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Leading the Leaders: The Redesign of an EdD Program to Prepare Superintendents to Serve North Carolina Schools

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Leading the Leaders: The Redesign of an EdD Program to Prepare Superintendents to Serve North Carolina Schools

Introduction

East Carolina University's (ECU) Doctor of Education (EdD) program has undergone a dramatic transformation over the past decade in order to ensure that current and future school district leaders, with an emphasis on preparation for the superintendency, are best prepared to serve North Carolina's PK-12 public schools in the 21st century and beyond. This redesign coincided with a change of national and state standards for district level administrators. The following will outline the impetus for the redesign of the EdD program, resulting in a renewed emphasis on service, development of signature pedagogies that engage students, and evidence of the success of subsequent program graduates. Included are the specific steps – and missteps – taken by faculty to advance the program redesign, the balance achieved between teaching theory and practice, and accompanying reflections. The program now actively engages and challenges its students from candidate selection in the admissions process to post-graduation opportunities for dissemination of their scholarly work by practitioners to practitioners. This insight into and reflection upon our program's challenges, growth, and subsequent successes is being shared in the hopes of supporting our colleagues within other EdD programs who may be navigating a similar path in effectively preparing high-quality public school superintendents and district administrators.

Institutional Context

The ECU EdD for PK-12 administration is designed to prepare school district leaders, including superintendents, for success through continuous district improvement and innovation. ECU's EdD students are typically employed full time as school or district leaders and attend the program through a hybrid construct with a blend of in-person and virtual instruction. Successful

completion of coursework results in eligibility for the North Carolina PK-12 Superintendent licensure. The licensure work in the EdD is aligned with the National Policy Board for Education Administration (NELP) (NPBEA, 2018) and the North Carolina Standards for Superintendents (NCDPI, 2007).

ECU EdD faculty work with community partners to ensure we are recruiting candidates from the areas in our region where there is a need for licensed administrators, as well as candidates that reflect the diversity of the population in the region. While ECU serves students from all of North Carolina's (NC) counties, its commitment to eastern NC is reflected in its strategic plan, elective classification as a Carnegie Community Engagement University, formal partnership with 141 community organizations, and most notably the formal collaboration with the Walter and Daisy Carson Latham Clinical Schools Network (LCSN). LCSN is a formal partnership between the College of Education at ECU and 44 public school districts, comprising approximately 600 schools with over 22,500 teachers who participate in partnership efforts (LCSN, n.d.). Sixty-eight percent of the districts serve a majority or near-majority (41% or more) non-white population of students. Seventy-five percent of the districts are considered mostly or completely rural. Ninety-six percent of the districts serve a higher percentage of the population living in poverty greater than the U.S. Census Bureau's 2017 official poverty rate of 12.3%. Students of color, LatinX, and American Indian communities are the majority in 16 of the 44 districts (37%) and 41% to 50% of students are non-white in an additional nine districts. All but one district's poverty rate is over 12.3%, and 27 districts report poverty rates over 20%. Four of the poorest counties in North Carolina are in the LCSN. Overall, there are 94,720 children between the ages of birth and 18 years living in poverty in the LCSN school district service areas. Given the demographics of our region, ECU's EdD program has placed renewed emphasis

on developing district leaders with the capacity to advocate and innovate to meet the needs of diverse learners.

In order to help ensure that our district leaders reflect the schools and communities which they serve, the ECU EdD Program has effectively recruited and graduated a diverse student population (see Table 1). The student demographics for the most recently admitted cohort (37 students) starting summer 2021 are 41% BIPOC with 13 Black students, 22 White students, 1 Native American student, and 1 LatinX student. The spring 2021 graduates' (29 students) diversity was 12 (40%) Black, and 17 (60%) White.

The ECU EdD stands out not only for its high completion rates in three academic years and diverse student enrollment, but also for its preparation of leaders for social justice. The journey for continuous programmatic improvement, nonetheless, has been fraught with challenges that have necessitated a great deal of self-examination, ongoing dialogue among faculty, exploration of new programmatic models, and pedagogical innovation.

Table 1

ECU EdD Faculty and Student Race/Ethnicity

Race/Ethnicity	2021 Eastern NC Region %*	2021 ECU EdD Faculty # (%)	2021 ECU EdD Students # (%)
Black	32.48%	1 (9%)	20 (37.04 %)
Asian/Pacific Islander	1.35%	1 (9%)	0 (0.00%)
White	40.35%	7 (64%)	32 (59.26 %)
LatinX	19.47%	2 (18%)	0 (0.00%)
Multiracial	5.79%	0 (%)	0 (0.00%)
Native American	0.56%	0 (%)	1 (1.85 %)
Other	0.00%	0 (%)	0 (0.00%)
Declined to State	0.00%	0 (%)	1 (1.85 %)
Totals	100.00%	11 (100.00%)	54 (100.00 %)

* Based upon 2021 NCDPI LEA membership by race for the 44 LEAs in the LCSN

The Impetus for Program Redesign

In 2011 the ECU EdD faculty decided to redesign the program based on the results of a program evaluation and to counteract criticisms about the perceived low quality of dissertations. The program evaluation conducted by two external faculty and one ECU faculty external to the College of Education (COE) noted that the EdD program was relying on its historical reputation to tout its success but that there were several areas that required program improvements. One area identified included the need to strengthen the vision of the program as it presented as PhD-like, yet the degree was not a PhD. The reviewers expressed concerns that the program lacked rigor in its research courses resulting in dissertation studies that would not meet the PhD-like requirements. At this time, many EdD programs were seeking ways to differentiate themselves

from PhD programs, especially when taking into account the purpose of each program, central pedagogical designs and research/dissertation structure (Boyce, 2012; Wergin, 2011). Also, the reviewers noted that the completion rate was below the national average and needed to be addressed. On a positive note, the reviewers noted that the EdD should be supported because it was the only doctoral program in the COE at ECU, and it contributed significantly to the university's Carnegie Research 2 designation. In addition, enrollment numbers were consistently higher than many doctoral programs at ECU.

