



**VCU**

School of Education

**School of Education**

**Ph.D. in Education Program**

**Student/Faculty Handbook**

*Revised July 2025*

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## **Foreword**

This handbook serves as a guide for SOE doctoral students and faculty on SOE and University program policy and procedure. In addition to this handbook, students should also become familiar with the [VCU Graduate Bulletin](#) as it articulates university policies and information related to graduate study.

The SOE Ph.D Program Advisory Board provides direction and determines policy for the Ph.D. in Education program. For concentration-specific issues, recommendations are made by the concentration coordinator on behalf of the concentration. Their recommendation is forwarded to the Director of Ph.D. Programs who brings that recommendation forward to the Advisory Board. At the discretion of the board, an open forum may be held on concentration-specific issues during an Advisory Board meeting.

For changes that impact all concentrations, the Director of Ph.D. Programs will appoint an ad hoc committee to investigate the issue and make a recommendation for changes to be adopted program-wide, which is brought to the Advisory Board for discussion and a vote.

Students and faculty will be notified of changes made to policies and procedures in the Ph.D. in Education program through email.

## Ph.D. in Education Concentrations

The Ph.D. in Education program has seven concentrations that allow students to specialize in a particular area by taking prescribed concentration courses. Specific courses for each concentration are listed by concentration in the [VCU Graduate Bulletin](#).

**Art Education.** The Art Education concentration allows students to connect contemporary art and education theories and philosophies, practical and professional experiences, and impactful research to develop an area of expertise relevant to the field of art education. The program distinguishes itself by integrating urban community engagement, digital and emerging media, and research and assessment in diverse settings. Graduates will be highly qualified to serve in teaching, research, and leadership positions at universities and in arts and education organizations.

**Counselor Education & Supervision.** The counselor education and supervision concentration is designed to prepare experienced, research-oriented master's-level counselors for academic positions focused on research, service, teaching and counselor education. Doctoral students will integrate theory, research and practice in areas of counselor supervision and training, counselor education and teaching, advanced counseling, diversity and multiculturalism, leadership, advocacy, and social justice.

**Curriculum, Culture & Change.** The curriculum, culture and change concentration offers a rigorous doctoral-level learning experience in curriculum and instruction, teacher education, and advocacy for social justice. The concentration prepares curriculum and instruction leaders for positions in school systems at the building level and above, as well as scholars with a wide range of interests—philosophical and sociocultural foundations of education, urban education, linguistically diverse groups, critical and culturally relevant pedagogy, anti-oppressive education, critical youth studies etc. In addition to a deep grounding in theoretical, practical and methodological approaches to curriculum and instruction, the concentration prepares instructional leaders to advocate for change across a wide range of institutions, systems and contexts. The concentration offers challenging learning experiences in the field of curriculum and instruction. Its expressed social justice values allow framing of courses in ways that provide critical analyses of contemporary schooling and ground students in the philosophical and historical roots of school change. The program welcomes students with interests in all institutional settings serving students across the life span (early childhood through adulthood) as well as informal and nonformal contexts. It also allows for discipline-specific inquiry in fields including but not limited to STEM, technology, history and literacy.

The concentration distinguishes itself by preparing curriculum and instruction leaders to be change agents capable of working in school systems, higher education and advocacy

organizations. It reflects an activist stance toward the education profession—one that views schooling as not only shaped by society but also as an active force for equity and meaningful societal change. It will appeal to a wide range of students: those who are seeking to become instructional leaders in school systems, those preparing to teach in the academy and all those desiring a strong foundation in educational reform.

**Educational Leadership, Policy & Justice.** The educational leadership, policy and justice concentration is designed to cultivate educational scholars and leaders who will advance scholarship, policy and practice related to equity and social justice. Drawing on an interdisciplinary study of leadership and policy, the program promotes an understanding of the many societal and organizational impediments to equal educational opportunity. This concentration is directed not only toward identifying and analyzing those injustices, but also toward imagining, researching and creating more equitable, inclusive schools, organizations and societies through leadership and policy. The dissertation is a rigorous culminating tool for research, advocacy and change within educational organizations and endeavors. Graduates will be prepared to lead for equity in K-12 organizations, higher education, research and policy think tanks or local, state and federal policymaking institutions.

**Educational Psychology.** The educational psychology concentration is designed to train research-oriented doctoral students who want to promote the success of students in educational environments. Doctoral students will integrate theory and research in the areas of developmental psychology, cognition, social psychology, motivation, assessment and diversity to better study learning in schools or school-like settings. This doctoral program is ideal for students who want to specialize in scholarship related to cognitive, motivational, social and environmental factors that shape teaching and students' learning.

**Research, Assessment & Evaluation.** The research, assessment and evaluation concentration is designed for individuals who want to develop skills to undertake, use and teach research, assessment and evaluation. Emphasis is placed on developing proficiency in quantitative, qualitative and mixed methods modes of inquiry and providing students with expertise to study varied educational and social research questions. Students select a focus in either research or evaluation.

**Urban Services Leadership – Adult Learning.** The urban services leadership concentration is designed to prepare future researchers, faculty and practitioners for leadership roles in academic, government (local, state, national and international) and community based for-profit and nonprofit organizations. Doctoral students will utilize a multidisciplinary approach to develop a broad understanding of the critical issues and challenges in adult learning and subsequently apply that understanding to the planning, implementation and evaluation of adult learning and educational programs and initiatives.

## **Ph.D. in Education Concentration Handbooks**

### **Links to Concentration-Specific Handbooks**

- [Art Education](#)
- [Counselor Education & Supervision](#)
- [Curriculum, Culture & Change](#)
- [Educational Leadership, Policy & Justice](#)
- [Educational Psychology](#)
- [Research, Assessment & Evaluation](#)

### **Graduate School and School of Education Policies and Regulations**

#### **Program Time Limits**

Per university policy, the time limit for completing all degree requirements, including the successful defense of the dissertation, is eight years. The eight-year time frame begins with the first semester a student enrolls for course work after being admitted into the program. The eight years allows for the completion of the degree and to accommodate any leave of absence time granted to a student. Please note that the program time limit does not change with any granted leave of absence. Students are responsible for keeping track of their timeline and progress in the program and adhering to SOE and university policy.

View the VCU Bulletin for more information regarding the time limit completion policy.

#### **Transfer Credits**

Transfer credits refer to graduate courses taken after the awarding of a master's degree and prior to admission to this program, whether taken at VCU or another accredited college or university.

To request credits to be transferred to your program coursework, you must submit the following to the Office of Graduate Studies:

1. Written request to transfer credits
2. Statement of support from advisor
3. Completed and signed Transfer Equivalency Form

The [Transfer Equivalency Form](#) can be accessed through the Graduate School resources page. The Office of Graduate Studies will forward those materials to the Associate Dean of Academic Affairs for approval and then to the Graduate School for approval and processing.

In making a request to transfer credits to this program, be aware that:

1. The Ph.D. in Education program is not as flexible as the Graduate School regarding the number of transfer credits allowed in the Ph.D. in Education program. Each case will be evaluated and approved on an individual basis by the advisor and Associate Dean of Academic Affairs and Graduate Studies.
2. You may not apply credits earned toward another degree (VCU or outside institution).
3. You must have received a grade of "B" or above in each course for which you are requesting transfer.
4. A course from another institution requested to be transferred must be equivalent to a VCU course in content. VCU course descriptions can be found in the [VCU Bulletin](#).
5. Transfer credits cannot be more than eight years old at time of completion of all requirements for awarding of the Ph.D. in Education degree.

For credits earned at another institution during the program: If you have already begun the program and want to take a course at another university for the purposes of transferring credits, you will need to first request permission from your advisor.

Your request should include:

1. the name of the school
2. course description of requested course
3. VCU course to be substituted- must relate to concentration area
4. statement of support from your advisor

Submit request with items listed above to the Office of Graduate Studies for approval by the Associate Dean of Academic Affairs. After taking course(s), you must submit official transcripts along with the Transfer Equivalency Form signed by your advisor to the Office of Graduate Studies. The Office of Graduate Studies will forward those materials to the Associate Dean of Academic Affairs for approval and submit along with a Special Action Request Form to the VCU Graduate School for processing.

To access the Graduate School policy on transfer credits please refer to the [VCU Bulletin](#).



## **Registration Policies**

Students must register for courses through [eServices](#) by designated registration deadlines. Students have until the end of the add/drop period at the beginning of each semester to add or drop courses without penalty. The add/drop deadline is typically the end of the first week of classes in the fall and spring and the first day of class in the summer. Registration deadlines for each semester can be found on the university [academic calendar](#).

Students are expected to consult their advisor and have their semester course schedule/ registration finalized in eServices prior to the add/drop deadline as failure to do so will have student billing implications.

