

Curriculum & Structure

Doctor of Education in Educational Leadership

Sul Ross State University

Program Overview

The Ed.D. in Educational Leadership is a 60-credit-hour program completed over three years (nine semesters). All courses are 3 credit hours each. The program is designed for working professionals and delivered fully online with weekly 90-minute synchronous sessions.

60

Credit Hours

3

Years / 9 Semesters

15

Cohort Size

100%

Online Delivery

Three-Year Program Arc

The curriculum is organized into three distinct phases, each building directly on the work of the previous:

Phase I: Framing and Grounding (Semesters 1–3)

Students identify and validate their Problem of Practice through improvement science tools, organizational analysis, and stakeholder engagement.

Phase II: Designing for Improvement (Semesters 4–6)

Students develop their Theory of Improvement grounded in scholarly literature, design rigorous methodology, and prepare for implementation.

Phase III: Leading, Learning, and Integrating (Semesters 7–9)

Students implement their improvement initiative, analyze data, and complete their Dissertation in Practice.

YEAR 1: FRAMING AND GROUNDING

Semester 1

6 Credits

EDUA 8321 – The Science of Change and Improvement (3 credits)

Introduction to improvement science epistemology, principles, and foundational tools including system mapping, root cause analysis, and measurement for improvement.

EDUA 8301 – Trends in Rural and Borderland Community Contexts (3 credits)

Examination of rural and borderland educational settings, focusing on place-based leadership, community context, and asset-based approaches.

Semester Focus: *Define preliminary Problem of Practice; develop context and positionality narratives.*

Semester 2

6 Credits

EDUA 8330 – Understanding Research Design (3 credits)

Introduction to research paradigms, inquiry question development, and systematic literature engagement.

EDUA 8302 – External Partnerships in Rural and Borderland Communities (3 credits)

Partnership models, stakeholder mapping, and ethical collaboration in rural and borderland contexts.

Semester Focus: *Engage scholarly literature; refine inquiry questions; map partnerships.*

Semester 3

6 Credits

EDUA 8331 – Lab: Examining Problems of Practice (3 credits)

Lab-based intensive Problem of Practice development with validation inquiry, driver diagram construction, and preliminary measurement systems.

EDUA 8309 – Organizational Theory (3 credits)

Organizational analysis through multiple theoretical frameworks including structural, political, cultural, and systems perspectives.

Semester Focus: *Validate Problem of Practice; prepare for checkpoint defense.*

- **Milestone: Problem of Practice Checkpoint**

YEAR 2: DESIGNING FOR IMPROVEMENT

Semester 4

6 Credits

EDUA 8332 – Lab: Scholarly Literature (3 credits)

Lab-based intensive literature review development with focus on synthesis, critical analysis, and scholarly writing.

EDUA 8320 – Strategic Planning and Evaluation (3 credits)

Strategic planning frameworks, logic models, program evaluation, and measurement systems for improvement.

Semester Focus: *Complete Literature Review chapter; develop Theory of Improvement.*

- **Milestone: Literature Review Checkpoint**

Semester 5**9 Credits****EDUA 8304 – Philosophy and Ethics in Practice** (3 credits)

Ethical frameworks applied to educational leadership with emphasis on moral responsibility in leading change.

EDUA 8303 – Change Management and Systems Thinking (3 credits)

Systems thinking tools and change management theories for sustainable organizational improvement.

EDUA 7322 – School Finance and Resource Management [Specialization] (3 credits)

School finance systems, budgeting, resource allocation, and fiscal sustainability in rural and borderland contexts.

Semester Focus: *Justify intervention design ethically, systemically, and fiscally; develop implementation plan.*

Semester 6**9 Credits****EDUA 8333 – Lab: Methods and Synthesis** (3 credits)

Lab-based intensive methodology development including research design, data collection instruments, and analysis procedures.

EDUA 8314 – Communication Strategies and Information Dissemination (3 credits)

Data communication, visualization, and stakeholder engagement strategies for educational leaders.