Another area identified through the program evaluation that necessitated a redesign of the EdD was to respond to the criticisms about the perceived low quality of dissertations. Several reasons contributed to these criticisms; first, most students admitted were ECU employees. Faculty often heard rumors that ECU administrators would wonder how the employee was qualified for an EdD based on the supervisor's opinion of the employee's performance at their job. Also, due to the large number of ECU employees enrolled in the program, the perception was that all who applied would get accepted. Around this time, the dean of the COE and the faculty of the Department of Educational Leadership did not have a shared vision for the EdD program. The university was faced with the need to reduce its budget and therefore required university leaders to prioritize programs and cut those deemed ineffective. The EdD faculty had several meetings with the COE Dean at that time to demonstrate the importance of the EdD to the college and education community. In these conversations the faculty introduced the idea of joining the Carnegie Project on the Education Doctorate (CPED) to help solidify the EdD identity as a practitioner degree.

The Carnegie Project on the Education Doctorate

CPED member universities consist of a broad network of schools of education. These members “developed a framework for EdD program design/redesign that supports creating quality, rigorous practitioner preparation while honoring the local context of each member institution” (CPED, n.d.-a, para. 1). Professional development offerings and convenings of CPED-member faculty support EdD programs that are undergoing redesign to better serve the needs of doctoral student practitioners.

Among the guiding principles of CPED programs are that EdD dissertations should be dissertations in practice (DiP) that utilize scholarship to address a real-world problem of practice (PoP) framed around bringing about solutions to issues of ethics, equity and/or social justice (Belzer & Ryan, 2013; CPED, n.d.-a; Shulman et al., 2006). A PoP is defined as 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” (n.d.-a, para. 10). Additionally, for CPED programs, EdD students are referred to as *scholarly practitioners*, in that they are being trained to “use practical research and applied theories as tools for change” (CPED, n.d.-a, para. 6).

The COE Dean approved the move to work with CPED to articulate the EdD mission, vision, and student competencies and agreed to sponsor a yearlong professional development with a CPED consultant to help faculty accomplish this goal. The redesign process started by attending a CPED Convening to investigate their framework. Convenings are thematic, annual meetings of faculty from member institutions “where dialogue and collaborative learning activities challenge traditional doctoral preparation ideas and offer new ways to design program content with the needs of professional practitioners front and center” (CPED, n.d.-b, para. 2). Faculty who attended the convening were sold on the CPED framework as the ideal model for

the redesign of the ECU EdD program in order to effectively address the concerns raised in the program evaluation so that the program could effectively prepare future district leaders and superintendents for the schools in our region.

After attending the convening, the faculty engaged in a yearlong Backward Mapping (Perry et al., 2020; Thomson et al., 2017) redesign process facilitated by the CPED consultant. In addition to Backward Mapping, the consultant met with ECU's Chancellor, Dean of the Graduate School, Vice Chancellor for Research, and the Dean of the COE to explain CPED, define the EdD and its difference from a PhD, and describe the level of rigor associated with ECU's EdD. This collaborative work was extended for another year, and it resulted in the redesigned vision, mission, and well-articulated set of student competencies for the ECU EdD listed below in alignment with CPED Guiding Principles (CPED, n.d.-a):

Competency 1. *EdD candidates become **scholarly practitioners** who think creatively and critically and are able to frame problems of practice with an understanding of the complexities of diverse learners and environments. (CPED Guiding Principles 1 & 5)*

Competency 2. *EdD candidates apply research and professional knowledge to **address a problem of practice** while making a significant contribution to the improvement of an educational institution. (CPED Guiding Principles 4, 5, 6)*

Competency 3. *EdD candidates become **servant leaders** who serve educational institutions by supporting the growth and well-being of all stakeholders, building community, and modeling ethical behavior. (CPED Guiding Principle 2)*

Competency 4. *EdD candidates become **civic leaders** who value diverse communities, communicate with, and engage all stakeholders, promote equity, social justice, and the quality of life for those individuals he/she serves. (CPED Guiding Principle 1 & 2)*

Competency 5. *EdD candidates become **professional practitioners** who have a high level of interpersonal skill and emotional intelligence, express a well-articulated personal vision, and promote leadership development within his/her community. (CPED Guiding Principle 3)*

Competency 6. *EdD candidates become **culturally competent** when working with various cultural groups locally, nationally, and internationally. (CPED Guiding Principle 3)*

Faculty developed a rubric to evaluate these competencies in student dissertations.

The Redesign Process

Equipped with a vision, mission, competencies, and a focus to change perceptions of the quality of dissertations, our EdD was accepted into CPED membership in 2014. As a result of the extensive work with CPED and the focus on addressing issues of equity and social justice, the faculty determined that the mission should reflect the intentional outcomes of the program: “To prepare educational leaders who respect diversity, build trustful relationships, apply scholarship to address practice, and engage in purposeful collaboration to confront the challenges of 21st century education.”