## **Continual Enrollment**

Students who commit to doctoral study are expected to make progress toward their degree each semester. The School of Education requires that students admitted into the program are expected to complete credits as follows:

- 0-36 Credits earned: 9 credit hours per each 12-month period commencing with the first semester in which the student enrolls for course work, until didactic coursework is complete.
- 36 Credits earned & Pre-Prospectus/Degree Candidacy: 3 credits per semester during the fall and spring semesters.
- Post Prospectus/Degree Candidacy: 3 credits of dissertation research (EDUC 899) per semester during the fall and spring semesters until minimum requirement for dissertation credits completed (6 credits if EDUS 890 completed, 9 credits if opted out of EDUS 890 with department approval). After the EDUC 899 credit minimum is met, students can enroll in 1 credit of EDUC 899 per semester.

Students are expected to enroll themselves in the appropriate number of credits after consultation with their advisor/Dissertation Chair. It is important to note that if during any particular semester, including summer, a student plans to defend their dissertation, graduate, or otherwise access university resources, the student must enroll in EDUC 899. Continual enrollment is both a School of Education and Graduate School policy. Students who do not follow this policy will be considered for dismissal from the program for lack of satisfactory progress toward the degree. Student accounts for students who do not register for three consecutive semesters without an approved leave of absence will be deactivated and will be required to reapply to the program. The graduate school policy on attendance and enrollment can be found in the [VCU Bulletin](#).

## **Leave of Absence**

After enrolling in program coursework, a student may request a leave of absence at any time. The time limit per leave of absence request is 3 semesters/one year. For example, if a student is enrolled and completes a fall semester and then wishes to take a leave of absence, they can request a leave of absence up until/through the following fall. The student must submit a written request for leave of absence to the SOE Office of Graduate Studies along with a statement of approval from their advisor. It is the student's responsibility to contact student accounting and/or financial aid to inquire about any impacts the leave of absence will have on their student bill or any financial awards received. A request for a leave of absence must be submitted and approved prior to the start of the semester the leave of absence is to begin. If the requested leave of absence includes exceeding the program time limit, a request for a program extension with a letter of support from the advisor is also required.

When a leave of absence is granted, the original eight-year time limit for completing the degree requirements, including successfully defending the dissertation, remains in effect and does not change. Students are responsible for consulting their advisor and checking the university calendar for registration deadlines prior to their return and registering for the semester they are slated to return. Failure to request a leave of absence or register for 3 consecutive semesters will result in deactivation of student account for violation of continual enrollment and prompt being required to reapply to program. Students are responsible for checking in with their advisor and department prior to their return from approved leave of absence. The Graduate School leave of absence policy can be found in the [VCU Bulletin](#).

### **Grades**

Within the doctoral program, course grades provide an important evaluative tool for students, as well as guidance for advisors. Though performance in individual courses with specific content and expectations can vary widely, average doctoral work should be at a "B" level or higher. Students in the Ph.D. in Education Program must have a minimum cumulative GPA of 3.2 to graduate. More information about grading policies can be found on the [Graduate School website](#).

### **Concentration Transfer**

In the event that a student would like to transfer from one concentration to another, the student submits a written request to their advisor and current concentration coordinator as well as the concentration coordinator of the concentration they wish to transfer to. Student's admission materials and program documents will be reviewed. Students may need to complete an interview or submit a writing sample if the concentration coordinator requests.

It is important to note that a change in concentrations may necessitate the student taking additional coursework. When a student is considering a request for a change in program concentration, it is recommended that they talk with their current concentration coordinator and concentration coordinator of the concentration they wish to transfer to who can provide more

details about the expertise of faculty and the courses that are part of the concentration.

After both the current and requested concentration coordinators have reviewed the transfer request, they will notify both the student and Office of Graduate Studies of their decision based on the best interest of the student. If the concentration transfer request is approved, the Office of Graduate Studies will submit a Special Action form to the Graduate School.

### **Dismissal from Program**

Program dismissal is initiated at the concentration level and reviewed by the SOE Doctoral Policy Board and the SOE dean/dean's designee. For more information about the dismissal process, please review [university dismissal policies](#). The following are the conditions under which a student could be dismissed or reviewed for dismissal from the program:

1. Required review for possible dismissal
  - a. "C" or below or the grade of "U" (Unsatisfactory) on required graduate course work
  - b. Concerns raised during the Annual Review or Qualifying Assessment
  - c. Failure to maintain continual enrollment
2. Dismissal
  - a. Unprofessional conduct ([see VCU Code of Conduct](#))
  - b. Violation of the VCU Honor System ([see VCU Honor Code](#))
  - c. Two grades of "U", "I", "C", or lower
  - d. An "F" or "FI"
  - e. Failure to check VCU email and respond to Ph.D. program correspondence as requested

A student may appeal a decision for dismissal from the program. The Graduate School policy and procedure for appeal can be found in the [VCU Bulletin](#).

### **Withdrawal from Program**

Students should consult their advisor and program coordinator prior to requesting withdrawal from the program. To withdraw from the program, a student must submit a written request to their advisor, program coordinator, and the Office of Graduate Studies. The Office of Graduate Studies will then file a Special Action Request with the Graduate School and the student will be officially withdrawn. Students who withdraw from the program will have to reapply to the program if they wish to return.

A student who wishes to withdraw from the program is responsible for dropping or withdrawing from any enrolled coursework in compliance with university deadlines at time of the withdrawal request. Students who are enrolled and request program withdrawal after the add/drop period has

ended will be financially responsible for the courses withdrawn unless a retroactive course drop request is completed and approved by the Graduate School. Information on the university course withdrawal vs. course drop policy can be found in the [VCU Bulletin](#).

## **Graduation**

During the semester in which a student intends to graduate, they must complete and submit the graduation application through VCU e-services at the beginning of the semester by the VCU designated deadline. Students will be notified of graduation application deadlines and instructions via VCU email.

Students are to complete graduation checkout through [eServices](#) and have their advisor complete preliminary approval through Degreeworks. Students may visit the [VCU Commencement website](#) for additional commencement details.

## **Pre-Candidacy Guide**

A minimum of 60 credits will be required to earn the Ph.D. in Education from the School of Education at Virginia Commonwealth University. These courses include program requirements as well as concentration requirements and electives chosen within the School of Education or throughout the university. In addition to the required credit hours, students are required to engage in co-curricular activities with one or more faculty mentors to increase skills and gain experience related to their long range career goals and scholarly interests.

All program coursework (excluding the dissertation) must total a minimum of 51 credit hours. Students are encouraged to take a minimum of three credits outside of the School of Education (this can be a course that meets other program requirements such as the research elective).

In addition to the formal requirements related to the Ph.D. in Education program, students are encouraged to prepare in other ways for the dissertation. Students should focus on both general, long term, and more immediate and specific preparation in the following areas:

1. Evolving a scholarly knowledge of a broad area leading to dissertation research. As the student progresses through the program, they should select electives and course work that will focus on promising and interesting areas for dissertation research. In general, the more thorough the scholarly understanding of relevant areas, the smoother the process of dissertation development. Topic areas can be discarded, refined, or explored further. Specific research questions can be generated.
2. Developing or refining the tools that can enhance and support the development of a

prospectus and dissertation. A working knowledge of resources that will facilitate research, writing, and manuscript preparation can ensure clear, accurate communication about the dissertation topic. Awareness of and experience in using the reference tools, primary sources, organizations, and other research tools in the topical area are critical skills for successful dissertation preparation. Course experiences in selecting research design, analyzing data, summarizing studies, and critiquing reports should be applied and practiced whenever possible. In addition, the use of word processing, referencing software, and other technology to complete course assignments and research papers throughout the doctoral program can increase the quality and speed of dissertation preparation.

3. Forge the scholarly and collegial links that can foster direction and support during the dissertation development process. Look for faculty who are conducting research on topics or using methodology that would be useful for your dissertation study and work with them as one of your co-curricular activities. Course instructors, externship placement contacts, workshop presenters, and faculty members within and outside the SOE and VCU provide vital avenues for networking that can, in turn, contribute depth and breadth as the dissertation committee is determined and as the dissertation evolves. The individual interests and talents of each mentor can provide further sources and resources, both formal and informal, during various phases of dissertation development.

### **Foundation Component (6 hours minimum)**

This component introduces students to theoretical and epistemological debates and related scholarly traditions in educational research. It is interdisciplinary in nature and spans two semesters. The first course provides a baseline understanding of influential philosophies of research as well as the essential steps of any inquiry project. The second course builds upon, broadens and deepens this understanding. Both courses also emphasize students' acculturation into doctoral studies. The courses included in this component are:

EDUS 702: Foundations of Educational Research & Doctoral Scholarship I

EDUS 703: Foundations of Educational Research & Doctoral Scholarship II

### **Research Component (15 hours minimum)**

This component emphasizes the skills essential to designing, conducting, interpreting, and reporting research. Students are required to demonstrate competency in areas of research methodology and statistics appropriate to doctoral level study. The courses included in this component are the following:

EDUS 608: Educational Statistics

EDUC 697: Collaborative Scholarship (or equivalent)

EDUS 710: Quantitative Research Design

EDUS 711: Qualitative Methods and Analysis

## Advanced Research Elective

\*The foundation and research courses mentioned above should be completed in the beginning of the program in preparation for the Qualifying Assessment.

