



Educational Leadership and Policy Studies Student Handbook

2026-2027

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LAND ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

We recognize that the University of Denver and the greater city of Denver reside within the traditional territories of the Hinonoeino (Arapaho), Tsitsista (Cheyenne), and Nunt'zi (Ute). We recognize the descendant communities of the Northern Cheyenne Tribe of Montana, the Northern Arapaho Tribe of Wyoming, the Southern Ute Indian Tribe, and the Ute Mountain Ute Tribe. We also acknowledge that over 40 different Indigenous nations continue to be in relation with the lands currently called Colorado. Denver is home to many different citizens of Indigenous nations and we recognize their enduring presence on this land by paying respects to their elders, both past and present. Please take a moment to consider the legacies of violence, displacement, migration, and resettlement that bring us together today and join us in uncovering such truths at all public events. Now is the time to reflect upon and personally reconcile how the genocidal acts against Indigenous communities intersect with our learning, collaboration, and sharing of knowledge.

To learn more about DU's recognition and efforts to reconcile the involvement of the University's founder, John Evans, in the Sand Creek Massacre, please review the [John Evans Report](#).

PURPOSE OF HANDBOOK

This handbook provides Educational Leadership and Policy Studies (ELPS) students with policies and procedures as they progress through their program. By default, students follow the handbook of the year they entered the program. With advisor approval, students may choose to follow a handbook published after they matriculated into the program. If they do so, they must follow all the policies, protocols, and course work plans in the new handbook. In addition to this handbook, the student should become familiar with the [Graduate Policies and Procedures](#) as stated in the DU Graduate Bulletin. All college and program policies which are considered the minimum requirements for all members of the university community are administered under the [Graduate Bulletin](#). The University of Denver reserves the right to make changes in the regulations, rules, fees, or other aspects of the policy manual without advance notice. The MCE website and the content of this handbook provide additional policy and procedure information specifically affecting Morgridge College of Education students and may be more stringent than the policies outlined in the Graduate Bulletin. Although every effort has been made to ensure agreement among these documents, it is the student's responsibility to read the norms and requirements regarding degree programs in all documents and to complete various program steps in a timely fashion.

Equal Opportunity Institution

The University of Denver is an Equal Opportunity Institution. It is the policy of the University not to discriminate in the admission of students, in the provision of services, or in employment on the basis of race, ethnicity, color, religion, sex, national origin, age, marital status, veteran status, sexual orientation, gender identity, gender expression, genetic information, or disability. The University prohibits all discrimination, harassment, and retaliation, and complies with all applicable federal, state, and local laws, regulations, and Executive Orders. Inquiries concerning allegations of discrimination based on any of the above factors may be referred to the University of Denver Office of Equal Opportunity and Title IX, Mary Reed Building, Room 422, 2199 S. University Blvd., Denver, CO 80208. Phone: 303-871-7481. Fax: 303-871-3656. For more information, please call the above number or see the website at [Equal Opportunity & Title IX Home | University of Denver \(du.edu\)](#) You may also contact the Office of Equal Opportunity and Title IX with concerns regarding determinations of religious accommodations. For disability accommodations and/or issues about access, refer to AccessibleDU: Student Disability Services (SDS).

Welcome to ELPS

Welcome to the Educational Leadership & Policy Studies (ELPS) Program in the Morgridge College of Education (MCE) at the University of Denver. The decision to pursue a certificate or graduate degree may have been an easy one for you to make, or it may have required more thought than you anticipated. One thing is certain—you have been selected because we know that your leadership will have an impact in educational settings that span from early childhood to post-secondary, in Colorado and the nation. A graduate degree is a significant commitment of time, money, and effort; and the ELPS faculty are committed to make it one of the most rewarding experiences of your lifetime.

Your experience in our programs will be different from those of most other graduate students. We expect that you will act on your learning and lead to make a difference. A certificate or degree course of study in ELPS will provide you with relevant learning through integrating high quality content and research, authentic projects and field experiences and individualized support from a team of experienced school leaders and University faculty. Classes are held on weekends or late on weekdays, and blended online learning and partnerships with districts provide flexibility and relevance. Additionally, classes are structured in a cohort model of delivery, so you will build tight learning communities that will persist beyond the completion of the program. The cohort model encourages a consistently high level of professional support and challenge among members. We value our continued connections with graduates, and work to facilitate connections of alumni with current MCE faculty and students.

The ELPS faculty is comprised of full-time University professors with district and school leadership experience and effective educators who are currently employed in districts, schools, and other related professions across the state. We integrate the work of real educational contexts within our courses and expect all students to apply learning to lead improvement efforts in your educational settings while developing personal leadership capacity. The goal of the faculty is that you develop a strong commitment to core values essential for ethical, visionary, courageous, transformative, and responsible leaders as well as the skills and abilities necessary for success as a leader in educational settings. We congratulate you on taking the first step on this new adventure, and we welcome you into our community of learners. We look forward to partnering with you, knowing that we make a difference for every student, teacher and community by doing great things together.

EDUCATIONAL LEADERSHIP AND POLICY STUDIES OVERVIEW

Who We Are

The Educational Leadership and Policy Studies (ELPS) program prepares courageous, visionary, and transformative leaders across all levels of the education system. Our approach integrates rigorous academic coursework with applied, field-based experiences and competency-driven learning to develop effective leadership practice. The program is strengthened through national partnerships and memberships with organizations such as the Carnegie Project on the Education Doctorate (CPED), the Alliance to Reform Educational Leadership (AREL), the University Council of Educational Administration (UCEA), the Wallace Foundation, the Carnegie Foundation, the New York City Leadership Academy, Teach For America, the Colorado Association of School Executives (CASE), and local school districts. These collaborations support continuous program improvement and ensure alignment with emerging needs in the field. Through this work, students engage in leadership, policy, and research that address current challenges and prepare them to lead change in an evolving educational landscape.

ELPS Mission

The ELPS program prepares P–12 leaders to lead for equity and social justice through inclusive, antiracist practice across educational systems. We develop leaders who take action to improve teaching and learning, interrupt systemic inequities, and create educational environments where all students and communities are recognized, supported, and able to thrive.

ELPS Values

Self-Aware: Reflective practitioners who seek and embrace critical feedback with the personal insight necessary to continuously improve and a willingness to fully dedicate their knowledge, skills, and passion towards becoming critically conscious scholars, researchers for social justice, and transformative leaders.

Critically Conscious Scholars: Critical seekers and producers of knowledge who base leadership and professional practice in historical and cultural awareness of communities served by engaging diverse ways of knowing to be an effective, ethical, and equity-focused scholar.

Transformative Leaders Committed to Social Justice: Transformative leaders who develop new knowledge and practice that promotes inclusive, non-oppressive educational contexts that serve the best interests of students, families, educators, and communities for a more equitable and socially just education system and society.

The ELPS Experience

All the degree programs in ELPS engage students in rigorous content, collaborative inquiry, and reflective practice within a tightly-connected cohort structure that intentionally builds learning communities and professional networks. Faculty members partner with individuals, schools, districts, and organizations to build leadership capacity and improve all educational contexts. All components of the ELPS programs incorporate the following practices to prepare students to generate new knowledge and expand career choices within the field of education.

Lead the Change in Education

The Educational Leadership and Policy Studies (ELPS) programs, including the Ritchie Principal Licensure Certificate, M.A., Ph.D., and Ed.D. degrees, prepare leaders who are ready to transform schools, districts, organizations, and communities today and in the future. Grounded in equity and social justice, ELPS students learn to identify disparities, challenge inequitable systems, and develop solutions that drive continuous improvement and create meaningful outcomes for all.

Transformative Leadership Development

At the heart of ELPS is the belief that transformative leadership begins with knowing yourself. Students cultivate self-awareness, critical consciousness, and the attributes of effective leadership by examining their identities, strengths, areas for growth, and the experiences that shape who they are. Great leadership begins with knowing where you stand and committing to where you need to go.

Scholar-Practitioner Focus

Through coursework and field-based experiences, ELPS students bridge research, theory, and practice to address complex educational challenges. Students develop the tools to analyze educational systems, apply critical inquiry, and use research as a catalyst for social justice, equity, and systemic transformation.

Community and Organizational Impact

Leadership is ultimately about creating change with and alongside communities. ELPS prepares students to build relationships, strengthen organizations, and lead transformative efforts that create more just and equitable educational systems. Whether leading in schools, districts, policy spaces, or academia, ELPS graduates are prepared to lead with purpose and create lasting impact.

