report
* Final publishable manuscript
* Graduation (if approved)
 | * Final approval by committee
* For those not meeting approval, continued enrollment in TEDLD 801/802 until completion
 | * Digital archiving
* Submit student degree request to Graduate School via MyGrad
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**Dissertation Checklist**

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| --- | --- | --- |
| **STEPS** | **KEY COMPONENTS OF DISSERTATION** | * **CHECK**
 |
| **1** | Develop dissertation proposal (TEDLD 585) |  |
| **2** | Create dissertation committee  |  |
| **3** | Approval of dissertation proposal by committee |  |
| **4** | Approval by IRB |  |
| **5** | Conduct dissertation |  |
| **6** | Draft dissertation  |  |
| **7** | Informal approval by chair to share first full draft |  |
| **8** | Committee feedback on first full draft |  |
| **9** | Finalize dissertation |  |
| **10** | Committee approval of dissertation |  |
| **11** | Public presentation and formal approval meeting |  |
| **12** | Submission and digital archiving of dissertation  |  |
| **13** | Graduation |  |

1. https://grad.uw.edu/programs/find-graduate-faculty/ [↑](#footnote-ref-1)