### **Concentration Component (27 hours minimum)**

This component is designed to allow the student to pursue a series of courses that provide a specific focus and serve as the student's primary discipline. These courses are expected to develop the in-depth knowledge and skills in an identifiable area that is congruent with the student's current or projected career field.

### **Co-curricular Activities**

Although not a credit-earning part of the program, co-curricular activities are essential to help prepare doctoral candidates for their future roles as researchers, university faculty, administrators, and in other leadership positions. Students will work with their advisors to determine specific co-curricular activities, which are chosen in light of concentration requirements, student experience, and goals for the individual student's professional development. Examples of co-curricular activities include conducting research, teaching at the university level, participation in preparing a proposal for a grant-funded project, presentation at a state or national professional conference, writing a manuscript for publication, and participation in leadership positions. Participation in these activities will be monitored and documented by the student's advisor. Students must complete at least one co-curricular activity and complete a co-curricular activity form, and obtain approval and signature from their advisor before beginning the co-curricular activity.

### **Independent Study**

A total of six credit hours of independent study can be applied towards the minimum 60 credits required for the doctoral program. Students and their advisors must complete the independent study form prior to beginning the independent study. Independent Studies should be completed within the start and end date of a semester, which can be viewed on the VCU academic calendar. Deadlines for submitting the Independent Study Form are as follows: December 1st for spring semester, April 1st for summer session, and August 1st for fall semester. Upon approval of independent study, students are to consult their advisor on which section of EDUS 641 to register.

### **Externship (3 hours minimum)**

The externship (EDUC 700) is a semester-long experience designed to enhance the student's program, career goals, and professional development. The externship site is typically an off-campus planned experience, outside the setting in which the student is currently employed, and ideally in a different but related career area in which the student has had no or limited prior work

experience. It is important that students discuss their ideas for the externship with their advisor and/or concentration coordinator as concentrations may have specific requirements and/or guidelines for this experience.

The Externship Application must be signed and approved prior to beginning the externship. Additional details regarding the externship:

- **Application for Externship.** In consultation with their advisor, the student prepares and submits a statement outlining the proposed externship. With the approval of the advisor and concentration coordinator, the student completes the Externship Application Form. Deadlines for submitting the Externship Application Form are as follows: December 1st for spring semester, April 1st for summer session, and August 1st for fall semester.
- **Externship Resources.** Please see the [SOE Ph.D. Externship Resource Page](#) for more information and documents to share with potential externship sites/supervisors.
- **The Externship Site.** It is the student's responsibility to identify a site for the externship; however, the student's advisor must approve the proposed site.
- **Student Externship Responsibilities**
  - **Timing and Setting.** The student is responsible for consulting with their advisor to determine the appropriate timing of the externship and to develop an understanding of appropriate types of settings consistent with the student's experience, program, and professional goals. Based on this information and the requirements of the externship application statement, the student initiates contacts and consults with personnel in possible externship settings. Once the student and advisor agree on a setting, the student, in consultation with the proposed onsite supervisor, completes the written portion of the application. During the externship experience, the student works as a professional under the direction of the onsite supervisor and is responsible for decisions made and tasks assigned within the setting during the externship period. The student maintains the records and materials required for the externship, prepares the final written summary report, and submits all needed materials to their advisor within grading deadlines.
  - **Log.** The student maintains a log of all hours spent on and off-site, including a brief description of the type of tasks and related experiences completed during the time frame. The log should document which hours were spent onsite and which off-site. Additional time beyond the 120 hours that is spent in related, but off-site tasks may be reported for information. The log must be submitted to the advisor, who will review it as part of the externship grading process.
  - **Product.** The student is required to develop and submit to their advisor a product

from the externship experience. During development of the externship experience, the student discusses with their advisor and proposed onsite supervisor the general nature of the expected product(s) (e.g., an instrument, manual, grant application, publishable article, workshop kit). Any change in the type of product to be developed must be approved in writing by the advisor. The product(s) must be submitted to the advisor, who will include a grade on the product(s) as part of the grade for the externship.

- **Final Report.** The student will also submit a final summary report to the onsite supervisor and their advisor. At a minimum, the summary report must include the name and address of the agency in which the externship was conducted, the major service or products of the agency, the name of the onsite supervisor, the time log, and a brief review of the purposes of the externship. The summary report must also include the onsite supervisor's evaluation, as well as evidence of how the five goals and the five specific measurable objectives presented in the Externship Application were met. The summary report is reviewed by the advisor as part of the grade for the externship.

- **University Advisor Externship Responsibilities**

- **Oversight.** The student's advisor works with the student to determine the scheduling of the externship within the doctoral course sequence, develop ideas for appropriate types of experience, and approve the site selected by the student. When the student has completed the externship application, which specifies the site, the onsite supervisor, and such specifics as time, experiences, and products; the advisor reviews the application, recommends any needed changes, and gives approval in writing. The advisor submits the approved application to the concentration coordinator for approval. During the externship experience, the university advisor serves as liaison between the onsite supervisor and the university, as needed.

At the end of the externship experience, the advisor reviews the application, log, product(s), onsite supervisor's evaluation, and the student's summary report and determines the student's externship grade.

- **The Onsite Supervisor Externship Responsibilities**

- **Guidance and supervision.** The term onsite supervisor refers to the person at the externship site who provides guidance and supervision of the student, while also serving as liaison between the agency or institution and the student's university advisor. The onsite supervisor provides professional direction to the student while in the host agency by orienting the student to the setting; acquainting the student



with agency tasks and timelines; overseeing the work of the student; and providing a written summative evaluation of the student's performance (e.g., [EDUC 700 Onsite Supervisor Evaluation Form](#)).

### **EDUS 890: Dissertation Seminar**

This course is designed to help students develop a dissertation research concept into the components of a dissertation prospectus. Students who have not had the opportunity to participate in co-curricular activities, coursework, or research projects under the direction of a faculty mentor resulting in a critical review of the literature in the area of their dissertation should plan to take this course. The course offers students structure and support to conceptualize and draft the prospectus.

All students should work closely with their Dissertation Chair (or their advisor if they have not selected a chair) to plan for integrating the seminar into their program of study. Students are encouraged to complete all research methods courses and be enrolled in their last semester of required didactic coursework at the time of enrollment in EDUS 890.

To ensure maximum benefit from the Dissertation Seminar, students are required to write a Concept Paper (see Appendix D for Concept Paper Guidelines) so it is clear that the topic is a viable one. It is expected that the Concept Paper will be a roadmap for developing the dissertation proposal. The Concept Paper is distinct and separate from the doctoral Comprehensive Assessment. To be enrolled in EDUS 890, students must submit the Concept Paper Approval Form. Please note, the Concept Paper is only required for students enrolling in EDUS 890.

Throughout the course, students are expected to meet regularly with their Dissertation Chair to discuss dissertation progress.

Alternatively, a student who has sufficient research experience, or has conducted an extensive critical review of the literature in the area of the dissertation, and is well along in drafting the prospectus, may, with the advisor's approval, opt out of EDUS 890 and work independently with their Dissertation Chair and committee to complete the prospectus. If a student has department approval to opt out of EDUS 890, they must submit written approval from their advisor to the SOE Office of Graduate Studies.

## **Program Planning**

### **Advisor**

- a. Role of the Advisor
  - i. Meets regularly with the advisee (students are responsible for initiating

- correspondence with their designated advisors);
  - ii. Provides appropriate advice, support, and mentoring;
  - iii. Provides research and publication mentorship;
  - iv. Assists with planning program of study and monitors advisee's progress in the program;
  - v. Identifies and evaluates appropriate co-curricular experiences; and
  - vi. Assists the student in completing required forms.
- b. Request to Change Advisor
- The student may maintain their originally assigned advisor for the duration of the program or change their advisor through mutual agreement with and consent of their current advisor, the requested advisor, and the concentration coordinator. If a student requests an advisor outside of their concentration, the concentration coordinator for the chosen advisor must review and approve the request.
- A student must complete and submit the Change of Advisor Form with required signatures to the Office of Graduate Studies to be added to the student's record.
- c. Advisor as Dissertation Chair
- The advisor may become the chair of the student's dissertation committee or the student and the advisor may, upon mutual agreement, opt to invite another faculty member to be the chair. If a student opts to invite another faculty member to chair their dissertation committee, they will take over academic advising duties and a Change of Advisor Form should be completed.