Ritchie Principal Licensure

The Ritchie Executive Leadership for Student Success (ELSS) is a 30-credit Certificate in Educational Leadership and Policy Studies that leads to recommendation for Colorado Principal Certification. This pathway, ideal for teachers and emerging school leaders and educators pursuing principal licensure, offers competency-based learning that is individualized to the leadership needs of the aspiring leader and the needs of the school in which the student is interning. It focuses not only on developing the skills and abilities necessary for success as a school leader, but also on developing a strong commitment to core values essential for ethical and responsible leadership.

The Certificate consists of four quarters of coursework and requires a minimum of 300 internship hours that are integrated into coursework. During the first quarter of the program (usually Summer), students engage in a leadership retreat that builds community and provides an experiential learning experience to practice the leadership theories and concepts that serve as the foundation of the program. The cohort structure promotes the development of a rich learning community for collaboration and challenge with many different opportunities for interaction and analysis. Each quarter incorporates face-to-face sessions with cohort and faculty, inquiry projects, self-assessments, various online learning activities including discussion boards and reflection journals, as well as readings to guide instruction and learning. This program can be completed in a hybrid in-person format with evening or weekend campus classes or in fully online format with evening or weekend synchronous Zoom classes. The Certificate can be combined with additional coursework for a master's degree. Students completing the Ritchie ELSS Principal Licensure Certificate develop the knowledge, skills, and dispositions necessary to demonstrate the Colorado Principal Quality Standards.

Graduates will be prepared to:

- 1. Lead Strategic Improvement and Organizational Change**
Develop and enact a shared vision, align systems and resources, distribute leadership, and lead continuous improvement efforts that advance student success. (*CDE Quality Standard I: Strategic Leadership*)
- 2. Strengthen Teaching, Learning, and Instructional Systems**
Support high-quality curriculum, instruction, assessment, professional learning, and evidence-based practices that improve teaching and learning outcomes for all students. (*CDE Quality Standard II: Instructional Leadership*)
- 3. Build Inclusive, Equitable, and Student-Centered School Cultures**
Create safe, supportive, and inclusive learning environments that value diverse

identities, foster belonging, support the whole child, and promote equity. *(CDE Quality Standard III: School Culture and Equity Leadership)*

4. Develop and Support People

Recruit, develop, evaluate, and support educators through collaboration, professional learning, feedback, and systems that build individual and collective capacity. *(CDE Quality Standard IV: Human Resource Leadership)*

5. Manage Systems, Resources, and Operations Responsibly

Use resources, policies, communication systems, and organizational structures effectively to create conditions that support learning, safety, and continuous improvement. *(CDE Quality Standard V: Managerial Leadership)*

6. Engage Families, Communities, and Educational Partners

Build relationships and partnerships that strengthen schools, engage communities, and advocate for students, families, and educational improvement. *(CDE Quality Standard VI: External Development Leadership)*

7. Use Evidence and Data to Advance Student Growth

Use data and evidence to understand student needs, guide decision-making, improve practices, and support academic growth and postsecondary readiness. *(CDE Quality Standard VII: Student Academic Growth)*

Modality

This program can be completed in a hybrid in-person format with evening or weekend campus classes or in fully online format with evening or weekend synchronous Zoom classes. Modality does not change content, requirements, behavior norms, academic expectations, or outcomes. Only the synchronous course delivery is different (i.e., in Zoom rather than on campus).

Additional Requirements, ELPS Certificate

Leadership Retreat

The purpose of the summer leadership retreat is to build community and provide an experiential learning experience to practice the leadership theories and concepts that serve as the foundation of the program. The retreat experience concludes with a half-day debrief session the Saturday after the retreat.

Intercultural Development Inventory (IDI – www.idiinventory.com)

Students will complete The Intercultural Development Inventory® (IDI®) as part of their coursework. The IDI provides feedback on a person's intercultural competence—the capability to shift cultural perspective and appropriately adapt behavior to cultural differences and commonalities. The Intercultural Development Inventory is a 50-item questionnaire available

online that can be completed in 15–20 minutes. Students will use the results of their IDI to monitor their growth towards interculturally competent leadership.

Inquiry Projects

Each quarter features an Inquiry Project where students collect and analyze data and engage in leadership experiences that are integrated with their internship. Students work with these Inquiry Projects as an ongoing context for thinking about leading and developing schools throughout the entire program and into their careers as educational leaders.

- **Organizational Diagnosis:** School leaders can lead efforts to create and sustain schools that successfully address the needs of every student, regardless of their diverse backgrounds. Issues of student and community equity and input are examined to challenge structures and assumptions about diverse and dominant cultural groups and access to learning. In this project a school profile and “snapshots” of culture, student achievement, leadership and market analysis are developed. Students identify organizational needs and practices relative to student achievement, culture, and leadership and marketing.
- **Leading Teaching and Learning:** Building the capacity of staff to use 21st century teaching and learning skills, knowledge and values are vital to student success. Principals create and sustain change in schools by engaging stakeholder participation in formulating and implementing change, without which most reform efforts fail. For example, wise use of technology, culturally proficient teaching, and differentiated instruction are pivotal to equitable student success. In this project students work with a teacher or teacher team in a collaborative inquiry action process and identify best practices in assessment, curriculum, instruction, learning, and leadership and identify organizational structures needed to support student learning needs.
- **Developing People:** Principals help schools become communities that prepare students to participate in society. They influence the organizational practices of schools and distribute resources equitably, uphold high standards, and give all students a variety of opportunities to learn and participate in their schools. Principals have the responsibility to provide a powerful and insightful voice regarding decisions about school change. In this project students identify best practices in evaluation and resource management to support and sustain human resources for student achievement.
- **Leading and Resourcing Change:** Excellent principals draw on researched, evidenced-based knowledge to lead innovative schools, melding theories with action to result in best practice. Understanding the legal, political, and socio-cultural contexts for organizing school resources and work is critical to sustaining school efficiency and effectiveness. In this project students provide evidence of how to use resources to lead change and support and sustain student learning.

The Internship

Each internship experience focuses on “problems of practice” related to the quarterly Inquiry Projects. Potential issues for investigation include systems; culture and environment; student support and response to intervention/instruction (RTI); data use; resource management; family and community engagement; teacher professional development, supervision, and evaluation; policy and ethics; and communication. The Internship is guided by the cohort professor, a mentor principal and a menu of opportunities that complements the focus of each of the inquiry projects. The University grade received by the intern is based upon the cohort professor’s judgment of the intern’s growth and understanding of the nature, problems and processes of leadership. The grade will be based upon multiple criteria including: 1) review of student’s portfolio, including the standards-based inquiry projects and reflections; 2) log of internship hours and experiences; 3) attendance and participation in meetings with mentor principal and cohort instructor; and 4) feedback from cohort instructor and mentor principal.

Internship Process (minimum requirements)

- **Initial Meeting:** The student will schedule a meeting (‘virtual’ by phone, Zoom, or email) between the student, the mentor principal and university instructor within the first 2 to 3 weeks (20-30 clock hours) after beginning the internship. Prior to the first meeting, the student gives the mentor principal a copy of the inquiry project internship materials.
- **Quarterly:** Check-in meetings (may be ‘virtual’ by phone, Zoom or email) to share and discuss the new Inquiry project outline with the principal mentor. School needs or considerations that might require a modification of the project are discussed. The cohort instructor is available to meet with students if desired or necessary-please contact them as needed/desired by the student or field mentor.
- **End of Each Quarter:** Log of hours and Inquiry Projects (or completion of the internship evaluation.) This documentation is posted on the student’s portfolio for course professor review or shared in a conference with the student, cohort instructor and mentor principal.
- **Last Quarter:** The appropriate Internship Evaluation Document is completed by the field mentor prior to the Final Conference and submitted electronically to the university mentor.

Certificate Completion Requirement

Final Portfolio Review and Leadership Journey Presentation

The final portfolio contains the cumulative learning from the principal certificate program. Each student prepares a portfolio that includes reflections of learning from the inquiry projects and provides evidence of meeting state standards for principals. Each student also presents a review of learning at an end-of- year, in- person Leadership Journey event. Mentor principals

are invited to attend this event. The student is required to provide the following context for leadership actions:

- Introduce school and position.
- Articulate vision, goals, key strategies and bold steps took to impact student learning and achievement at the school.
- Identify at least one “essential” leadership question.
- Clearly articulate how the inquiry projects impacted leadership development and experiences.
- Provide evidence of leadership competencies relative to Colorado Quality Standards for Principals and District leadership standards (if applicable).

Program Accreditation

- Colorado Department of Education (CDE) Approved Educator Preparation Program. Graduates may apply for [Colorado Initial Principal License](#) through the CDE and is accredited by the Council for the Accreditation of Educator Preparation (CAEP).