EDUA 7321 – School Law, Policy, and Board Relations [Specialization] (3 credits)

School law, policy frameworks, governance, and compliance requirements for practitioner research.

Semester Focus: *Complete Methodology chapter; design SSAR cycles; prepare for implementation.*

- **Milestone: Methodology Checkpoint**

YEAR 3: LEADING, LEARNING, AND INTEGRATING

Semester 7

6 Credits

EDUA 8313 – Human Resource Management (3 credits)

Leading people through organizational change including professional development, coaching, and capacity building.

EDUA 7306 – Superintendent Leadership in Curriculum and Instruction [Specialization] (3 credits)

Instructional leadership, curriculum oversight, and connecting improvement efforts to teaching and learning.

Semester Focus: *Implement improvement initiative; document leadership learning.*

Semester 8

6 Credits

EDUA 8360 – Dissertation I (3 credits)

Dissertation seminar supporting comprehensive data analysis and Results chapter development.

EDUA 7308 – Superintendency: Public and Community Relations [Specialization] (3 credits)

Public relations, media communication, stakeholder engagement, and communicating data to public audiences.

Semester Focus: *Complete data analysis; write Results chapter.*

- **Milestone:** Results of SSIAR Cycles Checkpoint

Semester 9

6 Credits

EDUA 8361 – Dissertation II (3 credits)

Dissertation completion seminar for Discussion and Implications chapter, final integration, and defense preparation.

EDUA 7311 – Superintendent Practicum [Specialization] (3 credits)

Practicum translating improvement learning into ongoing leadership practice with focus on sustainability.

Semester Focus: *Complete Dissertation in Practice; prepare for defense.*

- **Milestone:** DiP Completion and Defense

Dissertation in Practice Milestones

The program includes five major milestones marking critical checkpoints in DiP development. Each milestone requires demonstrated readiness before the student proceeds to the next phase of work.

End of Semester 3

Problem of Practice Checkpoint

Students present refined Problem of Practice with supporting evidence, driver diagram, and preliminary measurement thinking.

End of Semester 4

Literature Review Checkpoint

Students submit complete Literature Review chapter demonstrating synthesis of scholarly literature and connection to improvement aims.

End of Semester 6

Methodology Checkpoint

Students submit complete Methodology chapter with SSIAR cycle designs, data collection instruments, and ethical protocols.

End of Semester 8

Results of SSIAR Cycles Checkpoint

Students present evidence of implementation and sufficient analyzed data for Results chapter.

End of Semester 9

DiP Completion and Defense

Students submit complete Dissertation in Practice and defend before their committee.

Superintendent and District-Level Leadership Specialization

The 15-credit-hour specialization prepares students for superintendent and district-level leadership roles through five courses integrated across Years 2 and 3:

- EDUA 7322 – School Finance and Resource Management (Semester 5)
- EDUA 7321 – School Law, Policy, and Board Relations (Semester 6)
- EDUA 7306 – Superintendent Leadership in Curriculum and Instruction (Semester 7)
- EDUA 7308 – Superintendency: Public and Community Relations (Semester 8)
- EDUA 7311 – Superintendent Practicum (Semester 9)

Integrated Course Design

Courses within each semester are paired intentionally to work together toward shared learning objectives. Students develop sophisticated thinking by examining the same problem from multiple perspectives simultaneously. Weekly 90-minute synchronous sessions bring all courses together, where faculty model doctoral-level thinking and students practice with structured support.

This integrated design ensures students experience coherence across courses rather than fragmentation, building toward milestone readiness through coordinated faculty guidance.

Continuous Enrollment

EDUA 8160 – Dissertation Continuation *(1 credit)*

This course provides continuous enrollment for students who need additional time to meet a checkpoint standard during a semester when the related course is not offered. Students work with their advisor to produce evidence of meeting checkpoint requirements.

Questions About Curriculum or Program Structure?

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