### **Program of Study and Degreeworks**

During their first semester of the program, each student will be provided with their individualized Program of Study, which is designed to be a "one stop shop" for the student and their advisor to ensure successful completion of the Ph.D. program. The Program of Study provides important information as well as necessary forms students will complete throughout the program.

Degreeworks is used by the Graduate School to finalize graduation and can be accessed through [eServices](#). Students are responsible for regularly reviewing their Program of Study and Degreeworks with their advisor. It is the expectation that students will discuss their schedule each semester prior to enrolling in coursework to assure the timely completion of required courses.

### **Student Evaluation and Feedback**

Admission to the doctoral program is based upon an assessment of the student's academic strengths, research readiness, professional experience, and leadership potential—all of which affect the probability of successfully completing the doctoral program. Such success is dependent upon the doctoral student's continuing growth in knowledge acquisition, concept synthesis, and integrative application.

Thus, periodic student evaluation while enrolled in the doctoral program is important in three ways: (1) it is beneficial to the student in assessing their progress; (2) it is essential in determining the student's probability of successful program completion; and (3) it is critical to the maintenance of program integrity.

### **Annual Review**

An annual review will be conducted for each student every year. The purpose of the Annual Review is to:

1. Promote timely and consistent feedback on development and professional growth
2. Identify accomplishments, areas in need of support, and goals
3. Foster open communication between students and faculty, encouraging proactive planning

### **Qualifying Assessment**

The purpose of the Qualifying Assessment is to:

1. Ensure that students have the appropriate foundational knowledge and skills necessary to progress through the doctoral program
2. Identify students who need further review and determine appropriate remediation
3. Allow early identification of students who may not be sufficiently competent to continue in the program

Please see Appendix B and Concentration Handbooks for the content of the Qualifying Assessment. Students must meet with their advisor to discuss materials to be submitted, items reviewed, and timeline for completing the Qualifying Assessment in compliance with SOE policy. To continue to enroll in additional courses (and avoid registration hold), the Qualifying Assessment must be completed and documented prior to the student completing 30 credits in the program. Students are responsible for contacting their advisor to coordinate completion of the Qualifying Assessment.

When a student completes the Qualifying Assessment, a follow-up meeting must be held between the student and the advisor to:

1. Discuss the result of Qualifying Assessment.
2. Discuss any remediation plans or steps to be taken as a result of the Qualifying Assessment.

3. Complete the Post-Qualifying Assessment Agreement Form for Continuing Doctoral Status approval and provide a copy of qualifying assessment materials to the SOE Office of Graduate Studies.

### **Continuing Doctoral Status**

Students who have successfully completed the Qualifying Assessment and who have earned a minimum cumulative GPA of 3.0 at time of successful completion of Qualifying Assessment will be awarded Continuing Doctoral Status. No grades below "C" will be accepted for Continuing Doctoral Status.

### **Comprehensive Assessment**

The Comprehensive Assessment seeks to ensure that each student can demonstrate the ability to conceptualize, apply, and communicate information at an advanced, doctoral level.

The development, administration, and grading of the Comprehensive Assessment for a specific concentration is coordinated by the faculty of the concentration. For an overview of each concentration's policy see Appendix C and Concentration Handbooks.

Students need to meet and consult with their advisor the semester prior to when they intend to complete the Comprehensive Assessment. Students must be enrolled the semester in which the Comprehensive Assessment will be completed, and the Comprehensive Assessment should be successfully completed prior to enrollment in EDUS 890 or EDUC 899. Students must successfully complete the Comprehensive Assessment to avoid disruption in their completion of the program. The Comprehensive Assessment Report Form along with a copy of materials used must be completed following the successful completion of the assessment.

### **Doctoral Student Teaching**

Beyond any applicable GA assignments, full-time doctoral students are able to teach one course during an academic year. Part-time students may have more flexibility if they do not already have a full-time job. The [VCU SOE Graduate Student Teaching Expectations and Shared Resources](#) document is available for all SOE graduate student instructors and supervisors.

Following SACS, the University accrediting body, we have the following policy regarding doctoral students obtaining teaching experience.

### **Qualifications**

A master's degree in the teaching discipline or 18 graduate semester hours in the teaching discipline. Full-time doctoral students must be in their second year of doctoral preparation. Part time students will need to have completed 18 credit hours.

## **Supervision**

Graduate students may be asked to shadow a faculty member who is teaching an undergraduate or master's level class. Shadowing typically means attending most classes and meeting with the professor to talk about methods, issues, etc.

When teaching, the graduate student will meet on a regular basis with the supervising faculty member who typically teaches the course that the student is teaching for advice on developing the syllabus, suggestions for activities and supplemental materials, advice for handling issues that arise, etc.

The graduate student will be evaluated periodically by the supervising faculty member and/or the department chair. Doctoral students are expected to participate in at least one formal teaching observation each semester. The [Classroom Instruction Self-Reflection and Observation Tool](#) is designed to support both instructors and supervisors as partners in evaluating and enhancing instructional practices.

## **Procedure**

Students who wish to be considered for teaching should submit a CV to the department chair along with a request of possible courses to teach. This should be accompanied by letters of support from the student's advisor and concentration coordinator.

## **The Dissertation and Advancement to Candidacy**

### **Prospectus**

After completing the Qualifying Assessment, co-curricular activities, externship, all didactic coursework, and the Comprehensive Assessment the doctoral student begins the formal process of completing their prospectus and advancement to candidacy. The first step is writing a prospectus for a study that is a contribution to the student's discipline literature and is acceptable to the dissertation committee. To support and guide prospectus writing, EDUS 890: Dissertation Seminar is strongly recommended.

### **Selecting a Dissertation Topic**

A doctoral dissertation study should be an original study, designed to add to the body of knowledge in the student's discipline. It should be chosen carefully; being large enough to serve as a foundation for a future research agenda (particularly for doctoral candidates who plan to pursue a tenure-track position at a university), but targeted enough to assure that it can be accomplished within a reasonable timeframe. The student proceeds to conduct a careful review of the literature to identify the research question(s). For many students this will be reflected in the Concept Paper, which is submitted prior to enrolling in EDUS 890: Dissertation Seminar.

## **Format for the Prospectus and Dissertation**

The prospectus is a detailed plan of the student's dissertation. Guidelines can be found in the [VCU Thesis and Dissertation Manual](#) and Appendix E.

## **The Dissertation Committee**

After the student has been awarded Continuing Doctoral Status and prior to completing EDUS 890, the student should meet with their advisor to select a dissertation committee.

### ***Selecting the Dissertation Committee***

The committee must be selected and names submitted for approval to the Office of Graduate Studies by the end of the semester in which the student completes EDUS 890: Dissertation Seminar. It is highly recommended that students choose dissertation committee members *prior* to beginning EDUS 890. Process should be as follows:

1. Within the above stated time frame and the student has a clear idea of their dissertation topic, students meet with their advisor to agree on a Dissertation Chair. There is no expectation that the advisor will necessarily chair the student's dissertation committee. If a student and their advisor do decide to invite another faculty member to chair their dissertation committee, that faculty member takes over academic advising duties for the student.
2. With the Dissertation Chair, the student identifies faculty members with expertise in the dissertation area. Members should be chosen based on their knowledge of the content and/or methodology of the dissertation study. One member must be an expert in methodology, although there does not necessarily need to be a separate methodologist (that is, the methodologist could also be the chair, or VCU faculty outside the School of Education). The student contacts those individuals to determine their interest and willingness to serve. If any person declines to serve, the student and the Dissertation Chair select a replacement. This procedure is followed until all selected committee members have agreed to serve.

See the Responsibilities of Dissertation Committee Members section of this handbook for more detailed explanation of the responsibilities of the student, committee chair, and committee members. The final committee must have a minimum of four members. In alignment with the VCU [Graduate Bulletin](#), the dissertation committee must consist of at least 4 Graduate faculty members including:

- 2 members from within the candidate's discipline (including the Chair)
- 1 member from outside the candidate's discipline (this means outside of

- student's program discipline and not just outside VCU)
  - 1 additional committee member (VCU or affiliate) as approved by Chair (The outside committee member may be from an institution outside of VCU. If a student wishes to have a committee member from outside the university, this must be approved by their advisor, concentration coordinator and department chair.)
3. All members of a dissertation committee must have graduate faculty status or affiliate graduate faculty status.

Students must check the [Graduate School website](#) to make sure their selected dissertation committee members are listed and have graduate faculty status prior to submitting Dissertation Committee Agreement Form to SOE Office of Graduate Studies. If a student wishes to invite an individual to serve on their committee who does not have graduate faculty status or affiliate graduate faculty status with VCU, faculty status can be requested by submitting a Graduate/Affiliate Faculty Status Appointment Request Form to the Office of Graduate Studies along with copy of the CV of the requested committee member.