PRINCIPAL LICENSURE CERTIFICATE COURSE WORK PLANNING DOCUMENT

EDUCATIONAL LEADERSHIP AND POLICY STUDIES

NAME _____

STUDENT ID _____

REQUIRED COURSES

[Ritchie ELSS Course Descriptions](#)

Course Number	Course Title	Credit Hours	Quarter to be Completed
ADMN 4840	Strategic and Transformative School Leadership	9	Summer
ADMN 4841	Instructional Leadership for Equitable Schools	5	Fall
ADMN 4842	Human Resource Leadership	5	Winter
ADMN 4843	Strategic Resource Management for School Leadership	5	Spring
Subtotal		24	
ADMN 4860	Principal Internship	2	Fall
ADMN 4860	Principal Internship	2	Winter
ADMN 4860	Principal Internship	2	Spring
Subtotal		6	
Total Credits Required		30	

Student Signature: _____ **Date:** _____

Advisor Signature: _____ **Date:** _____

The course work planning document must be completed with the student's signature, advisor's signature, and submitted to the Course Professor by the end of the first quarter of enrollment.

MASTER OF ARTS

(INCLUDES PRINCIPAL LICENSURE)

The Educational Leadership and Policy Studies Program Master of Arts (ELPS-MA) is uniquely designed to prepare leaders who can turn around low-performing schools. The master's degree is a seven-quarter program of study that begins with the foundation of the ELPS certificate program (Ritchie ELSS cohort). The ELPS Program (MA degree) is an approved provider of CDE School Turnaround Leadership Grant Program; please refer to the [CDE website](#).

The Master of Arts in Educational Leadership and Policy Studies with a concentration in Principal Licensure is designed to be completed the year following the Certificate in Educational Leadership and Policy Studies. The MA offers extended study of transformative and turnaround leadership, covering issues of culture, diversity, poverty, special needs, liberatory design, entrepreneurship, and data-driven leadership. The MA consists of a total of 45 credit hours, which includes the Certificate in Educational Leadership and Policy Studies with a concentration in Principal Licensure program (30 credits) and four additional courses (15 credits). The completion of the MA culminates with the design and execution of an action research or school design project as the MA capstone. This program can be completed in a hybrid in-person format with evening or weekend campus classes or in fully online format with evening or weekend synchronous Zoom classes.

Graduates will be prepared to:

1. Lead Strategic Improvement and Organizational Change

Develop and enact a shared vision, align systems and resources, distribute leadership, and lead continuous improvement efforts that advance student success. *(CDE Quality Standard I: Strategic Leadership)*

2. Strengthen Teaching, Learning, and Instructional Systems

Support high-quality curriculum, instruction, assessment, professional learning, and evidence-based practices that improve teaching and learning outcomes for all students. *(CDE Quality Standard II: Instructional Leadership)*

3. Build Inclusive, Equitable, and Student-Centered School Cultures

Create safe, supportive, and inclusive learning environments that value diverse identities, foster belonging, support the whole child, and promote equity. *(CDE Quality Standard III: School Culture and Equity Leadership)*

4. Develop and Support People

Recruit, develop, evaluate, and support educators through collaboration, professional learning, feedback, and systems that build individual and collective capacity. *(CDE Quality Standard IV: Human Resource Leadership)*

5. Manage Systems, Resources, and Operations Responsibly

Use resources, policies, communication systems, and organizational structures effectively to create conditions that support learning, safety, and continuous improvement. (*CDE Quality Standard V: Managerial Leadership*)

6. Engage Families, Communities, and Educational Partners

Build relationships and partnerships that strengthen schools, engage communities, and advocate for students, families, and educational improvement. (*CDE Quality Standard VI: External Development Leadership*)

7. Use Evidence and Data to Advance Student Growth

Use data and evidence to understand student needs, guide decision-making, improve practices, and support academic growth and postsecondary readiness. (*CDE Quality Standard VII: Student Academic Growth*)

Modality

This program can be completed in a hybrid in-person format with evening or weekend campus classes or in fully online format with evening or weekend synchronous Zoom classes. Modality does not change content, requirements, behavior norms, academic expectations, or outcomes. Only the synchronous course delivery is different (i.e., in Zoom rather than on campus).

MA Degree Completion Requirement - Action Research Capstone Project

The Action Research course (ADMN 4849) provides the methodological framework and support for the development of a capstone project, which serves as the comprehensive exam for the Master's in Educational Leadership and Policy Studies. While enrolled in this course, students are responsible for designing a study, reviewing appropriate literature, and gathering/analyzing data. Under the supervision of the course instructor, students will then draw conclusions from their research, make an action plan, and reflect on the relationship between action research, leadership and the content in the Educational Leadership and Policy Studies Master's program. The result is the completed capstone. Certification of successful capstone completion by each student's capstone advisor is necessary to fulfill degree requirements for the MA. Students are expected to complete the capstone in the quarter during or immediately following completion of ADMN 4849. Students who do not complete the capstone during ADMN 4849 prior to leaving the Action Research course will be assigned a Capstone Advisor by the ELPS Program Chair.

The capstone project for the ELPS MA should demonstrate:

- An integration of theory and practice
- Original thinking and research richly supported by literature from the field, using APA format
- A problem-based focus connected to practice Instructor approval of action research project

Students will follow this process in the formulation of the action research project:

- Selecting a focus
- Clarifying theories
- Identifying research questions
- Collecting data
- Analyzing data
- Reporting results
- Planning/taking informed action

Evaluation of the Action Research Project

The Action Research professor or the student's Capstone Advisor will evaluate the completed capstone project. After the final evaluation of the capstone, the Capstone Advisor will submit the Certification of the Completion of Capstone to the Academic Services Associate.

All capstone projects will be evaluated using the following criteria:

- Clear identification of focus and research question(s)
- Relevant literature review of related research (minimum of five sources, APA format)
- Clear research design, development of data collection tools and definition of data sources and collection processes
- Strong data analysis and interpretation of findings
- Clear description of the planned or real action resulting from research findings

Program Accreditation

Colorado Department of Education (CDE) approved Educator Preparation Program and Turnaround Leader Program. Graduates may apply for [Colorado Initial Principal License](#) through the CDE.

MA COURSE WORK PLANNING DOCUMENT
EDUCATIONAL LEADERSHIP AND POLICY STUDIES (ELPS)

NAME _____

STUDENT ID _____

Course Number	Course Title	Credit Hours	Quarter to be Completed
A. Principal Licensure Concentration Requirements (Certificate, Completed in Year 1)			
ADMN 4840	Strategic and Transformative School Leadership	9	Summer
ADMN 4841	Instructional Leadership for Equitable Schools	5	Fall
ADMN 4842	Human Resource Leadership	5	Winter
ADMN 4843	Strategic Resource Management for School Leadership	5	Spring
Subtotal		24	
B. Internship Requirements (Certificate, Completed in Year 1)			
ADMN 4860	Principal Internship	2	Fall
ADMN 4860	Principal Internship	2	Winter
ADMN 4860	Principal Internship	2	Spring
Subtotal		6	
C. Foundation Requirements (Year 2)			
RMS 4900	Education Research and Measurement	4	Summer
ADMN 4834	Culturally Responsive School Leadership	3	Summer
Subtotal		7	
D. Program Requirements (Year 2)			
ADMN 4848	Liberatory Design for School Improvement	4	Fall
ADMN 4849	Action Research for School Leaders	4	Winter

Subtotal	8	
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Summary of Course Requirements		
Certificate Sequence (Year 1)		
A. Principal Licensure Concentration Requirements from Certificate in Year 1		8
B. Internship Requirements from Certificate in Year 1		7
Master's Sequence (Year 2)		
C. Foundation Requirements		24
D. Program Requirements		6
E. Action Research Capstone Paper/Project	Date Completed:	
Total Credits Required		45

Student Signature: _____

Date: _____

Advisor Signature: _____

Date: _____

The course work planning document must be completed with the student's signature, advisor's signature, and submitted to the Course Professor by the end of the first quarter of enrollment.

Overview of ELPS Doctoral Pathways

The Educational Leadership and Policy Studies (ELPS) Program doctoral (EdD or PhD) degree prepares students to be transformative leaders in a variety of educational settings. What distinguishes the ELPS program from traditional doctoral programs in education is the belief that the next generation of leaders should be future-focused, critical thinkers, and change agents. Instead of a program that is reactive to existing systems, ELPS prepares the next generation of leaders to transform research, policy, and practice in complex and ever-changing educational contexts. A doctoral degree from ELPS prepares students with research and leadership skills that will expand career choice sets within the field of education. ELPS doctoral students benefit from:

- Small teacher-student ratios,
- A rigorous curriculum that is grounded in social justice and responsive to current challenges faced by educational leaders,
- A cohort comprised of accomplished educational leaders from diverse national and international educational contexts,
- Full access to resources for University of Denver students,
- Research and fieldwork opportunities for applied learning,
- Personalized mentorship by respected scholars in the field, and
- Access to well established educational partnerships and networks across Colorado and the nation.