To operationalize our vision, “To graduate *Servire* leaders who lead, serve, and transform complex and changing educational environments,” the faculty committed to engage in dialogue via monthly curriculum and instruction meetings. These meetings provided the space for continuous improvement. The process was in place, but progress to operationalize the new

vision was slow. Faculty had access to the tools that could help them navigate the changes required to redesign the program, but department-level buy-in was also important for success (Perry et al., 2020). Between 2014 and 2016, there were many faculty changes in the department; some left the program, some were added that were not familiar with the CPED model, and the program coordinator retired. The institutional memory regarding the redesign vanished almost completely, thus hindering the sustainability of the improvement efforts. The department chair at that time supported faculty to attend CPED convenings, but faculty did not choose to attend. In 2016, the chair appointed a new EdD program coordinator. At the time of the appointment, the faculty member also was promoted to full professor and had been serving in the department since 2005. Her credibility among her peers and knowledge of the ECU EdD's history with CPED helped with faculty buy-in. The 2016-17 academic year activities focused on continuing to obtain faculty buy-in, learning CPED principles, and networking with CPED institutions. The faculty also agreed to stop admitting new students for a period of two years to allow time for the EdD redesign and implementation. These two years would also provide enough time to graduate current students operating under the previous program structure.

During the next two academic years (2017-2019), the EdD program coordinator utilized Backward Mapping again as the framework for discussions about the EdD redesign. Faculty once again met monthly. At each monthly meeting, faculty tackled various aspects of the program and continued dialogue regarding what was working and what needed changing within the program. These monthly meetings have continued and are essential to the ongoing success of this program.

For the first academic year, 2017-2018, the Backward Mapping process was utilized to develop a scope and sequence for the EdD's design track/courses that led to the completion of a

Dissertation in Practice (DiP) in three years. Countless hours were spent on discussions about the assets and deficiencies of EdD students based on faculty past experiences. Decisions were made to scaffold the writing process for scholarly practitioners within the design courses. In addition, the faculty decided to include the requirement of having actionable space as part of the admission process. Faculty wanted to ensure that admitted students have the leadership authority to make changes in their district or school workplace to address a PoP. This is assessed during the interview and is a non-negotiable when considering admission to the program. Upon admission, students enroll in two courses each semester. One course is an inquiry method course focused on the DiP, and the second course is a content course focused on leadership development.

The Backward Mapping process during 2018-2019 focused on designing the scope and sequence of the leadership content courses and the accompanying inquiry method/DiP courses, as well as revising the admission process. Faculty redesigned courses to align with both the national NPBEA standards and NC Superintendent licensure requirements and CPED design concepts, resulting in the development of District Service Leadership Projects (DLSPs), which will be explained in more detail later in this article. Textbooks and resources were scrutinized and changed to focus on diverse communities, leadership for social justice, and building partnerships. With the CPED PoP design concept, the EdD was designed to develop skills and abilities for school leader practitioners to innovate and resolve problems through a lens focused on educational equity. Program studies included leadership theory, methods of educational inquiry, organizational theory, culturally responsive leadership, strategic planning, curriculum and instructional leadership, and educational improvement sciences. Practitioner preparation was grounded in a fusion of both research and practical content. Students learned how to critique and

integrate research results reported in the literature; examine a PoP through extant literature as well as empirically within one's context of professional practice; independently design and implement an intervention; and conduct, analyze, interpret findings, as well as report and disseminate the results.

EdD Candidate Selection

The admission process was also redesigned based on faculty discussions. One major consideration that arose was the intensity of the advising and dissertation coaching needed for students to complete a DiP in three years (Lunsford, 2021; Martinsuo & Turkulainen, 2011). Faculty decided on non-negotiables, one being the number of students each faculty member could chair to provide students with the necessary support to ensure success within a 3-year period. Faculty resolved that chairing eight students was an acceptable load. This decision led to a change in the number of students admitted. Admission to the doctoral program became highly competitive and limited to experienced leaders who faculty identified as having the qualifications to engage in this redesigned three-year program. Faculty articulated the qualities for candidates to be successful, including possession of substantial knowledge of leadership, successful experience in educational settings, and high levels of professionalism (Allen et al., 2018; Jones et al., 2019; Kimbrel & Varga, 2020). Cohorts are now only admitted once per year, with no new cohort each third year due to faculty loads. The faculty only admit the number of students they can support.

The way the program was redesigned, the course instructors of the design courses assist in the dissertation writing process along the way. A second non-negotiable was to calibrate and maintain a steady pace among the various sections of each course. For this reason, students are admitted in cohorts and each design course requires a signature assignment that contributes to

their DiP. Course instructors and dissertation chairs provide ongoing feedback and support to students throughout the program. If a student is unable to maintain the pace and meet required milestones with their cohort, they are required to pause their program and return the following year with the next cohort.

The program structure was also finalized during this time. Faculty obtained approval to deliver the program using a hybrid structure, in that 60% of each course is delivered online, while students are also required to attend face-to-face meetings 40% of the time off-campus at a site approved by our accreditation agency. The EdD provides a system of support services that acknowledges the challenges students away from the campus who work full time have in meeting the responsibilities of their academic endeavors. This includes the selection of cohort meeting locations, typically off-campus at one of the aforementioned approved sites conveniently located in geographical locations that reduce student and faculty driving time.

From 2019 to present, the faculty have worked on developing CPED-influenced DiP guidelines and a DiP template to help guide students through the inquiry design and writing process, indicating recommended structures and information that captures and guides students' research alongside Collaborative Inquiry Partners (CIPs). Additionally, to better engage and support our students, faculty have begun thoroughly examining and improving existing EdD program design concepts while also adding programmatic innovations, some of which are unique to the ECU EdD program. There are certain characteristics built into the design of the program to improve the likelihood for success in a three-year EdD program, while still allowing for the opportunity to affect real change in the students' environments (Archbald, 2008; Belzer & Ryan, 2013; Malfroy, 2005). These design concepts are aligned with the CPED framework and explained in more detail in the next section.