Please Note: No person may serve on a dissertation committee if such service would create the appearance of conflict of interest. For example, a student working with an agency or commercial organization may not have their supervisor serve on the committee.

4. Once all committee members have agreed to serve on the committee, the student submits a Dissertation Committee Agreement Form (along with any needed faculty status requests) to the Office of Graduate Studies. The Office of Graduate Studies will review the proposed members and will approve the candidates submitted or may reject candidates who appear to have a conflict of interest.

Barring resignations, members of a dissertation committee continue to serve until the candidate's research is completed and successfully defended. If changes are made to a student's dissertation committee, then a new Dissertation Committee Form must be submitted to the Office of Graduate Studies. If a committee member leaves the university prior to dissertation defense and still wishes to serve on the committee, then a Graduate/Affiliate Faculty Status Appointment Request Form must be submitted. An affiliate faculty member cannot serve as sole Chair of a dissertation committee; however, they may serve as a Co-Chair along with a current VCU Graduate faculty member.

## **Responsibilities of the Candidate, Dissertation Chair, and Committee Members**

### ***Candidate***

The dissertation is the candidate's research, but it is the candidate's responsibility to seek out and act upon guidance from the Dissertation Chair and each committee member. At the same time, the candidate should recognize that faculty workloads vary during the year, so that contacting a committee member, scheduling an appointment, critiquing a written draft, and similar activities may unavoidably require extra time in some instances. Maintaining contact, however, will facilitate the good communication that helps make the dissertation development process a rewarding experience for all ([see VCU Dissertation Compact here](#)). Early in the dissertation process, the student should meet with the chair to establish a realistic timeline for completing the dissertation. Students should be aware that timelines often shift during the course of the dissertation process (due to IRB, delays with accessing sites, data collection delays, etc...).

#### **Candidate Responsibilities:**

- Select a Dissertation Chair, or co-chairs, with guidance from their advisor.
- Nominate committee members with guidance from the Dissertation Chair(s) and submit Dissertation Committee Approval form.
- Establish attainable research goals, with the approval of the Dissertation Chair and committee members.
- Develop a formal written prospectus and prepare formal written materials in an accurate and scholarly form by:
  - following the [VCU Thesis and Dissertation Manual](#) and the [American Psychological Association \(APA\) Manual 7th Edition](#) for both prospectus and dissertation
  - ensuring compliance with academic integrity and research ethics (for details see [VCU Office of Research](#) and [VCU Honor System](#))
- Meet required deadlines for submission of written materials by:
  - Distributing copies of the completed prospectus to the Dissertation Chair, each committee member, and the Office of Graduate Studies, at least 14 calendar days prior to the date of the prospectus review.
  - Distributing copies of the completed dissertation to the Dissertation Chair, each committee member, and the Office of Graduate Studies, at least 14 calendar days prior to the date of the dissertation defense.
- Submit the appropriate application to the VCU Institutional Review Board and seek IRB approval before making any changes to the research protocol.
- Receive formal committee approval of the prospectus and IRB approval before beginning data collection. Understand that when the prospectus is approved by the dissertation committee at the prospectus hearing, it becomes an agreed upon plan between the candidate and committee. Substantial changes in the approved prospectus must be



discussed with the committee and approved in writing by the committee.

- Consult with and be guided by the Dissertation Chair and committee members throughout the research process. Although the specific interaction between the candidate and committee may vary, the candidate is expected to make appointments and, when requested, submit written drafts at least 7 calendar days prior to meeting with the Dissertation Chair or committee members.
- Understand and be prepared to defend all aspects of the dissertation (e.g., research methods and data analyses).
- Assume responsibility with the Dissertation Chair for the final proofreading of the dissertation.
- Submit a copy of the approved final dissertation electronically to the Office of Graduate Studies and complete exit forms.
- Submit the approved final electronic dissertation to VCU Scholars Compass. See guidelines on the [Graduate School website](#).

### ***Dissertation Chair***

Serving as a Dissertation Chair constitutes a major responsibility to the candidate, the School of Education, and the Ph.D. Program. For the Dissertation Chair, the dissertation process requires extended involvement with both the candidate and committee members. It is time-consuming and, at times, demanding. At the same time, it provides an intellectual challenge unlike any other University responsibility. Through successful guidance of a completed dissertation, the chair not only contributes to the expansion of knowledge in a given field, but also becomes an integral part of that contribution as the dissertation becomes a basis for future research.

#### **Dissertation Chair Responsibilities:**

- Guides the candidate in:
  - Developing a scholarly, researchable question.
  - Preparing the written outline or summary of the problem statement, research question, and methodology.
  - Selecting and utilizing instrumentation and analyses congruent with the methodology and research design.
- Ensuring academic integrity and VCU honors system are followed.
- Establishes times when available to guide the candidate with prospectus and dissertation drafts.
- Establishes, with the candidate, attainable research goals and a reasonable time frame for completing the steps in the dissertation process.
- Clarifies for the candidate and committee members the role of the candidate, chair, co-chair (where appropriate), and committee; and suggests ways in which each can contribute most effectively to the dissertation development process.
- Advises the candidate when materials are at an appropriate level of completeness to share

with committee members, as well as when to communicate progress or problems.

- Assists the candidate in preparing the application for the VCU Institutional Review Board. For IRB purposes, the chair is the principal investigator for the research.
- Guides the candidate in developing content and format, as well as in using appropriate grammar and style; and assures that the final document is without error and suitable for publication.
- Supervises the preparation of and approves both the prospectus and the dissertation prior to the formal review and the defense.
- Assists as needed with scheduling the candidate's prospectus hearing and dissertation defense through the Office of Graduate Studies.
- Maintains a climate that facilitates constructive discussion during the prospectus hearing.
- Guides the student in enrolling in the appropriate number of credit hours each semester of EDUC 899: Dissertation Research and submits a grade of Satisfactory, Unsatisfactory, or Fail for dissertation credit during each semester in which the candidate is enrolled in EDUC 899.
- Maintains a climate conducive to a fair review of the candidate's dissertation research during the dissertation defense.
- Ensures that all committee members sign the appropriate forms related to the defense.

### ***Co-chair***

Because of the need for special expertise from a given committee member, it may be appropriate to appoint a person on the committee to serve as co-chair. It is anticipated that this person would, comparatively speaking, provide more consultation than any other committee member except the chair.

#### **Co-Chair Responsibilities:**

- Confers with the Dissertation Chair on their role on the committee.
- Provides needed in-depth review of the areas of the dissertation that are their area of expertise.
- Guides the candidate in areas of the dissertation research in which they have expertise.
- Participates in the prospectus review and dissertation defense.

### ***Dissertation Committee Members***

The expertise of each committee member is essential to the development of the candidate's dissertation research, and as such, will be reflected in the quality of the final product. The contributions and support of each committee member helps assure that the candidate will complete a quality dissertation.

#### **Committee Member Responsibilities:**

- Assist the candidate by:

- Critiquing all written materials submitted by the candidate.
- Conferring in the selection of instrumentation and statistical or qualitative analyses congruent with the research design.
- Providing content, methodological, and/or statistical expertise related to the research problem under study.
- Presents concerns and suggestions to the Dissertation Chair and candidate during the prospectus development process.
- Recommends additional committee meetings to the Dissertation Chair when needed.
- Participates in the prospectus review and dissertation defense.

### **Prospectus Hearing**

The Dissertation Chair is responsible for reviewing content and determining that a prospectus meets university and School of Education guidelines and is ready for formal review. When, in the opinion of the Dissertation Chair, the prospectus is ready for critical review, and the student has completed all required coursework, co-curriculars, and the Comprehensive Assessment, a prospectus hearing is scheduled. The hearing must be held within the first and last day of class of a semester.

To schedule a prospectus hearing, a student must:

1. Get approval from the Dissertation Chair (after review of grades and program requirements) to schedule prospectus hearing.
2. Consult committee and select date to hold prospectus hearing either via zoom, in person or hybrid.
3. Email Office of Graduate Studies for Prospectus Hearing Request Form that must be completed and returned, and to reserve space if necessary.
4. Submit Prospectus Hearing Request Form 2 weeks prior to prospectus hearing with all meeting information.
5. Submit electronic copy of prospectus to committee and to the SOE Office of Graduate Studies 2 weeks prior to hearing. Copies must be sent to the Office of Graduate Studies. The Prospectus must meet the requirements of the *VCU Thesis and Dissertation manual* before submission.
6. Email the Office of Graduate Studies is essential for timely announcement to the School of Education.

### **Prospectus Approval Process**

Upon completion of the prospectus hearing, the committee reaches a conclusion about moving forward with data collection. A minimum of three positive votes is required for approval. The committee may decide to:

- a) approve the prospectus without changes

- b) approve with specified changes,
- c) disapprove the prospectus altogether

The committee will share their decision with the student. The Dissertation Chair must notify the Office of Graduate Studies of the committee's decision to initiate required documents to be signed via DocuSign. These forms include the Prospectus Review Report and VCU Advancement to Candidacy Form.