Both the EdD and PhD are grounded in equity, social justice, rigorous inquiry, and the study of leadership and policy. The pathways differ in how students use research, the types of questions they pursue, and the professional roles for which they are preparing. The **Doctor of Education (EdD)** prepares scholar-practitioners who use research and evidence to lead organizational improvement and address complex problems of practice. The **Doctor of Philosophy (PhD)** prepares scholars who conduct original research, advance theory, and contribute new knowledge to the field of educational leadership and policy.

Shared Doctoral Learning Experiences

Foundational Coursework

The doctoral program consists of two years of foundational coursework in research and leadership offered in a cohort model. During the initial years of study, EdD and PhD students learn together in a shared scholarly community focused on leadership, policy, research, and systems change. Students engage with leadership theory, critical perspectives, qualitative and quantitative research methodologies, and policy analysis while developing the knowledge and skills needed to conduct meaningful inquiry and contribute to educational transformation. This coursework is intentionally designed to help students make critical connections between practice, research, and theory. The cohort format allows students to get to know a cadre of

fellow educational leaders and scholars who support each other through coursework and doctoral research. After the initial two years of coursework, EdD students continue to develop and complete their Dissertation in Practice, and PhD students continue with another year of coursework in a cognate area of interest and specialized research methodology.

Intercultural Development Inventory (IDI – www.idiinventory.com)

Students will complete The Intercultural Development Inventory® (IDI®) as part of their coursework. The IDI provides feedback on a person's intercultural competence—the capability to shift cultural perspective and appropriately adapt behavior to cultural differences and commonalities. The Intercultural Development Inventory is a 50-item questionnaire available online that can be completed in 15–20 minutes. Students will use the results of their IDI to monitor their growth towards interculturally competent leadership.

Comprehensive Review

The Comprehensive Review is a required milestone in the ELPS doctoral program and a primary mechanism for evaluating students' mastery of Student Learning Outcomes (SLOs). It marks the transition from doctoral coursework to independent scholarly inquiry and assesses readiness to advance to the dissertation phase. The Comprehensive Review must be completed after all required coursework, or in the final academic quarter in which coursework is completed and requires program approval to proceed. Through the Comprehensive Review, students must demonstrate their ability to synthesize relevant scholarship, apply theoretical and conceptual frameworks, utilize appropriate methodological approaches, critically engage with research, and articulate a clear research focus aligned with their doctoral pathway. A faculty review committee evaluates submissions and provides an outcome based on students' preparation for independent dissertation research. Successful completion of the Comprehensive Review is required before registering for Doctoral Research Seminar (ADMN 5910) or advancing to the dissertation phase, including the Dissertation in Practice (DiP) for EdD students or the dissertation for PhD students.

Student Learning Outcomes (SLOs)

The Comprehensive Review evaluates student performance across the following Student Learning Outcomes:

Self-Aware (SLO-1): Reflective practitioners who seek and embrace critical feedback with the personal insight necessary to continuously improve and a willingness to fully dedicate their knowledge, skills, and passion towards becoming critically conscious scholars, researchers for social justice, and transformative leaders.

Critically Conscious Scholar (SLO-2): Critical seekers and producers of knowledge who base leadership and professional practice in historical and cultural awareness of communities served by engaging diverse ways of knowing to be an effective, ethical, and equity-focused scholar.

Transformative Leaders Committed to Social Justice (SLO-3): Transformative leaders who develop new knowledge and practice that promotes inclusive, non- oppressive educational contexts that serve the best interests of students, families, educators, and communities for a more equitable and socially just education system and society.

Comprehensive Review Guidance

The complete eligibility requirements, review process, panel composition, outcome definitions, notification procedures, Ethical Authorship and AI Use policy, and evaluation rubric for the Comprehensive Review are maintained in the ELPS Comprehensive Review Guidance Document, available on the ELPS Canvas page. The Comprehensive Review Guidance Document is the authoritative source for Comprehensive Review policies and procedures and is reviewed and updated annually. Students and faculty should consult it directly rather than relying on this summary alone. A Does Not Meet determination on the Comprehensive Review results in academic probation in accordance with ELPS program policy, as described in the Comprehensive Review Guidance Document and in University, College, and Program Academic Policies and Procedures, below.

Advancement to Dissertation Phase

While students may explore research interests, review literature, and consult with faculty during coursework, formal dissertation activities, including proposal development and defense, Dissertation in Practice (DiP) implementation, IRB submission, data collection, and independent dissertation research, may not begin until the Comprehensive Review has been successfully complete

Doctor of Education (EdD)

Program Overview

The ELPS Doctor of Education (EdD) is an executive doctoral program designed for experienced organizational leaders who are actively engaged in systems-level improvement within their professional contexts. Grounded in the Carnegie Project on the Education Doctorate (CPED) framework, the program prepares scholar-practitioners to use inquiry, leadership, and the Dissertation in Practice (DiP) to address complex, persistent problems of practice and advance meaningful change within their organizations. Students enter the program with a clearly identified problem of practice situated in their professional setting, an issue they seek to understand deeply and address through sustained inquiry and leadership action. Because the EdD is practice-centered, students are expected to maintain a professional role throughout the program that provides sufficient leadership responsibility, organizational access, and decision-making authority to carry out their Dissertation in Practice. EdD students represent leaders across a range of professional contexts, including:

- PK–12 schools and districts
- Nonprofit and community-based organizations
- Policy and advocacy organizations
- Educational systems and leadership organizations

Within these roles, students engage in inquiry that is embedded in their organizations, examining and influencing policies, practices, and systems in real time. Their work may include leading initiatives, supervising programs or teams, shaping organizational decision-making, or guiding improvement efforts directly connected to their problem of practice.

The EdD Experience

The EdD is intentionally designed to integrate leadership practice, research, and organizational improvement. Throughout the program, students build the capacity to:

- Identify and analyze complex, practice-based problems
- Use research and evidence to inform leadership decisions
- Design and implement improvement strategies within their organizations
- Evaluate the impact of change initiatives
- Influence organizational systems, policies, and practices
- Advance equity and social justice through applied leadership

The program emphasizes leadership as a process of inquiry and action, preparing leaders not only to understand educational challenges, but to intervene in and transform the systems in which those challenges occur.

Program Structure

The EdD is a 65-credit doctoral program beyond the master's degree that builds on students' professional leadership experience. The program begins with two years of foundational doctoral coursework delivered in a cohort model. During this period, EdD students learn alongside ELPS PhD students, developing shared foundations in research, theory, and inquiry while engaging in practice-based application. Following coursework, students enter the dissertation phase, where they design and complete their Dissertation in Practice (DiP). This work is supported through faculty advising and structured dissertation seminars. Students may also complete an administrative internship aligned with leadership licensure pathways, when applicable.

Culminating Research Experience: Dissertation in Practice (DiP)

The Dissertation in Practice (DiP) is the culminating experience of the ELPS EdD and reflects the central purpose of the degree: advancing professional practice through scholarly inquiry. Rather than studying problems from a distance, students conduct practice-based research embedded in their organizational contexts. Each DiP is anchored in a problem of practice identified at program entry and refined through coursework and engagement with research, theory, and stakeholders. Through the DiP, students:

- Investigate the organizational, systemic, and contextual dimensions of their problem of practice
- Engage stakeholders and communities connected to the issue
- Design, implement, influence, or evaluate improvement efforts
- Use evidence to inform decision-making and assess outcomes
- Generate actionable knowledge that supports organizational learning and change

The DiP is not only a scholarly contribution; it is an applied, practice-centered intervention that supports measurable improvement within the student's professional setting.

DiP Structure and Evaluation

The Dissertation in Practice (DiP) is designed to uphold a high standard of scholarly rigor while allowing flexibility in how students investigate and address their problem of practice. As the culminating experience of an executive doctoral program, the DiP reflects both a scholarly contribution and a sustained effort to improve professional practice within an organizational context. Students are expected to produce original work that advances understanding of their identified problem of practice. Originality in the DiP is demonstrated through how the problem is conceptualized, how inquiry is designed and conducted, and how findings are used to inform meaningful improvement. This work should align with CPED Design Concepts and Program Principles and result in actionable knowledge that supports organizational learning and change. A range of research approaches is appropriate for the DiP, including improvement science, program evaluation, policy development or analysis, action research, and other applied

research designs. The selected approach should align with the nature of the problem of practice and the proposed improvement goals.