Table 2

ECU's CPED Influenced Program Design Concepts

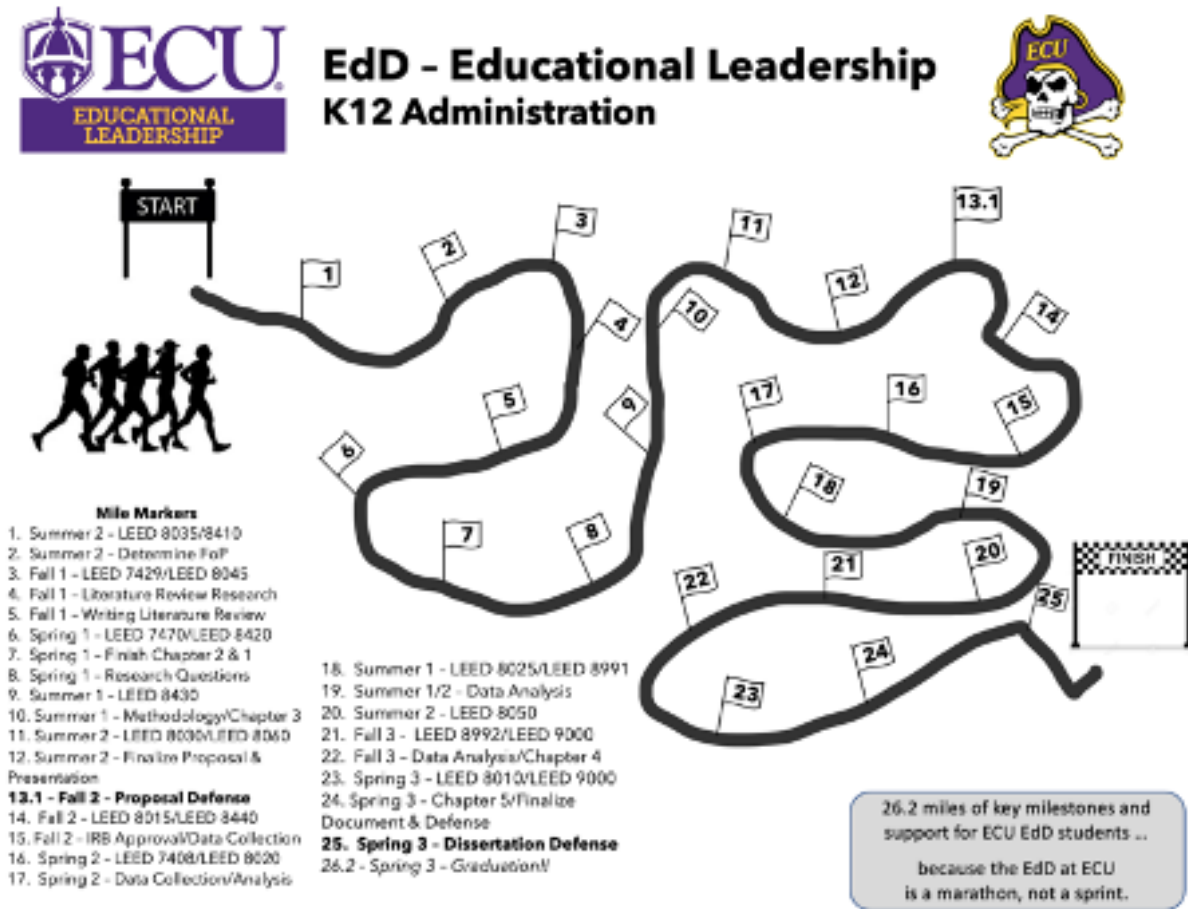
ECU Design Concepts	Description	Alignment with CPED Framework
Internship, DLSPs	Students focus on practitioner license and leadership skill development	Laboratory of Practice
DiP Pitch Presentation	Students frame PoP and secure educational institution leader approval to address it in DiP	PoP Signature Pedagogy Scholarly Practitioner Dissertation in Practice
Study Abroad / International Experience	Students compare educational issues between countries and engage in a service-learning project	Laboratory of Practice Signature Pedagogy
Continuous Improvement Methodologies	Students learn and apply educational inquiry methods that lead to improvements such as Participatory Action Research and Collaborative Inquiry	Inquiry as Practice PoP Signature Pedagogy
Signature Admission Process	Applicants experience several activities during admission that illustrate the integration of social justice and equity within the program	Mentoring & Advising
Ongoing Dissertation Support	One course per semester a design course to help incrementally with the DiP	Mentoring & Advising
Scholarly Practitioner Match with Poster Gallery Walk	Students present framed PoP and select their Dissertation Chairs	Dissertation in Practice Signature Pedagogy Scholarly Practitioner
DiP Dissertation Chair	Dissertation chairs are selected first year in the EdD	Mentoring & Advising

ECU EdD Design Concepts: The EdD as a Marathon

The ECU EdD program views innovation as both a process and a product of educational improvement. Scholarly practitioners in the program are supported and encouraged by faculty to identify a real-world PoP with an emphasis on issues of equity and social justice within their actionable space. Using a foundation of knowledge acquired from data gathered on the PoP and the existent literature, scholarly practitioners are expected to work with collaborative inquiry partners to design, implement, and rigorously evaluate innovative educational interventions to affect equitable change through their leadership practice. This process of innovation is grounded in improvement science. Students are charged by faculty to reflect on this process on an ongoing basis, which in turn develops scholarly practitioners who think critically and are able to frame educational innovation with an understanding of the complexities of diverse learners and environments (Perry et al., 2020). Additionally, the outcome of students' respective inquiries provides innovative products that make a positive difference in the quality of life of individuals, families, organizations, and communities. Upon completion of the EdD, our faculty coach practitioners to develop high levels of interpersonal skills, emotional intelligence, and leadership skills. We want our graduates to identify themselves as practitioners who support the continued creation of new areas of practitioner-focused scholarship, as well as promote an increase in the utilization of equitable inquiry methods in professional practice.