If the prospectus is approved without changes, the Dissertation Chair will notify the Office of Graduate Studies and forms to be signed will be initiated. If the prospectus is approved with specified changes, the Dissertation Chair needs to provide documentation of changes to be made to the student and to the Office of Graduate Studies. If required changes are minor, forms for prospectus approval can still be completed.

If the prospectus is not approved, the committee explicitly identifies in writing changes to be made and steps to be taken for approval and provides a copy to the student and the Office of Graduate Studies and the Prospectus Review Report will be completed. Students should submit required changes to the committee within 5 calendar days of hearing and the committee should review and approve changes within 5 calendar days of receipt.

When required changes are completed and the prospectus is approved, the Committee Chair must alert the Office of Graduate Studies so the VCU Advancement to Candidacy Form can be completed. If the prospectus is still not approved after submitted changes then a meeting with the student, Dissertation Chair, department chair and Associate Dean of Academic Affairs is held to determine next steps the student must take.

Degree Candidacy will be awarded after successful completion of prospectus and completion and submission of the Prospectus Review Report and the Advancement to Degree Candidacy form.

### **VCU Institutional Review Board**

VCU's Institutional Review Board (IRB) reviews all proposed research studies that involve human subjects. Prior to prospectus hearing, the candidate with their adviser determines whether the study meets the requirements for exempt, expedited, or full board review. If the study requires IRB approval, the approval process must be initiated prior to prospectus hearing.

VCU requires all research personnel on a study to complete the [Collaborative IRB Training Initiative \(CITI\) Basic Course](#) before beginning human subjects research. More information about VCU IRB can be found on the [Human Subjects Research](#) website. When submitting the research protocol through VCU RAMS-IRB, please select the Dissertation Chair as the PI for review and approval.

While the Dissertation Chair is the principal investigator for all dissertation research studies, it is the students' responsibility to ensure that IRB approval has been obtained before beginning any data collection activities. Students using secondary data must contact and receive formal approval from the IRB before the use of any data.

### **Advancement to Candidacy**

A student becomes a Ph.D. candidate after having completed all coursework required for the degree, including EDUS 890 (unless the student has opted out with departmental approval), passed the Comprehensive Assessment, and successfully defended the prospectus. Students who have fulfilled all of these requirements must alert the Office of Graduate Studies to have Advancement to Candidacy Form completed. Please see the [Graduate Bulletin](#) for more information about degree candidacy.

### **Doctoral Candidacy and Dissertation**

A minimum of 9 dissertation credits is required, three of which can be EDUS 890: Dissertation Seminar. With approval from their advisor, students who opt out of EDUS 890 may begin taking dissertation credits (EDUC 899). The student is required to maintain continual enrollment during the dissertation process and is required to register for dissertation credits each semester that they are using university resources, including consulting with the dissertation committee.

The student is required to consult with their Dissertation Chair each semester prior to registering for dissertation research hours. There is no limit to the number of EDUS 899 credits a student may take while pursuing completion of the degree; however program time limits per Graduate School policy remain intact. If the Dissertation Chair is not the listed instructor for the student's EDUC 899 course, they must submit the grade earned to the listed instructor prior to the grade submission deadline.

### **Scheduling the Dissertation Defense**

To schedule the dissertation defense, a student must:

1. Get approval from the Dissertation Chair (after review of grades and program requirements) to schedule dissertation defense.
2. Consult committee and select date to hold dissertation defense.
3. Email Office of Graduate Studies for Dissertation Defense Request Form that must be completed and returned, and to reserve space if needed.
4. Submit Dissertation Defense Request Form 2 weeks prior to defense.
5. Submit electronic copy of dissertation to committee and to the Office of Graduate Studies 2 weeks prior to defense. Copies must be sent to the Office of Graduate Studies.

Emailing the Office of Graduate Studies is essential for timely announcement to the School of

Education.

Dissertation defenses must be held no later than 10 calendar days prior to the Graduate School's deadline for submission of final and approved dissertation to the digital archives. The Graduate School's deadline for submission to the VCU Scholars Compass can be found on the [VCU Academic Calendar](#).

### **Approval of the Dissertation**

Following the dissertation defense, the committee deliberates and makes a decision on approval. The committee may decide to:

1. approve the dissertation as written
2. approve dissertation with minor changes
3. request the candidate to make specific changes before approval

If minor changes (spelling, typographical, or syntactical) are needed, the approval form can still be completed. The committee may empower the Dissertation Chair to act on its behalf in supervising the revisions. Requested changes need to be submitted to the committee within 5 calendar days of dissertation defense and the committee must review and approve changes within 5 calendar days of receipt and notify the Office of Graduate Studies of its decision.

If major changes (defined as conceptual, factual, or interpretive changes) are needed, a second meeting must be scheduled, at which time the dissertation committee reviews and acts on the revisions. The second meeting should be scheduled within 10 calendar days of original defense unless conflict with getting changes submitted and approved prior to the university Thesis/Dissertation approval deadline, in which case the meeting should be held sooner.

A minimum of three positive votes is required for approval. Once the dissertation is fully approved, the Dissertation Chair notifies the Office of Graduate Studies of the committee's decision to initiate final degree requirements.

If the dissertation defense is not approved after the second meeting, then a meeting with the student, committee, department chair, and Associate Dean of Academic Affairs will be held to determine next steps.

### **Submission of the Approved Dissertation**

Guidelines regarding dissertation submission are available at the [VCU Scholars Compass](#) website. Final dissertations need to be uploaded to the VCU Scholars Compass by the designated deadline on the university academic calendar. VCU also requires that students complete the [Survey of Earned Doctorates](#).



## **Appendix A: Forms**

**Please note:** Beginning Fall 2025, required forms will be completed/initiated within a student's Program of Study.

[Co-Curricular Activity Form](#)

[Post Qualifying Assessment Advising Meeting Summary Form](#)

[Externship Application Form](#)

[Independent Study Form](#)

[Externship Application Form](#)

[Comprehensive Assessment Approval Form](#)

[Concept Paper Approval Form](#)

[Dissertation Committee Agreement Form](#)

[Prospectus Hearing Request Form](#)

[Dissertation Defense Request Form](#)

[Change of Advisor Form-SOE Ph.D. Program](#)



## Appendix B: Content for the Qualifying Assessment

Content for the Qualifying Assessment portfolio in your concentration will consist of items and materials designated by the faculty in your concentration ([concentration-specific information here](#)) and performance and completion of the following four courses:

**EDUS 608 Educational Statistics** The purpose of this course is to facilitate students' development of the skills required to come up with a research hypothesis and analyze data to confirm or deny said hypothesis. Students will specifically consider the development of theoretically grounded hypotheses and the use of a variety of statistical techniques to enable their testing. The class will focus in particular on multiple regression with two or more independent variables and the psychometric analysis of measurement scales intended to tap variables used in the models developed. Students will also consider curvilinear relationships, factor analysis and power analysis. Students who successfully complete the course should have the ability to analyze complex data sets and construct measures that enable the testing of hypotheses that advance theory, research and practice in the field of education.

### **EDUS 702: Foundations of Educational Research and Doctoral Scholarship Part I**

1. Acclimate beginning Ph.D. students into the realm of doctoral studies
2. Encourage students to reflect on their place in their program/concentration and on the wider contexts within which their programs/disciplines are situated
3. Familiarize students with key components of the inquiry process, such as understanding inquiry as learning, building conceptual frameworks, and developing clarity on knowledge use
4. Expose participants to the field of epistemology, or the study of knowledge—particularly as it applies to educational research
5. Expose students to diverse philosophies of research (such as interpretivism, critical theory, arts-based research)
6. Analyze ethical issues in research and introduce students to the history and purposes as well as conventions and rules of the IRB process
7. Provide interdisciplinary exposure by giving students opportunities to work with students from other concentrations

### **EDUS 703: Foundations of Educational Research and Doctoral Scholarship Part II**

1. Assist Ph. D. students with navigating doctoral studies
2. Continue to support Ph.D. students' exploration of their place in their program/concentration and the wider contexts within which their programs/disciplines are situated
3. Equip students with understanding of history, purpose, and goals of theory in social science

research, particularly critical theory

4. Develop students' foundational knowledge necessary for building scholarly arguments and engage social theory in their own writing
5. Provide a setting where doctoral students develop heightened sensitivity to the complex nature of contemporary education, especially urban and global issues in education (diversity, race, class, gender).
6. Deepen interdisciplinary exposure by giving students opportunities to work with students from other concentrations