Research Compliance and Ethical Conduct

All research involving human subjects must be reviewed and approved by the University of Denver's Institutional Review Board (IRB) through the Office of Research Integrity and Education (ORIE), as required by University policy. Students are responsible for:

- Determining whether their project requires IRB review
- Consulting with their faculty advisor regarding research design and compliance
- Completing required IRB application materials when applicable

Students should review ORIE guidelines and consult with their advisor early in the research planning process to ensure compliance with ethical standards and timelines.

Selection of DiP Research Topics

DiP topics must be grounded in the student's problem of practice and should be selected based on the following considerations:

- Relevance to the student's professional role and organizational context
- Significance of the issue for improving practice within a specific setting
- Alignment with ELPS coursework and program learning outcomes
- Potential to inform or influence organizational decision-making and improvement efforts
- Feasibility within the expected timeframe (typically 9–15 months)

Required Elements of the Dissertation in Practice

The format of the Dissertation in Practice may vary based on the research design, methodological approach, and nature of the problem of practice. However, all DiPs must clearly demonstrate the following core components:

- **Problem of Practice:** A clearly defined, contextually grounded problem situated within the student's professional setting
- **Review of Relevant Literature and Context:** Engagement with research, theory, and professional knowledge that informs understanding of the problem
- **Conceptual or Theoretical Framework:** A framework that guides the analysis, design, or interpretation of the work
- **Research Design and Methods:** Appropriate methods aligned with the problem of practice and intended outcomes
- **Findings and Analysis:** Systematic analysis of data and evidence relevant to the problem and inquiry
- **Implications for Practice and Organizational Impact:** Clear articulation of how findings inform decision-making, practice, or policy within the organization

- **Recommendations and Actionable Outcomes:** Evidence-informed recommendations and/or implemented or proposed improvement strategies
- **References and Supporting Materials:** Complete documentation of sources and any appendices as appropriate
- All written work must adhere to current APA style guidelines, current edition

Doctoral Research Coursework and Registration

EdD students complete required doctoral research coursework to support the development and execution of the DiP:

- **ADMN 5910: Doctoral Research Planning and Design (variable credits; minimum 6)** prepares students for proposal development and research design
- **ADMN 5993: Independent Research (variable credits)** supports ongoing dissertation work

Students are required to register for at least one credit each Fall, Winter, and Spring quarter until degree completion, in accordance with MCE policy. A minimum number of doctoral research credits must be completed as outlined in the program requirements.

Expectations for Scholarly Quality

ELPS faculty expect students to demonstrate high levels of scholarly and professional quality in all aspects of the DiP. Work should reflect:

- Clear and effective written communication
- Strong alignment between problem, framework, methodology, and findings
- Thoughtful analysis and interpretation
- Relevance and contribution to educational leadership practice

Each DiP represents a contribution to the field and to the improvement of practice within the student's professional context.

Guiding Timeline for DiP Development

While individual timelines may vary, the following stages provide a general framework for developing the Dissertation in Practice. These stages reflect an iterative process in which students continuously engage their problem of practice within their organizational context.

1. Problem Framing and Inquiry Development

- Clearly defined problem of practice grounded in the student's organizational context
- Identification of the site, scope, and relevant stakeholders
- Development of focused research and/or improvement questions
- Initial data collection or evidence plan
- Preliminary literature review to inform understanding of the problem
- Draft IRB application (if applicable)

2. Practice-Based Research Design and Proposal

- Refined problem of practice and confirmed research site
- Development of a theoretical or conceptual framework
- Expanded and integrated literature review
- Finalized research or improvement design, including timeline and methods
- Alignment of methods with intended organizational outcomes or improvement goals
- Proposal defense
- IRB and site approval (if required)

3. Implementation, Data Collection, and Analysis

- Execution of the research or improvement plan within the organizational context
- Ongoing data collection and analysis
- Iterative reflection on findings and emerging insights
- Adjustment of approaches as appropriate to the problem of practice

4. Findings, Impact, and Defense

- Analysis of findings connected to the theoretical/conceptual framework and literature
- Interpretation of results in relation to the problem of practice
- Clear articulation of implications for practice, decision-making, and organizational improvement
- Development of actionable recommendations or demonstrated impact
- Final Dissertation in Practice defense

Committee Composition and Process

Faculty Advisor and Committee Formation: Each student is assigned a faculty advisor who serves as the Dissertation in Practice (DiP) Committee Chair. The Chair or Co-Chair must be an ELPS-appointed faculty member with an earned doctorate. Students, in consultation with their advisor, will form a committee consisting of a minimum of three members. The voting committee includes:

- The DiP Chair or Co-Chair (ELPS faculty)
- At least one additional faculty member (ELPS or DU faculty)
- A third member who may be an external scholar or practitioner with relevant expertise

At least one ELPS faculty member (the Chair or Co-Chair) must serve on every committee. Additional members may be drawn from within or outside the University to ensure appropriate content, methodological, or practice-based expertise aligned with the student's problem of practice. Appointments of external or non-DU committee members require approval from ELPS.

Committee Roles and Decision-Making

The DiP Committee is responsible for guiding and evaluating the student's work across proposal and dissertation phases. Decisions of the committee are determined by majority vote of the voting members. In cases where a voting decision cannot be reached or results in a split decision an additional ELPS faculty member or designated program representative will review the work and provide a final determination. Given the program's executive and practice-based focus, committee composition is intentionally designed to incorporate both scholarly rigor and professional expertise relevant to the student's problem of practice.

Dissertation in Practice Oral Defense

An oral defense of the Dissertation in Practice (DiP) is required and is conducted by the student's committee. The defense must be held at least three weeks prior to the end of the academic quarter in which the degree is to be conferred. Committee members must receive a complete copy of the DiP at least two weeks in advance of the scheduled defense. The defense is expected to be conducted in person unless circumstances require remote participation, as approved by ELPS.

Conduct of the Oral Defense

The DiP Committee Chair presides over and manages the defense process. The Chair is responsible for ensuring that the defense is conducted in a professional and equitable manner and that the student has a full opportunity to present and defend their work. During the defense:

- The student presents their Dissertation in Practice
- Committee members engage in questioning and discussion
- The defense focuses on the alignment of the problem of practice, research design, findings, and implications for practice and organizational impact

The oral defense is an open forum. Faculty, students, and other invited participants may attend. External participants may ask questions at the discretion of the Committee Chair.

Committee Deliberation and Decision

Following the public portion of the defense:

- The student and all non-committee members are excused
- The committee deliberates in closed session

The outcome of the defense is determined by **majority vote of the voting committee members**.

Possible outcomes include:

- **Pass with No Revisions:** Minor editorial or formatting changes only
- **Pass with Minor Revisions:** Limited revisions to organization, clarity, or content
- **Pass with Major Revisions:** Substantive revisions required, which may include rewriting sections, expanding analysis, or strengthening alignment between findings and implications
- **Fail:** The Dissertation in Practice does not meet program standards or the student is unable to adequately defend the work

The Committee Chair is responsible for overseeing completion of required revisions. Committee members may also require review and approval before final submission.

Re-Defense Policy

A student who does not pass the oral defense may petition the committee for the opportunity to complete one additional defense. The scope and timing of revision and re-defense will be determined by the committee in consultation with ELPS faculty.

Documentation of Results

Following the defense:

- The **Result of Oral Defense form** must be completed and signed by all committee members
- The form is submitted to the ELPS Academic Services Associate for inclusion in the student's academic record

Electronic or remote signatures may be accepted in accordance with University policy when in-person signatures are not feasible.

Dissertation, Dissertation in Practice, Master's Thesis Plagiarism Prevention Policy

Approved by MCE Faculty Governance on September 9, 2014

The University of Denver has a very clear policy regarding plagiarism. Plagiarism, as a concept, can be somewhat confusing to students. To increase clarity regarding the definition and operational implications of plagiarism as well as to protect the individual students as well as the Morgridge College of Education we will be instituting a policy related to culminating written projects, which include dissertations, dissertations in practice (EdD students only), and Master's theses.

Prior to submission for review, students will be responsible for using the Canvas Turnitin page, which is a plagiarism-prevention service, to check the document for plagiarism. The process is as follows:

1. The student completes the project.
2. The student runs the document through Turnitin

3. Turnitin produces a report.
4. The student reviews the report.
5. The student makes any necessary changes to the document.
6. The student writes a ONE PAGE summary of his/her efforts regarding the process. This should include a statement that the student indeed ran the document through the software program. It should also briefly explain any changes that were made and if changes were not made why not.
7. The Chair/Director will review the summary, along with the Turnitin report.

This process will be used by every student. Students are still expected to be arbiters of their own honesty. This process does not shift the onus of responsibility in any way to faculty; rather, it is another step in attempting to reduce and avoid plagiarism.