The analogy of a marathon is used to aid scholarly practitioners in pacing themselves through the EdD program of study. Figure 1 was developed by faculty and is provided to scholarly practitioners at the beginning of the program to illustrate the program design with coursework and key milestones. Our description of design elements will embed the same analogy.

Figure 1. Three-year EdD analogy with a marathon



Advising begins in the admission process and continues throughout the program: *In a marathon, physical and mental training and research about the course is essential.* Similarly, the candidate selection process is holistic and yields high diversity and high completion rates (see Table 1). Admitted practitioners are expected to possess substantial knowledge, successful experience in educational settings, and elevated levels of professionalism and leadership. Throughout the admission process, activities were developed to illustrate the rigor, intensity, focus, and design of the three-year EdD program. At the interview, applicants are provided with

an overview of the EdD program and details regarding characteristics and leadership experience faculty are seeking for admission. Applicants are also provided with details on ECU's affiliation with CPED and how it influences the focus and direction of the program and participant expectations. Once admitted, students have a clear knowledge of the structure and purpose of the program, as well as what is expected of them as they seek to become scholarly practitioners. Advising continues throughout the program and is embedded within the design courses (a design course is taken each semester). In addition, students select their dissertation chair during the fall semester of their first year and course instruction and advising is complemented by direct guidance from dissertation chairs.

Interview Process: *Participation in a marathon requires you to train and prepare, demonstrating that you are ready for the journey ahead.* The EdD program consistently receives more qualified applications than there are seats available in the program. As a result, the admission process is selective and not all qualified applicants may be offered admission. Faculty are seeking students who will honor the mission of the program: to prepare educational leaders who respect diversity, build trustful relationships, apply scholarship to address practice, and engage in purposeful collaboration to confront the challenges of 21st century education.

To identify applicants who are committed to social justice and change, have the relevant experience and actionable space, and the academic abilities to be successful in a doctoral-level program, faculty implemented a unique face-to-face interview process. Applicants are divided into groups and take part in three interview stations: an individual interview with a faculty member, group discussion of an article focusing on social justice and critical conversations provided prior to the interview day, and work in a group to creatively solve a problem focused on

educational equity. The design of these three interview activities is such that the interviewers (faculty, alumni, current students) can view the following skills relevant to success as an educational leader focused on addressing educational equity and social justice issues:

- Knowledge and recognition of the importance of social justice and educational equity
- Ability to promote/encourage leadership in others
- Collaboration/teamwork
- Communication skills
- Professional demeanor
- Interpersonal skills
- Ability to identify problems of practice related to equity in their sphere of influence and design and conduct research to determine possible solutions to problems.

Each applicant interacts with a minimum of five interviewers during the interview process and each interviewer collects data. The interview data are compiled, and at the time for admission decisions, all information is reviewed by department faculty, including application materials, as well as interview results. Final admission decisions are made by faculty consensus following extensive review and discussion.

Ongoing Dissertation Support: *A marathoner trains with a coach, who provides encouragement and resources along the course.* Each semester students enroll in two courses: one course focused on leadership theory and development and a second course focused on the dissertation in practice, called design courses. Dissertation loads are shared by faculty teaching the design courses along with the chair of each scholarly practitioner's dissertation. Faculty meet monthly and calibrate the coaching support and the expectations for a completed dissertation

manuscript, including applying the faculty generated guidelines for the ECU EdD dissertation manuscript to each student. Each design course includes signature assignments that support advancing the student toward successful completion and defense of the DiP within three years.

Key milestones are listed below and are embedded throughout the program courses:

- Summer (Year 1): Name and Frame the PoP/Pitch Presentation to Practitioner Supervisors
- Fall (Year 1): Select Dissertation Chair and Develop Literature Review
- Fall (Year 2): Dissertation Proposal Defense, IRB Approval, Data Collection
- Fall (Year 3): Develop Final Draft of Chapters 4-5, Report Results with Collaborative Inquiry Partners
- Spring (Year 3): Dissertation Defense

Continuous Improvement Methodologies: *A marathoner continuously adjusts their approach to find and set the desired pace.* Faculty recognize that scholarly practitioners have a great need to learn inquiry methods that are applicable to addressing significant PoPs. The ECU EdD program subscribes to continuous improvement methodologies that encourage practitioners to conduct research over a period of three years utilizing methodologies that allow several iterations or cycles of research, where each cycle is informed by data and reflections about the data on practice (Perry et al., 2020). For this reason, faculty revised methodology courses to focus on scholarly inquiry and design. Scholarly practitioners learn how to design and implement an intervention or innovation; and conduct, analyze, interpret findings, report, and disseminate the results of a DiP.

DiP Pitch Presentation: *A marathoner explores upcoming races to determine the right course and event for them.* During the first semester of the program, our students evaluate their individual spheres of influence, or actionable space, to determine a possible topic for their DiP that includes a social justice focus. The culminating activity of this semester involves conducting a pitch presentation to their practitioner supervisor. The process of developing the “pitch” enables our scholarly practitioners to carefully consider a potential DiP topic using data collected from their actionable space – their educational setting. Through the development of a root cause analysis and driver diagramming, the result is a cohesive and well-supported PoP which the practitioners in turn share with their respective practitioner supervisor to gauge support for their proposed study (Crow et al., 2019; Hinnant-Crawford, 2020; Perry et al., 2020). Faculty and supervisors provide feedback to ensure that each scholarly practitioner has the foundation for a solid DiP study. LEED has built these pitch presentations into a luncheon (pre-pandemic) event where local leaders collaborate with faculty and scholarly practitioners.