### **EDUS 710: Educational Research Design**

The purpose of this course is to examine complex quantitative designs and concepts that are commonly encountered in conducting quantitative research in applied social settings. The course assumes knowledge of fundamental principles of research, such as identifying research problems or questions, reviewing literature, sampling, choosing appropriate assessment techniques to gather information, simple research designs, internal and external validity, types of research, descriptive and inferential statistics, and a working knowledge of SPSS data analysis software. These basic principles and skills are extended to the more complex situations that are frequently encountered in applied settings. The course is designed for doctoral students. An important goal of the course is to enable students to become critically reflective in the use of quantitative data for decision-making. More specifically, the objectives include student understanding and application of:

1. the effects of sampling on non-experimental and experimental designs
2. data entry and SPSS software for data analysis
3. advanced principles of measurement as related to research design
4. statistical, internal, construct, and external experimental validity
5. survey and non-experimental designs
6. experimental and quasi-experimental designs, including single and multiple factor designs
7. multivariate research designs
8. factor analysis
9. statistical analyses for single factor and multiple factor designs
10. nested experimental designs requiring HLM analyses
11. differences between statistical significance and effect size

**Students are responsible for consulting their advisor and concentration coordinator regarding preparation and completion of the Qualifying Assessment after completion of 18 credit hours in the program.**

## Appendix C: Comprehensive Assessment Policy Overview

(concentration-specific information here)

	CESN	CCC	EDLP	EDPS	RAE	USL	Art Ed
<b>Eligibility</b>	Completion of all didactic coursework, not including EDUS 890	Completion of all didactic coursework, not including EDUS 890	Completion of all didactic coursework, not including EDUS 890 (Semester of last class will be allowed, semester after last class is preferred.)	Completion of all didactic coursework, not including EDUS 890 & prior to EDUC 700	Completion of all didactic coursework, not including EDUS 890  (Semester of final coursework may be allowed.)	Completion of all didactic coursework, not including EDUS 890	Completion of all didactic coursework, not including EDUS 890
<b>Administration</b>	Fall, Spring or Summer* (*pending chair availability)	Fall/Spring	Fall, Spring or Summer. 6 weeks to complete the exam, common start date. Submitted to coordinator at end of coursework	Fall, Spring, Summer* (*pending chair availability)	Fall/Spring/	Fall/ Spring	Fall/ Spring
<b>Format</b>	Individualized take-home questions in 4 content areas and an oral defense. Please see CES handbook for details.	Literature Review	Take-home project that includes competencies in data analysis	Literature Review Please see the EDPS Handbook for details.	Individualized take-home questions for a 20-page paper and an oral exam	AL = Timed computer- based exam on campus	Consult advisor/concentration coordinator
<b>Preparation</b>	Student will consult with advisor about exam preparation	Please see CCC handbook for details	Students to compile/ coordinate any artifacts of learning in advance. Students encouraged to collaborate with others taking the exam. Coordinator is available for questions during the 6 weeks.	Students meet w/ their advisor by the first week of the semester in which the exam is to occur to determine the topic and scope of the literature review.	Students receive questions 1 week prior. Take-home questions require ~ 25-30 hours of preparation	Exam must be scheduled 1-2 months in advance. 30-45 days in advance students may meet with coordinator. Questions not provided in advance.	Consult advisor/ coordinator
<b>Grading</b>	In the case of a computer-based exam, two-three SOE faculty readers will evaluate the exam and two will need to assign a rating of “pass” or “pass with honors” in order for the student to have successfully passed the Comprehensive Assessment. Students can expect their Comprehensive Assessment results within 4 to 6 weeks of test administration. A student who fails one or more questions will be allowed to retake the exam once. All questions will be graded Honors, Pass, or Fail. Until a student has passed all components of the Comprehensive Assessment, a grade of I (incomplete) will be recorded on the student’s transcript.						

	For other exam formats, please consult with the concentration coordinators.
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## **Appendix D: Concept Paper Guidelines**

### **Purpose of the Concept Paper**

The purpose of the Concept Paper is two-fold. First, it should provide an indication to the reader that the student has a sufficiently developed idea for a dissertation topic that is based on the literature. Second, it should provide an indication of the student's ability to write about research literature and a research idea.

The Concept Paper consists of a "mini-literature review" of 8-10 double spaced pages, excluding references. The review should describe and evaluate key studies in the student's area of interest, provide a synthesis of studies cited, and identify key gaps in the literature. The review should follow APA style and close by identifying the student's topic of inquiry. The student will develop this literature review in consultation with their Dissertation Chair.

### **Preparation**

To be proactive in their preparation of the Concept Paper, it is recommended that students follow these steps:

1. Meet with their Dissertation Chair to determine their readiness for EDUS 890.
2. Meet with their Dissertation Chair to receive direction for the Concept Paper.
3. Submit the Concept Paper to your Dissertation Chair at least 2 weeks before the SOE deadline for submission for the semester you intend to enroll in EDUS 890.

### **Review Process**

The Dissertation Chair or other faculty designated by the student's concentration will review the student's paper. If it is deemed that the literature review is sufficiently substantive, the Concept Paper Approval Form and a copy of the Concept Paper should be submitted to the Office of Graduate Studies. Once these steps are completed, the student can register for EDUS 890 through [eServices](#). If the paper is not accepted, the student will not be permitted to enroll in EDUS 890, however they will receive feedback about why the paper was not acceptable and work with their advisor on next steps.

## **Appendix E: Formats for the Prospectus and Dissertation Guidelines**

The most recent American Psychological Association (APA) Manual 7th edition is the style of choice for dissertations completed by students in the Ph.D. in Education program. A student may petition the concentration coordinator for an exception to the use of the APA style. Students are encouraged to become familiar with the APA Manual and the VCU Graduate School Thesis and Dissertation Manual as guides for the technical preparation of their dissertation.

In general, follow APA style for determining the levels of headings, resolving style issues, particularly with regard to expressing numbers and statistics, using gender neutral language, constructing tables and figures, crediting sources and constructing the reference list. The VCU Graduate School Thesis and Dissertation Manual must be followed for non-content formatting requirements (e.g., fonts, margins, pagination, constructing the abstract, labeling the tables and figures in the body of the text, developing the List of Tables, List of Figures, and the Table of Contents). It also has information about arranging the contents of your dissertation for upload to the VCU Scholars Compass. Please see the Student Checklist of General Program Requirements (Appendix F) .

It is also recognized that for some dissertations, the format outlined here may not be appropriate. Alternatives to the formats presented in this Appendix may be approved. Students should consult with their Chair regarding formats for dissertations and will need to obtain approval from their Chair on the format chosen.

### **Traditional Format**

#### **A. Traditional Prospectus Format**

The Prospectus is a plan the candidate develops to serve as a guide in completing their dissertation research. It is expected that the plan should be concise, well-articulated, and represent the candidate's best thinking and inquiry on a researchable topic.

Since the prospectus is a detailed plan of the candidate's dissertation, it reflects the dissertation format. The body of the prospectus is composed of three major parts, roughly equivalent to the first three chapters of the final dissertation, as well as some other features typical of a major scholarly work. The relative length and depth of each section may vary somewhat, but it is expected that each section will be included in the prospectus.

The first part, Introduction, includes the statement of the problem and its significance, the rationale for the study, a summary of the literature review and methodology, and a listing of

specific research questions. In essence, the Introduction should provide a brief overview and understanding of what will be studied, why it is of importance, and how it will be accomplished.

The second part of the prospectus, the Review of Literature, describes and documents the theoretical, historical, experiential, and/or experimental background of the proposed study. The review should be carefully organized to clarify the various conceptual and interdisciplinary roots from which the proposed study has emerged and illuminate the way in which the study will expand upon, rather than duplicate, past knowledge. Thus, it includes a thorough review of the literature and research relevant to the dissertation question, although it may not provide the exhaustive review of supportive and related areas that will be found in the final dissertation. In addition, this part usually includes a subsection listing the terms and definitions that are critical to the study.

The third part, Methodology, presents the detailed procedures that will be followed in conducting the research. It is usually written in the future tense. Depending on the specific methodology to be employed in the study, such components as the population, participants, instrumentation, procedures, research design, data analysis steps, and other information needed to understand the study should be included and described in detail. In most instances, the limitations of the study are also delineated in this part of the prospectus. The Journal Article Reporting Standards in the appendix of the APA Manual gives good guidance as to what should be included in the Methodology chapter.

Although the content of these first three parts has been carefully developed to provide both a clear overview of and detailed plan for conducting the dissertation study, placement of two specific components may vary. Depending upon the area of inquiry and the nature of the study, the definition of terms may be placed in the first or second part and the limitations and/or delimitations of the study may be located in the first or third part of the prospectus. In such situations, clear guidance should be sought from the doctoral Committee.

In addition to the three basic parts of the written prospectus, please follow the VCU Thesis and Dissertation Manual for formatting of the Title Page and Table of Contents, margins and pagination, etc. A bibliography, which lists all sources cited, but no additional supporting references, follows the Methodology part of the prospectus. Appendices should also be used as appropriate, to include any documents, such as letters, permissions, data gathering instruments, or other exhibits that will be used in conducting the dissertation research. (See Sample Prospectus Contents for an outline of this information).