DiP Publication

Once the chair has approved the DiP final product, the DiP Chair will submit the Final Approval of Dissertation in Practice Form, and the student will receive instructions for submitting the document. If EdD students would like to request that their Dissertation in Practice be published through ProQuest, they must follow the instructions and deadlines on the Office of Graduate Education's [website](#).

Program Accreditation

Colorado Department of Education (CDE) Approved Educator Preparation Program. Graduates who have completed the Administrative Internship may apply for [Colorado Initial Administrator License](#) through the CDE.

Doctor of Education (EdD) Planning Document

Educational Leadership and Policy Studies (ELPS)

Academic Year: 2026–2027

Student Information

Name	
Student ID	
Advisor	
Start Term	

Program Overview

The EdD is a **65-credit doctoral program** designed for practicing leaders. This planning document outlines program requirements and supports ongoing advising, progress monitoring, and course sequencing. *Note: Course offerings and schedules are subject to change. Students must consult with their advisor each term*

Year One Coursework

Quarter	Course Title	Course Number and Credits	Focus Area	QTR/YR Taken (ex. Win '27)	Approved Substitution Course, QTR, YR
Fall	Foundations of Ed. History & Philosophy	ADMN 4827 4 credits	Leadership		
Fall	Introduction to Doctoral Research	ADMN 5800 4 credits	Research		
Winter	Organizational Theory & Behavior	ADMN 4819 4 credits	Leadership		
Winter	Introduction to Qualitative Research	RMS 4941 4 credits	Research		
Spring	Intro to Critical Policy Analysis	ADMN 4823 4 credits	Leadership		
Spring	Advanced Inquiry and Analysis	ADMN 4900 4 credits	Research		
Summer	Leadership Lab: Applied Inquiry and Practice ³	ADMN 5710 4 credits	Leadership		

Year Two Coursework

Quarter	Course Title	Course Number and Credits	Focus Area	QTR/YR Taken (ex. Win '27)	Approved Substitution Course, QTR, YR
Fall	Leading Teaching and Learning	ADMN 4835 4 credits	Leadership		
Fall	Introductory Statistics ¹	RMS 4910 4 credits	Research		
Winter	Perspectives in District Leadership ²	ADMN 4812 4 credits	Leadership		
Winter	Critical Policy Analysis for Educational Systems	ADMN 4844 4 credits	Research		
Spring	Improving Organizational Culture	ADMN 4836 4 credits	Leadership		
Spring	Action Research for Systems Leadership	ADMN 4822 4 credits	Research		

Administrative Internship (Optional – Licensure Pathway)

Students seeking Colorado administrator licensure may complete an administrative internship through ADMN 5710 or ADMN 4817. The internship requires 6 credits (50 clock hours per credit; 300 total hours) and is designed to support applied leadership development aligned with Colorado Department of Education standards. Students should consult with their advisor to determine eligibility and alignment with licensure requirements.

Requirement	Course Number	QTR Taken	Credit Hours
Administrative Internship			2
Administrative Internship			2
Administrative Internship			2

Year Three–Doctoral Research (Dissertation in Practice)

Dissertation credit requirements include ADMN 5910 (minimum 6 credits) and ADMN 5993. Students must maintain continuous enrollment each Fall, Winter, and Spring quarter in consultation with their advisor.

QTR	Course	Credits
Fall	ADMN 5910: Doctoral Research Planning and Design	
Winter	ADMN 5910: Doctoral Research Planning and Design	
Spring	ADMN 5910: Doctoral Research Planning and Design	
	ADMN 5993: Independent Research (if needed)	
	ADMN 5993: Independent Research (if needed)	
	ADMN 5993: Independent Research (if needed)	
Total Credits		13 (minimum)

- Students must complete a **minimum of 13 doctoral research credits**
- At least **6 credits must be ADMN 5910**
- Remaining credits are completed through **ADMN 5993**

Program Milestones and Benchmark

Requirement Area	Date Completed
Comprehensive Review	
Dissertation in Practice Proposal Hearing	
IRB Approval Number (if required)	
Final Dissertation in Practice Hearing	

Program Credit Summary

Requirement Area	Credit Hours
Leadership Coursework	28
Research Coursework	24
Dissertation in Practice	13
Total Required for EdD Degree	65 credits

Student Signature _____ **Date** _____

Advisor Signature _____ **Date** _____

This planning document reflects an advising conversation and shared agreement regarding the student's program of study. The document must be submitted to ELPS Canvas by the end of the first academic quarter and should be reviewed and updated annually, or as needed, in consultation with the advisor.

Doctor of Philosophy (PhD)

The ELPS Doctor of Philosophy (PhD) in Educational Leadership and Policy Studies prepares scholars to generate new knowledge, advance theory, and conduct rigorous research that informs educational policy and practice. Grounded in commitments to equity and social justice, the program emphasizes critical inquiry into educational systems, structures, and inequities. Graduates are prepared to engage in scholarly research, critically analyze systems of power and policy, and contribute to addressing complex educational challenges through research, scholarship, and public engagement. PhD graduates pursue careers across:

- Higher education and academia
- Research organizations and policy institutes
- Educational leadership and system-level roles
- Government and policy settings

The ELPS PhD integrates educational leadership, organizational theory, systems thinking, and policy analysis with advanced quantitative and qualitative research methods. Students develop the capacity to examine how educational systems shape opportunities and outcomes for diverse communities and to produce research that contributes to more just and equitable systems. Throughout the program, PhD students cultivate the ability to critically examine educational systems, contribute to scholarly discourse, and produce research that informs policy and practice. The PhD emphasizes research as a tool for understanding, interrogating, and transforming educational inequities across local, national, and global contexts.

Program Structure

The PhD is a 90-credit doctoral program beyond the master's degree designed to prepare students for research-intensive and scholarly careers. The program begins with two years of foundational doctoral coursework delivered through a cohort model. During this period, PhD students learn alongside ELPS EdD students, building a shared foundation in research, theory, and inquiry while engaging in critical examination of educational leadership, policy, and systems. Following foundational coursework, students complete a third year of advanced study focused on research methodology and a specialized cognate area (e.g., curriculum studies, higher education, educational assessment, or policy). These courses are selected in consultation with a faculty advisor and may be taken across programs within the Morgridge College of Education and the University of Denver to support the development of a focused area of scholarly expertise. Upon completion of coursework, students advance to candidacy and focus on independent research culminating in a traditional doctoral dissertation. The dissertation addresses a significant issue in educational leadership and policy and is expected to produce original research that contributes to knowledge, informs policy and practice, and advances equity and justice in education.

The dissertation phase is supported through advanced research coursework, doctoral seminars, and ongoing faculty advising. Students are required to maintain continuous enrollment in doctoral research credits each Fall, Winter, and Spring quarter until degree completion, in accordance with Morgridge College of Education and Office of Graduate Education policies. Students may also elect to complete a 400-hour administrative internship, particularly if pursuing leadership licensure (e.g., Administrative License, Special Education Director License, or Gifted Education Director License).

The PhD Experience

Throughout the program, students develop advanced research competencies and deep theoretical grounding needed to contribute meaningfully to the field of educational leadership and policy studies. The PhD emphasizes scholarly inquiry, critical analysis, and knowledge generation in service of more equitable and just educational systems. Students develop the capacity to:

- Conduct rigorous quantitative, qualitative, and mixed-methods research
- Analyze educational systems, policies, and organizations with attention to power, equity, and systemic inequality
- Develop and apply theoretical frameworks that examine race, class, language, ability, and other dimensions of difference
- Contribute original scholarship that advances knowledge and promotes equity and justice
- Design and implement independent research studies that address complex educational challenges
- Produce scholarly writing for academic, policy, and practitioner audiences
- Inform policy and practice through evidence-based, equity-centered research

The PhD experience prepares students to serve as scholars, researchers, and thought leaders who not only advance understanding, but also contribute to the transformation of educational systems through rigorous, equity-oriented inquiry.

Doctoral Research Hours

PhD students complete doctoral research coursework through a combination of ADMN 5910 (Doctoral Research Planning and Design) and ADMN 5995 (Independent Dissertation Research).

- Students must complete a minimum of 10 doctoral research credits
- At least **6 credits must be completed in ADMN 5910**
- Remaining credits are completed through **ADMN 5995**, as determined in consultation with the faculty advisor

Course Descriptions

- **ADMN 5910: Doctoral Research Planning and Design (variable credits; minimum 6)**
Supports dissertation conceptualization, research design, and scholarly writing.
Students typically enroll in this course across multiple quarters.
- **ADMN 5995: Independent Dissertation Research (variable credits)**
Supports independent research, data collection, analysis, and dissertation writing following advancement to candidacy.