In preparation for students to meet with their supervisors and/or faculty to discuss a potential PoP topic for their DiP, students will develop a brief (8-12 slides) presentation to share and discuss. This presentation can be used moving forward as a starting point for engaging collaborative inquiry partners in the student’s DiP.

A template is provided for students to use in developing their pitch presentation.

Components of the pitch presentation include at a minimum:

- Title (Name the PoP)
- Context about the setting/population
- Demonstrating that the PoP exists, with supporting data
- Potential causes of the PoP (from Fishbone diagram)

- Assets around the PoP (from Fishbone diagram)
- Considerations thus far of potential actions/interventions to address the PoP
- Why the PoP matters to you and its significance to your context, with emphasis on equity and/or social justice.

DiP Chair/Scholarly Practitioner Match with Poster Gallery Walk: *A marathoner finds the right coach for them and their race.* During the second semester of coursework, the scholarly practitioners immerse themselves in relevant literature to their DiP topic and begin to form the initial methods of inquiry for their respective DiP. The culminating activity includes a poster presentation event whereby all departmental faculty meet with the scholarly practitioners, share their research focus and areas of expertise, and participate in a poster gallery walk. A template for the poster is provided to students (see Figure 2). Each student discusses their DiP concept – essentially the pitch presentation, now further conceptualized and supported by an extensive literature review – with each member of the faculty. Based on each DiP’s best alignment with each faculty’s potential contribution, students and faculty indicate their preferences for whom they would like to work and are matched so that every student has a dissertation chair whom they had input on selecting. Research shows that the relationship between doctoral students and their chairperson has been linked to success in doctoral programs (Neale-McFall & Ward, 2015). Faculty are integral to advising and reserve workspace three years at a time for each EdD student they advise and mentor.

Figure 2

ECU EdD DiP Pitch Presentation Template

TITLE (Name & Frame Problem of Practice)

Your Name, EdD Candidate

The PoP in Context

What is your Focus of Practice?

Include data from your site that validates that your PoP is grounded. How does it address issues of equity or social justice?

Share about the setting of your study and the population your study is focused upon. Feel free to include a photo, chart, visual.

Root Cause & Asset Analysis

Summarize fishbone in 1-2 sentences indicating root causes of PoP, with emphasis on equity and/or social justice.

Driver Analysis

Summarize driver diagram in 1-2 sentences indicating potential solution to your PoP that would make a positive difference.

[Choice of...]

Choose one of the following to include a visual display of the direction you are taking with your literature review:

- A literature map showing with your intended literature review topics and subtopics, OR
- A table or graphic organizer with a list of your intended literature review topics/subtopics, as well as a few keys articles relevant to your intended study, OR
- An overview of your theoretical framework and/or conceptual model upon which your intended study is based.

Collaborative Inquiry Partners

- How do you plan to engage CIPs throughout?
- Why does this study matter to you & your CIPs?

District Service Leadership Projects (DSLPPs): *A marathoner breaks up the race into attainable steps toward their ultimate goal.* PK-12 practitioners must also satisfy written and oral assessments that document attainment of professional competencies. Students complete six District Service Leadership Projects (DSLPPs) on educational district-level equitable improvements in the following leadership areas: strategic, instructional, cultural, human resource, managerial, micropolitical, and external development. The six DSLPPs focus on standards that the North Carolina Department of Public Instruction (NCDPI) require educational leadership programs to adopt. The DSLPPs provide for significant learning experiences that

engage students in their own learning and real-world applications of that learning. ECU EdD faculty redesigned the courses to include the DSLPs to significantly improve the quality of a superintendent's preparation to perform their roles and responsibilities.

Each DSLP evolves from a carefully planned and executed process. Based on the specific standard, students gather and analyze available qualitative and quantitative data related to the district (i.e., school improvement plans, district initiatives, district improvement plans, School Report Cards, Teacher Working Conditions Survey results, student testing reports, Multi-Tiered Systems of Support data, student data by subgroups, student data by subject areas, MOUs, etc.). They produce an Analysis of Data to determine an area that needs improvement. Next, they identify one Area of Improvement. Then students discuss their identified area for improvement with the superintendent to obtain feedback and receive permission to develop a plan to address the identified area. Faculty also help to shape the project.

Students produce an Action Plan (Partnership/Relationship Impact Plan) to address the need identified for the DSLP. In the action plan, the student includes the following:

- Identify appropriate action steps to remedy a problem
- Clearly communicate and enforce expectations, structures, rules, and procedures
- Communicate a clear and convincing rationale for the action
- Provide appropriate support
- Provide feedback and encouragement
- Monitor progress
- Adjust the plan to obtain the desired outcome.

Students involve the appropriate school personnel/stakeholders by presenting the Strategic Direction Impact Plan, allow them to provide feedback, and then summarize their stakeholder

feedback with their faculty. Students work with the superintendent (or their designee) to evaluate the degree to which the project impacted student learning and development. This evaluation and impact summary includes a summary of data outcomes that resulted from the project, a description of how their efforts and leadership behaviors impacted student performance, and a written reflection on how this project has impacted their leadership skills and abilities.