## **B. Traditional Dissertation Format**

Although the dissertation follows the format already used for the approved prospectus, minor revisions must be made as the prospectus parts are developed into dissertation chapters. Two additional major components and some new specific pages must also be prepared and included in the final dissertation. The three prospectus parts become the first three chapters of the dissertation and additional chapters titled "IV. Findings" and "V. Discussion, Conclusions and Recommendations" complete the written record of the candidate's study.

Chapter 1 may be revised as an executive summary and include a discussion of the analysis and conclusions or it may stand as organized for the prospectus. Often the Review of Literature is expanded to include greater information about areas that support or relate to the dissertation question under study or to include more current literature. The part on Methodology in the prospectus must be revised from future to past tense. Any changes in the procedures or difficulties which developed in carrying out the methodology are also reported.

The quantitative and/or qualitative results of the study, where appropriate, are reported in the Findings chapter. In addition to data describing the actual population used in the research, both tables and explanatory clarification of the actual data collected in the course of the study are presented in the first section of the chapter. Narrative analysis of the data and any trends observed are discussed in a final section of the same chapter.

The Discussion, Conclusions and Recommendations chapter uses the data already reported and relates those findings to the specific research problem and questions delineated in the Introduction and each subsequent chapter. Therefore, the chapter must be carefully crafted to reflect the actual content of the preceding four chapters, as well as to provide logical extensions of that content. It is in this chapter that the implications of the findings and how they impact policy should be demonstrated.

The recommendations, which are highly dependent upon the nature of the dissertation problem, attempt to put the dissertation research into practical terms. Thus, the recommendations which emerge, in part, form the basis for further research.



## C. Sample Contents of the Traditional Format Dissertation

*[Title Page in mandatory format]	
Acknowledgement.....	
*[Table of Contents] .....	
List of Tables.....	
List of Figures.....	
*[Abstract in Mandatory format].....	
I. INTRODUCTION .....	
Statement of Problem .....	
Rationale for Study of Problem .....	
Statement of Purpose .....	
Literature/Research Background/Theoretical Framework .....	
Research Questions .....	
Summary .....	
Definition of terms.....	
II. REVIEW OF LITERATURE .....	
Overview of Related Areas .....	
*[Organized review of literature/research] .....	
III. METHODOLOGY .....	
Sample.....	
Data Sources.....	
Procedures .....	
Data Analysis .....	
Limitations .....	
I. FINDINGS .....	
*[Descriptive Findings (as appropriate)] .....	
*[Findings for each research question]	
II. DISCUSSION, CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS .....	
REFERENCES .....	
APPENDICES .....	
VITA	

\* Bracketed portions indicate that prospectus/dissertation specific information, rather than the indicated heading, should be provided in the actual prospectus

## Three-Paper Format

The three-paper format is formed by three conceptually and/or empirically linked papers with a brief narrative that describes how the papers are related to a theme or research area. Each of the three papers needs to be stand alone meaning they could be submitted for publication independently. The expectation is that the papers either have been published or are of sufficient quality that they will be submitted for publication (e.g., literature review submitted as part of the Comprehensive Assessment).

The student must be listed either as the sole author or the first co-author of each article. As such, students are responsible for leading the project in most ways. These include development and articulation of a concept or idea for research, development of a proposal to pursue this idea, development of a research design, conducting research and analysis, writing major portions of a manuscript, designing an intervention or assessment (if relevant), and interpreting findings. A guideline for determining contribution to manuscripts can be found here: <https://www.cell.com/pb/assets/raw/shared/guidelines/CRediT-taxonomy.pdf>. Coauthors must be identified at the student's proposal defense. The article and the role of the coauthors must be presented to and approved by all members of the dissertation committee. Any changes in co-authorship must be approved by the student's committee.

The dissertation committee must agree that each article can be submitted for publication; thus, the inclusion of articles already published before a committee is constituted is at the discretion of the committee. If a previously published article is approved by the committee, the student will be responsible for securing necessary permissions from the copyright holder and other authors. Doing so will allow students practice in navigating authorship issues and will ensure that all authors are aware of how their work is being used.

In addition, the general formatting requirements listed above also apply to articles used as chapters. The student MUST apply a consistent style in font, headings, subheadings, tables and figures throughout the entire document (e.g., each article used as a chapter).

For a three-paper dissertation, the prospectus defense and dissertation defenses look somewhat different. For the prospectus defense, an overall vision of the three papers (which can include papers already written), articulation of how they are conceptually and/or empirically linked, clear timeline, data collection, analyses, and publication plans with accompanying rationale for each choice must be reviewed and signed off by the committee. For the dissertation defense, the papers should be completed along with a brief narrative that describes how the papers are related to an overarching theme or research question. The candidate must clearly defend each paper in addition to demonstrating how they are related to the theme/research question.

## A. Sample Contents of the Three-Paper Format Dissertation

\*[Title Page in mandatory format]

Acknowledgement

\*[Table of Contents]

\*[Abstract in Mandatory format]

I. LINKING DOCUMENT .....	
Synthesis across the three papers.....	
Significance of the body of work.....	
I. TITLE OF FIRST MANUSCRIPT.....	
Body of Article.....	
References.....	
II. TITLE OF SECOND MANUSCRIPT.....	
Body of Article.....	
References.....	
III. TITLE OF THIRD MANUSCRIPT.....	
Body of Article.....	
References.....	
APPENDICES.....	
VITA.....	

\* Bracketed portions indicate that prospectus/dissertation specific information, rather than the indicated heading, should be provided in the actual prospectus

## Appendix F: Student Checklist of General Program Requirements

**Students are responsible for making sure required forms are completed.**

- ☐ **Program of Study.** Students are to complete the Program of Study with their advisor.
- ☐ **Qualifying Assessment.** Students must complete Qualifying Assessment after completion of 18 (and prior to completing 30) credits, including four courses in research and educational foundations (EDUS 608, 702, 703, and 710).
- ☐ **Post-Qualifying Assessment Summary Form.** Completed by the advisor to summarize the goals and objectives of the student after reviewing Qualifying Assessment results, course grades, and any supplemental coursework. Any remediation required to address deficiencies identified during this review are specified on this form including timelines for completion and/or other recommended action.
- ☐ **Continuing Doctoral Status.** Awarded once the student has successfully completed Qualifying Assessment, and completed any remedial plan.
- ☐ **Co-curricular Activity Form.** Completed by the student and advisor to outline the specifics of co-curricular activities determined to assist the student in gaining professional experiences important for long-term career goals in research, teaching, leadership, and/or service to the field.
- ☐ **Externship Application.** Completed by the student, advisor, and onsite supervisor in the semester prior to the externship experience (EDUC 700).
- ☐ **Comprehensive Assessment.** In consultation with the advisor, the student follows concentration-specific instructions for registration, preparation, and completion of the Comprehensive Assessment.
- ☐ **Dissertation Committee Agreement Form.** Following consultation between student and advisor,, the Dissertation Committee Agreement Form is submitted to the Office of Graduate Studies no later than the end of the semester in which EDUS 890: Dissertation Seminar is completed.
- ☐ **Prospectus Hearing.** The student is allowed to schedule this with the agreement of the Dissertation Chair and committee members. The student schedules the prospectus

hearing with their committee two weeks prior to the desired date and emails the Office of Graduate Studies for instructions and information for the hearing announcement. At the same time, the student forwards a copy of the prospectus to their committee and the Office of Graduate Studies. The student is responsible for ensuring completion of required documents prior to and following prospectus hearing.

- ☐ **Admission to Doctoral Degree Candidacy Form.** Completed when all required coursework, Comprehensive Assessment, and successful prospectus hearing has been completed.
- ☐ **Graduation Application.** Submitted at the beginning of the semester in which the student expects to graduate. The student, advisor, program director, and Associate Dean of Academic Affairs must approve through eServices/Degreeworks.
- ☐ **Dissertation Defense.** The student is allowed to schedule this with the agreement of the Dissertation Chair and committee members. The student schedules the dissertation defense with their committee two weeks prior to the desired date and emails the Office of Graduate Studies for instructions and provides information for the defense announcement. At the same time, the student forwards their dissertation to their committee and the Office of Graduate Studies. The student is responsible for making sure documents required before and following the dissertation defense are completed.
- ☐ **Final Edits.** Once the dissertation is approved, the student must make any final edits and revisions recommended by the committee within 5 calendar days of the defense date. The committee has 5 calendar days to approve revisions upon receipt.
- ☐ **Upload Dissertation.** Student uploads final dissertation to VCU Scholars Compass by Graduate School deadline. See the [Electronic Theses and Dissertation website](#) for specifics.