Continuous Enrollment Requirement

In accordance with Morgridge College of Education (MCE) and Office of Graduate Education policies, all doctoral students must maintain **continuous enrollment** by registering for at least one credit each Fall, Winter, and Spring quarter until degree completion.

PhD Dissertation Committee Composition and Process

Guidelines on the composition and process for the creation of a student's committee can be found in the [Graduate Bulletin](#) and on the Office of Graduate Education website.

PhD Dissertation Oral Defense

Guidelines on the scheduling and conducting of the oral defense can be found in the [Graduate Bulletin](#).

PhD Submission of Dissertation

After successful completion of the oral defense and final approval of all revisions, instructions for submitting the Dissertation may be found on the [Office of Graduate Education website](#).

Dissertation, Dissertation in Practice, Master's Thesis Plagiarism Prevention Policy

Approved by MCE Faculty Governance on September 9, 2014

The University of Denver has a very clear policy regarding plagiarism. Plagiarism, as a concept, can be somewhat confusing to students. In an effort to increase clarity regarding the definition and operational implications of plagiarism as well as to protect the individual students as well as the Morgridge College of Education we will be instituting a policy related to culminating written projects, which include dissertations, dissertations in practice (EdD students only), and master's theses. Prior to submission for review, students will be responsible for using the Canvas Turnitin page which is a plagiarism-prevention service, to check the document for plagiarism. The process is as follows:

1. The student completes the project.
2. The student runs the document through Turnitin within their Canvas course.
3. Turnitin produces a report.
4. The student reviews the report.

5. The student makes any necessary changes to the document.
6. The student writes a ONE PAGE summary of his/her efforts regarding the process. This should include a statement that the student indeed ran the document through the software program. It should also briefly explain any changes that were made and if changes were not made why not.
7. The Chair/Director will review the summary, along with the Turnitin report.

This process will be used by every student. Students are still expected to be arbiters of their own honesty. This process does not shift the onus of responsibility in any way to faculty, rather it is another step in attempting to reduce and avoid plagiarism.

Doctor of Philosophy (PhD) Planning Document

Educational Leadership and Policy Studies (ELPS)

Academic Year: 2026–2027

Student Information

Name	
Student ID	
Advisor	
Start Term	

Program Overview

The PhD is a **90-credit doctoral program** designed for practicing leaders. This planning document outlines program requirements and supports ongoing advising, progress monitoring, and course sequencing. *Note: Course offerings and schedules are subject to change. Students must consult with their advisor each term*

Year One Coursework

Quarter	Course Title	Course Number and Credits	Focus Area	QTR/YR Taken (ex. Win '27)	Approved Substitution Course, QTR, YR
Fall	Foundations of Ed. History & Philosophy	ADMN 4827 4 credits	Leadership		
Fall	Introduction to Doctoral Research	ADMN 5800 4 credits	Research		
Winter	Organizational Theory & Behavior	ADMN 4819 4 credits	Leadership		
Winter	Introduction to Qualitative Research	RMS 4941 4 credits	Research		
Spring	Intro to Critical Policy Analysis	ADMN 4823 4 credits	Leadership		
Spring	Advanced Inquiry and Analysis	ADMN 4900 4 credits	Research		
Summer	Leadership Lab: Applied Inquiry and Practice ³	ADMN 5710 4 credits	Leadership		

Year Two Coursework

Quarter	Course Title	Course Number and Credits	Focus Area	QTR/YR Taken (ex. Win '27)	Approved Substitution Course, QTR, YR
Fall	Leading Teaching and Learning	ADMN 4835 4 credits	Leadership		
Fall	Introductory Statistics ¹	RMS 4910 4 credits	Research		
Winter	Perspectives in District Leadership ²	ADMN 4812 4 credits	Leadership		
Winter	Critical Policy Analysis for Educational Systems	ADMN 4844 4 credits	Research		
Spring	Improving Organizational Culture	ADMN 4836 4 credits	Leadership		
Spring	Action Research for Systems Leadership	ADMN 4822 4 credits	Research		

Administrative Internship (Optional – Licensure Pathway)

Students seeking Colorado administrator licensure may complete an administrative internship through ADMN 5710. The internship requires 8 credits (50 clock hours per credit; 400 total hours) and is designed to support applied leadership development aligned with Colorado Department of Education standards. Students should consult with their advisor to determine eligibility and alignment with licensure requirements.

Requirement	Course Number	QTR Taken	Credit Hours
Administrative Internship (Leadership Lab, 1st enrollment)	ADMN 5710		4
Administrative Internship (Leadership Lab, 2nd enrollment)	ADMN 5710		4

Year Three – Advanced Study and Specialization

Students design the third year of study in consultation with their advisor to develop advanced expertise in research and a specialized area of focus.

Intermediate/Advanced Research Methods

QTR	Course	Credits	Level: intermediate or advanced
Total Research Credits (year 3)			

Cognate Area (Required Specialization)

Students complete a **cognate area** in consultation with their advisor to develop a focused area of scholarly expertise. Cognate courses may be taken within ELPS, across the Morgridge College of Education, or in other University of Denver programs. In some cases, approved leadership preparation coursework may be applied.

QTR	Course	Credits	Requirement
Total Cognate Credits (year 3)			

Year Four–Doctoral Research (Dissertation in Practice)

Dissertation credit requirements include ADMN 5910 (minimum 6 credits) and ADMN 5995. Students must maintain continuous enrollment each Fall, Winter, and Spring quarter in consultation with their advisor.

QTR	Course	Credits
Fall	ADMN 5910: Doctoral Research Planning and Design	
Winter	ADMN 5910: Doctoral Research Planning and Design	

Spring	ADMN 5910: Doctoral Research Planning and Design	
	ADMN 5995: Independent Research (if needed)	
	ADMN 5995: Independent Research (if needed)	
	ADMN 5995: Independent Research (if needed)	
Total Credits		10 (minimum)

- Students must complete a minimum of 10 doctoral research credits
- At least **6 credits must be ADMN 5910**
- Remaining credits are completed through **ADMN 5995**

Program Milestones and Benchmark

Requirement Area	Date Completed
Comprehensive Review	
Dissertation Proposal Hearing	
IRB Approval Number	
Final Dissertation Defense Hearing	

Program Credit Summary

Requirement Area	Credit Hours
Leadership Coursework	28
Research Coursework	24
Advanced Research + Cognate	28
Dissertation in Practice	10
Total Required for PhD Degree	90 credits

Student Signature _____ **Date** _____

Advisor Signature _____ **Date** _____

This planning document reflects an advising conversation and shared agreement regarding the student's program of study. The document must be submitted to ELPS Canvas by the end of the first academic quarter and should be reviewed and updated annually, or as needed, in consultation with the advisor

EDUCATIONAL LEADERSHIP AND POLICY STUDIES FACULTY

The Educational Leadership and Policy Studies faculty is committed to working closely with students to facilitate their academic progress. As part of this process, faculty members regularly review all students' work. Faculty bios can be found on the [MCE website](#).

Doris Candelarie, PhD

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Lolita Tabron, PhD

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Dana Williams, PhD

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University, College, and Program Academic Policies and Procedures

The following policies are governed by the University of Denver and Morgridge College of Education (MCE) and apply to all ELPS students:

- **Finality of Grades:** Grades submitted at the end of a term are final and may not be changed on the basis of additional work or re-examination.
- **Minimum GPA Requirement:** Graduate students must maintain a cumulative GPA of 3.0 or higher.
- **Academic Probation and Dismissal:** Students whose GPA falls below 3.0 will be placed on academic probation. Continued failure to meet the minimum GPA may result in dismissal. If it becomes mathematically impossible to raise the GPA to 3.0, dismissal will occur in accordance with University policy.
- **Grade Replacement Policy:** Students may repeat up to two courses in which a grade below B- was earned. The most recent grade replaces the prior grade in GPA calculations, consistent with Graduate Bulletin policy.

Students are responsible for understanding and complying with all policies outlined in the [Graduate Academic Standards](#).

Maintain Adequate Progress

The ELPS Program is committed to supporting student success while upholding University, College, and program standards. Student progress is monitored continuously by faculty and formally reviewed at the end of each academic quarter.

To remain in good academic standing, students must:

- Maintain a cumulative GPA of 3.0 or higher (*see: University and College Academic Policies*)
- Make timely progress toward degree completion
- Meet all program milestones (e.g., coursework, comprehensive examinations, dissertation/DiP benchmarks)
- Demonstrate professional and ethical behavior consistent with ELPS Student Learning Outcomes (*see: Student Conduct and Academic Misconduct*)

Students who do not demonstrate adequate and timely progress may be subject to academic review, probation, or dismissal (*see: Program Review and Stages of Academic Concern*).