Within the last year, EdD students have designed DSLPs that included the following: (a) a district-wide re-entry plan for students and staff after COVID restrictions were lifted; (b) the development of a virtual academy designed as an alternative education option for students who thrive best in an online environment or have circumstances that prevent them from being successful in a traditional face-to-face environment; (c) a plan to equitably distribute more than \$2.3 million in Elementary and Secondary School Emergency Relief (ESSER) funding for schools to cope with COVID hardships; (d) a plan to utilize the Universal Design for Learning (UDL) framework to guide instructional delivery in the co-taught classes in the district to improve instruction and learning for special needs children; and (e) a strategic plan to guide gifted services for academically and/or intellectually gifted students across the district.

Study Abroad International Experience: *A marathoner wants to enjoy new sites, sounds, and experiences to engage them throughout the race.* In the second year of the program, scholarly practitioners can grow as global leaders through a faculty-led study abroad experience. Study abroad experiences are designed to take place over approximately 12-14 days in the middle of the semester. ECU EdD study abroad experiences are typically organized to rural areas of Latin American countries to gain an in-depth understanding of their culture and education systems, with a focus on studying equitable policies and practices. The first study abroad experience took place in Fall 2019 in Cusco, Peru. The course was Political and Social Issues in

Educational Leadership. Students studied and compared the influences politics can have on education in North Carolina and in Cusco, Peru. While in Peru, students engaged in a service-learning project with an afterschool program sponsored by the local police. Students described the opportunity as “...one of the most amazing experiences of my lifetime. I am truly grateful for the experience to give back to the children in Peru, enhance my leadership skills, see Machu Picchu, and build life-long connections with my colleagues.” Another recent graduate who also participated in the trip to Peru described it as “life changing and enhancing.” She also indicated that the opportunity to “walk the paths of history created a greater sense in me to make history.” Similarly, another recent graduate indicated that “experiences change people, and this trip did just that for me.” He also advised that he “returned to my family and my job as a better person and with a greater appreciation of the things that we have.” The next study abroad experience to Patagonia, Argentina has been postponed as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Graduation Celebration: *A marathoner crosses the finish line, celebrates the completion of this monumental undertaking with family, friends, and colleagues, and reflects on their journey.* Planned for post-COVID, the ECU EdD graduation will be accompanied by a uniquely eastern North Carolina barbeque for EdD graduates and their families to gather and celebrate with their peers and faculty who have supported them on their journey.

Evidence of Candidate and Program Impact

Impact on Scholarly Practitioners

A DiP requires students to reflect on the impact of their dissertation studies on their leadership skills and knowledge. Students are asked to add a research question to their studies to determine the impact of their study on their own leadership practice. Students collect this data by writing memos with reflections throughout their three years in the program. An analysis of their

reflections indicated that ECU EdD scholarly practitioners felt that the CPED-influenced EdD had a positive impact on their leadership abilities and their creativity to perform collaborative and ethical behaviors, their constructive thinking, and their ability to address a PoP identified within their actionable space. One recent graduate shared that the EdD process has transformed her leadership practices and beliefs. Her core values were strengthened by the focus of social justice in her practice.

The EdD at ECU prepares educational leaders who are knowledgeable and empathetic regarding issues of social justice and equity encountered in the educational setting beginning with the admission interview process. Throughout the program, students engage in critical discourse and experiences focused on equity and servant leadership. One student shared, “Horizons are not static, and neither are people. It is important to experience as much of the cultural diversity in this world as possible if we are to be best prepared to serve our students.” The unique opportunity to study abroad as a doctoral student in a part-time program while working full-time offers scholarly practitioners an experience that has made a direct impact on their lives, as leaders and as human beings.

As part of the final chapter of the DiP at ECU, scholarly practitioners are encouraged to include a section reflecting on their experience in the EdD program and how the completion of a DiP has impacted their role as a scholarly practitioner. One important impact is that the PoP and solutions implemented by EdD students are shared with district leaders and/or school boards to lead engaging conversations related to the findings of their respective DiP studies, demonstrate their analytical and critical thinking skills and their ability to lead stakeholders through the improvement process. Many of the dissertation projects are adopted by school systems as part of

their practice. Scholarly practitioners report to us that additional leadership opportunities, jobs, and projects are offered to them based on their DiP work and outcomes.

Impact on the Program and Faculty

The EdD redesign process has dramatically improved EdD completion rates. Table 3 shows that an average of 60% of scholarly practitioners are completing the degree in 3 years and the percentage increases to 88% within 4 years.

Table 3

ECU EdD Cohort Graduation Rates

Cohort year	Size	Graduation rate in 3 years	Graduation rate under 4 years
2011-2014	14	11/14 (79%)	13/14 (92%)
2014-2017	26	10/26 (38%)	23/26 (89%)
2015-2018	17	10/17 (59%)	15/17 (88%)
2018-2021*	46	29/49 (63%)	41/49 (83%)
2019-2022	16	14/16 (88%) anticipated	TBD

Note. *First class to participate in fully redesigned program started in 2018

In addition to completion rates, faculty have been positively impacted by the processes and outcomes set in place for ECU's CPED-influenced EdD. Shared-governance structures have been institutionalized in the way faculty plan and implement program curricula. All faculty are invested in continuous improvement evidenced by 100% engagement in monthly curriculum meetings that review data, calibrate syllabi, discuss learning progress, and unite in addressing instructional challenges. These longstanding monthly meetings have been in place since 2014. Pedagogies have evolved to focus on social justice and equity in educational leadership. We are

proud to say that this focus permeates all courses and faculty's own professional development. In 2019, faculty initiated and engaged in a book study of Ibram Kendi's, *How to be an Antiracist*. As a result, we further decided to continuously review our curricula and be aware of our own institutional practices that may enable racist practices and dismantle them. The murder of George Floyd further motivated faculty to do more to fight racism. As Kendi states, "The only way to undo racism is to consistently identify and describe it – and then dismantle it" (p. 9). As a result, in 2020-2021, faculty hosted three virtual learning exchanges open to ECU's community and the public. The focus was on telling personal stories around racism in education, social emotional experiences, and global engagement around these topics:

- August 2020: *From Crisis to Opportunity -- Learning exchange for Pirate educational leaders of PK-12 schools and higher education institutions*
- October 2020: *From coping and hoping to dealing and healing: An interactive symposium for supporting K-20 educational leaders emotionally with the trauma of systemic racism*
- January 2021: *Global stories about localized community action: Creative activism in education*

Faculty plan to continue engaging in learning exchanges to deepen their own learning and activism.