Indicators of Inadequate Progress

Indicators include, but are not limited to:

- Unresolved Incompletes beyond University deadlines (*see: University and College Academic Policies*)
- Delays in required program milestones
- Non-passing grades (any grade of C- or lower, or unresolved Incompletes)
- Course withdrawals without documented extenuating circumstances
- Attendance or participation concerns that do not meet course or program expectations, as determined by instructors or the program
- Professional or ethical concerns, including disruption of learning, unprofessional conduct, or violations of University policies (*see: Student Conduct and Academic Misconduct*)

University and Program Academic Standards

University policy requires that any graduate student whose cumulative GPA falls below 3.0 be placed on academic probation. Failure to raise the GPA to 3.0 may result in suspension or dismissal and loss of eligibility for financial aid or assistantships.

In addition:

- Courses with grades below C- do not count toward degree requirements
- If it is not mathematically possible to raise the GPA to 3.0, the student will be dismissed in accordance with University policy
- Students may utilize the University grade replacement policy (limited to two courses), in which the most recent grade replaces the previous grade in GPA calculation

Program Review and Stages of Academic Concern

Students are subject to **formal academic standing review** when specific concerns arise (e.g., grades of C- or lower or course withdrawals). This process is distinct from routine quarterly progress reviews (*see: Program Student Review Process*). Academic concerns are addressed progressively:

Stage 1: Initial Academic Concern

A first grade of C- or lower results in:

- A required meeting with the advisor
- A written action plan filed with the program

- Placement on **programmatic academic probation** (distinct from GPA-based probation; see: University and College Academic Policies)

Stage 2: Escalated Academic Concern

A second grade of C- or lower, or a second course withdrawal, results in:

- A comprehensive review of the student's academic record
- A meeting with the advisor and the Division Lead (or designee)
- Continued programmatic probation with a formal remediation plan not to exceed two academic quarters

Stage 3: Dismissal Threshold

Earning three or more grades of C- or lower results in dismissal from the program, regardless of cumulative GPA.

Probation and Dismissal Procedures

Academic standing decisions follow a layered policy framework:

- University of Denver policy establishes minimum standards
- Morgridge College of Education (MCE) defines procedural requirements
- ELPS program policies establish additional expectations

The Division Lead, in consultation with ELPS faculty, is responsible for final academic standing decisions. When a student is placed on probation:

- The student receives formal written notice outlining specific concerns and required actions
- The student must submit a written response
- The student works with the advisor and the Division Lead to finalize an improvement plan
- All conditions must be met within the specified timeline

Failure to meet probation requirements may result in dismissal. All decisions are communicated in writing, and students are provided an opportunity to respond in writing.

Conditions for Removal from Probation

To return to good academic standing, students must:

1. Submit a signed improvement plan to the Division Lead by the second week of the subsequent quarter
2. Complete any required course retakes at the next available offering, earning at least a **C or higher**

3. Demonstrate consistent academic engagement, including timely communication with the advisor, Division Lead, and instructors

Failure to meet these conditions may result in continued probation or dismissal.

Program Student Review Process

ELPS faculty conduct **quarterly reviews of all students** to assess:

- Academic progress toward degree completion
- Scholarly writing quality
- Content knowledge and analytical rigor
- Research development
- Professional dispositions aligned with ELPS Student Learning Outcomes

This process is **distinct from formal academic standing review** and is intended to support student development and progress. If concerns are identified:

- The student's advisor (dissertation or DiP chair) will initiate contact
- For students without an assigned chair, ELPS faculty will initiate contact

Communication of Feedback:

Feedback is shared during advising week, either in writing or through advising meetings. Advising meetings provide structured opportunities for students to:

- Review progress and expectations
- Receive guidance and feedback
- Advocate for learning needs
- Share academic, professional, or personal concerns

Summary of Review Outcomes

Following review, outcomes may include:

- Continued enrollment with conditions
- Academic probation
- Dismissal from the program

Student Conduct

Please refer to the [DU Honor Code](#) and the DU [Graduate Bulletin – Student Conduct](#) for more information.

Academic Misconduct

Please refer to the Graduate Bulletin's description of [Academic Standards](#) for more information.

Procedures for Academic Grievances and Appeals

Please refer to [DU Graduate Bulletin – Academic Grievance and Appeal Procedure](#) for more information.

Plagiarism Prevention Policy

Please refer to the [Graduate Bulletin](#) for more information.

Student Responsibilities

The student must assume full responsibility for meeting all requirements for the degree. Before becoming a candidate for graduation, the student must complete the following:

- Complete all required coursework with a 3.0 or better GPA.
- Pass the Comprehensive Review.
- Apply for graduation by the deadline. Failure to do so will automatically delay graduation to a subsequent quarter, resulting in a graduation deferral fee.
- Submit the Dissertation in Practice (EdD) or Dissertation (PhD) proposal and final product to the committee at least two weeks before the date of the defense.
- Satisfactorily complete the oral defense and submit the final product (Dissertation in Practice or Dissertation) within the deadlines.
- Remove all incomplete grades at least three weeks before the end of the quarter in which the degree is to be awarded.

If any of these expectations or deadlines are not met, the awarding of the degree will be postponed.

Changing of Advisors

Doctoral students in ELPS are matched with a Dissertation in Practice Chair (EdD) or a Dissertation Director (PhD) towards the end of the first year of the program. This matching is based on various factors including a student's content interests, a student's methodological needs, faculty research interests, and faculty availability. Student can change their dissertation advisors by:

1. Contact the new potential advisor to see if that person is willing to lead the dissertation
2. Contact the old advisor and let them know you wish to change advisors. Please provide a brief rationale.
3. Contact ELPS so they can update our databases.

Student Rights & Responsibilities

Please refer to the [Student Rights and Responsibility](#) page and the [Graduate Bulletin](#) for more information.

Degree Audit

It is the responsibility of the student to ensure that all degree requirements are met. Students are encouraged to track their progress on a regular basis using the Degree Audit in My4D. For detailed instructions on using the Degree Audit, please see the [Office of the Registrar's website](#). Questions regarding the degree audit should be directed to the ELPS Registrar

APPENDIX A

Program Forms

Masters of Arts (MA):

[Certification of the Completion of Master's Capstone \(Action Research Project\)](#)

Doctor of Education (Ed.D.):

[Dissertation in Practice Committee](#)

[Dissertation in Practice Proposal Approval](#)

[Result of Oral Defense](#)

[Final Approval of Dissertation in Practice](#)

APPENDIX B

The Seven Norms of Collaborative Work

- 1. Pausing:** Pausing before responding or asking a question allows time for thinking and enhances dialogue, discussion, and decision-making.
- 2. Paraphrasing:** Using a paraphrase starter that is comfortable for you – “So...” or “As you are...” or “You’re thinking...” – and following the starter with an efficient paraphrase assists members of the group in hearing and understanding one another as they converse and make decisions.
- 3. Posing Questions:** Two intentions of posing questions are to explore and to specify thinking. Questions may be posed to explore perceptions, assumptions, and interpretations, and to invite others to inquire into their thinking. For example, “What might be some conjectures you are exploring?” Use focusing questions such as, “Which students, specifically?” or “What might be an example of that?” to increase the clarity and precision of group members’ thinking. Inquire into others’ ideas before advocating one’s own.
- 4. Putting Ideas on the Table:** Ideas are the heart of meaningful dialogue and discussion. Label the intention of your comments. For example: “Here is one idea...” or “One thought I have is...” or “Here is a possible approach...” or “Another consideration might be...”.
- 5. Providing Data:** Providing data, both qualitative and quantitative, in a variety of forms supports group members in constructing shared understanding from their work. Data have no meaning beyond that which we make of them; shared meaning develops from collaboratively exploring, analyzing, and interpreting data.
- 6. Paying Attention to Self and Others:** Meaningful dialogue and discussion are facilitated when each group member is conscious of self and of others and is aware of what (s)he is saying and how it is said as well as how others are responding. This includes paying attention to learning styles when planning, facilitating, and participating in group meetings and conversations.
- 7. Presuming Positive Intentions:** Assuming that others’ intentions are positive, promotes and facilitates meaningful dialogue and discussion, and prevents unintentional put-downs. Using positive intentions in speech is one manifestation of this norm.

APPENDIX C

Reflective Process

Reflective Process

For reflection to become the focus of development it needs to be explicit, structured and shared. It needs to move beyond a record of events to a catalyst for analysis and action. Given this intent, reflective journals should be structured to answer the following questions:

- What do/did I do? (Describe)
- What does this mean? (Inform)
- What have I learned from others? (Notice)
- How did I come to be like this? (Confront)
- How might I do things differently? (Reconstruct)

Adapted from Smyth, J. (1988). Deliberating on reflection in action as a critical form of professional education. *Studies in Continuing Education*. 10(2), 164–171.