Faculty are also publishing and presenting with EdD students at major professional associations, such as the University Council of Educational Administration (UCEA), the International Council of Professors of Educational Leadership (ICPEL), the Southern Region Council of Education Administration (SRCEA), and CPED. Faculty are coaches, facilitators, and

mentors to our practitioner-students. This quote from one of our recent graduates captures the importance of and impact of our faculty:

I value your guidance and you have been fair, responsive, and extremely knowledgeable whenever I have come to you for assistance. Your courses have struck the perfect balance of having positive working relationships, relevant instruction, and appropriate rigor in my professional opinion. Over the past two years, I have helped my wife battle breast cancer, go through the impacts of the George Floyd unrest, a global health pandemic, and now back surgery. I don't think I would be at this point in this process if it were not for your guidance.

Impact on the Community Our Program Serves

EdD students complete their DiP while embedded in their work as professional practitioners. We have found that students' dissertation topics indeed address problems of practice, and the majority resulted in improved knowledge, experience, and outcomes for their communities. Students are encouraged to conduct their DiP alongside Collaborative Inquiry Partners (CIPs). Students include in their dissertations a description of their collaboration with their CIPs to illustrate the collaborative engagement of their studies. CIPs are involved to varying degrees depending upon the context of the study, ranging from consulting to in-depth engagement in participatory action research. As a result, many of the dissertations have had a positive impact on communities and educational institutions. The following are just a few examples of significant impacts that are directly related to students conducting their dissertations in practice:

- A high school principal secured a tuition scholarship and Honors college admission for an undocumented LatinX student.

- A high school principal created safe spaces for undocumented students at an early college high school and increased enrollment and opportunities for these students to graduate with both a high school diploma and an Associate of Science degree.
- An assistant superintendent created an equity board and reviewed and revised the policies for recruitment of students to advanced and gifted programs. The board found exclusionary language that was institutionalized and led to racist practices.
- An associate superintendent developed a personalized professional development series to support teachers in utilizing online instruction best practices and strategies during COVID-19 lockdown.

In addition to the impact on educational institutions where EdD students' studies took place, faculty regularly co-present with students at professional organizations and within ECU. Students consistently participate in the ECU Graduate School's annual Research and Creative Activity Week and in the Graduate School's Pirate Talks (East Carolina University's mascot is a pirate). The Graduate School's Pirate Talks were developed to engage in intentional and purposeful dialogue to raise awareness of diversity within ECU's community and to build a more inclusive and equitable future for ECU. In November 2020, two of our EdD students co-presented on Supporting Undocumented Students' Education in the U.S. This Pirate Talk was repeated by popular demand and has sparked conversations about ECU's role in providing access to education to undocumented students.

CPED has influenced the way ECU's EdD prepares leaders for PK-12 district leadership and the superintendency. The communities these leaders serve benefit from scholarly practitioners who are civic leaders, global leaders, and servant leaders. Their DiPs make a difference, change beliefs, and promote equitable education practices (Hoffman & Perry, 2016).

Faculty are continuously evolving and incorporating ways to prepare leaders to address unjust systems of education, unsafe and lethal situations for our students, educators, and communities of color. We are continuously revising our programs to equip leaders to proactively address equity and social justice issues in our educational systems. We are committed to this work and will be relentless in bringing this into our classrooms. We apply evidence-based practices to our curriculum and leadership development practices. Our faculty are constantly reading and researching to apply these to teaching and learning. However, what most steadied the EdD program at ECU through the redesign process was our relationships with school and district leaders. Many were engaged throughout the revisioning and provided honest, thoughtful feedback along the way. Their confidence in our faculty, all of whom are former practitioners, allowed for missteps and redirection of the EdD program in its evolution, trusting that the students entering the program would continue to receive high quality coaching from practicing leaders and opportunities to apply leadership knowledge and skills at their school or district sites.

Conclusion

Overall, we have made significant strides in the redesign of the EdD program to both align with the CPED model and to meet the changing needs of our students. As faculty, we continue to evaluate our practices within the program, as well as the successes of our students in their communities. We value the input we receive from our faculty members, alumni, and current students on their experiences, as well as their willingness to provide us with information regarding the skills and abilities needed to be successful in their communities. One current superintendent enrolled in the EdD program said about the impact of the program:

The East Carolina University EdD in K-12 Leadership program provides an opportunity for established professional educators to strengthen their leadership

aspirations through the rigorous engagement of real-time curriculum content and research-based application. As a North Carolina public school superintendent, the program has advanced my professional skillsets through a 3-year cohort model, with a capstone dissertation in practice that is reflective of proven research-based, scholarly practices that may be replicated in the school setting. The faculty is purposeful in developing authentic, life-long relationships with students as well as personally investing in our academic success. I will be forever grateful for their professional commitment to my personal and professional growth.

As a result of what initially seemed like a daunting, uncomfortable, and potentially insurmountable task, the overall program evaluation and redesign has positioned the EdD program at East Carolina University to prepare innovative and reflective superintendents who are well-equipped to lead 21st century schools throughout our region, across the state, and beyond.

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