

Frequently Asked Questions

Doctor of Education in Educational Leadership

Sul Ross State University

Program Basics

What is the Ed.D. in Educational Leadership?

The Doctor of Education (Ed.D.) in Educational Leadership is a professional doctoral program designed for experienced leaders committed to driving meaningful improvement in rural, borderland, and underserved communities. The program uses improvement science as its signature pedagogy and culminates in a Dissertation in Practice that addresses an authentic problem in your organization.

How is an Ed.D. different from a Ph.D.?

An Ed.D. is a professional practice doctorate focused on applying research to solve real-world problems and improve organizational outcomes. A Ph.D. is a research doctorate focused on generating new theoretical knowledge and preparing scholars for academic careers. The Ed.D. prepares scholar-practitioners who lead improvement in educational and organizational settings.

Is this program CPED-aligned?

Yes. The program is aligned with the Carnegie Project on the Education Doctorate (CPED) framework, which defines the Ed.D. as preparing educators for the application of appropriate practices, generation of new knowledge, and stewardship of the profession.

Is this program accredited?

Sul Ross State University is regionally accredited by the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools Commission on Colleges (SACSCOC). The Ed.D. program has received Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board (THECB) approval.

Program Format and Structure

Is the program fully online?

Yes. All coursework is delivered online with no campus residencies required. You can complete the entire program from wherever you live and work.

How long does the program take?

The program is designed for completion in three years (nine semesters) of continuous enrollment, including summers. Students take 2–3 courses per semester while working full-time.

What is the cohort model?

You will progress through the program with the same group of 15 students, creating a learning community that supports collaborative inquiry and shared growth. The cohort model reduces isolation, increases accountability, and builds lasting professional networks.

What are synchronous sessions?

Each week, all students and faculty meet together for a 2-3 hour live online session. These sessions integrate the work from all courses in that semester, provide faculty modeling of doctoral-level thinking, facilitate peer collaboration, and support Dissertation in Practice development. Students also, in small groups, are expected to meet online, synchronously each week.

When are synchronous sessions scheduled?

Sessions are scheduled at a consistent day and time throughout the program to allow students to plan their professional and personal commitments. The specific schedule will be determined in consultation with the cohort to maximize accessibility.

Admissions

When can I apply?

The application portal opens approximately 10 months prior to the cohort “start date.” Applications will be processed on a rolling basis, until the cohort is filled, with final admission decisions announced roughly one month prior to the cohort start date.

What are the minimum requirements?

- Master's degree from a regionally accredited institution (minimum 3.0 GPA)
- Texas Principal or Principal as Instructional Leader Certificate (for cohort 2)
- Minimum three years of leadership experience
- Current employment in a leadership role with authority to lead change and access to organizational data

Do I need to be currently employed as a principal?

No. While you must hold Texas Principal Certification (cohort 2-only), you do not need to currently serve as a principal. Many successful applicants work in district-level positions, higher education, or other educational leadership roles.

How competitive is admission?

Cohorts are limited to 15 students. Admission is competitive and considers professional experience, academic preparation, mission alignment, and potential contribution to the cohort learning community.

What makes a strong application?

Strong applications demonstrate: clear identification of an authentic Problem of Practice; deep understanding of your organizational context; commitment to serving rural, borderland, or underserved communities; capacity for rigorous doctoral-level work; and readiness to engage in improvement science inquiry.

Do I need GRE or other test scores?

No. The program does not require GRE, GMAT, or other standardized test scores.

Cost and Financial Aid

What is the total program cost?

The total tuition for the 60-credit program is \$24,130, making it among the most accessible doctoral programs in the region.

Are there payment plans?

Students pay tuition each semester. Specific payment plan options and billing schedules are available through the Cashier's office to admitted students.

Is financial aid available?

Federal financial aid is available for eligible students. Admitted students will receive information about financial aid application processes and available resources.

Does Sul Ross offer scholarships for doctoral students?

Information about scholarships and funding opportunities will be provided to admitted students. Additionally, many employers offer tuition reimbursement for doctoral study.

Time Commitment

How many hours per week does the program require?

Students typically dedicate 12–15 hours per week to doctoral work during coursework semesters (Years 1–2), including the 2-3 hour synchronous session. Year 3 requires additional time for dissertation implementation, data collection, and writing. The program is designed for working professionals maintaining full-time employment.

Can I work full-time while in the program?

Yes. The program is specifically designed for working professionals. You will apply your learning immediately in your current organizational context, making doctoral study enhance rather than compete with your professional responsibilities.

Will I need to take time off work?

No campus residencies or extended time away from work are required. However, you will need protected time each week for coursework, synchronous sessions, and dissertation work.

Curriculum and Dissertation

What courses will I take?

The program includes 60 credits across nine semesters covering improvement science, research methodology, organizational theory, leadership, ethics, personnel, and dissertation completion. Detailed curriculum information is available in the Curriculum & Structure document.

What is the Dissertation in Practice?

The Dissertation in Practice (DiP) is an applied research project addressing an authentic problem in your current organization. Unlike traditional dissertations that generate theoretical knowledge, the DiP produces actionable solutions and demonstrates measurable organizational improvement using improvement science methodology.

When do I start working on my dissertation?

Dissertation development begins in Semester 1 when you identify your Problem of Practice. You refine it throughout Year 1, develop your Theory of Improvement and methodology in Year 2, and implement your improvement initiative in Year 3.

Do I need IRB approval?

Yes. All Dissertations in Practice require Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval before data collection begins. The program provides guidance and support for preparing IRB applications.

What if I change jobs during the program?

Significant employment changes can complicate dissertation completion, as your DiP is grounded in your organizational context. Students are strongly encouraged to consider employment stability when applying. If changes occur, consult immediately with your dissertation committee to assess options.

Technology and Support

What technology do I need?

You need reliable internet access, a computer with webcam and microphone, and basic proficiency with online learning platforms, video conferencing, and standard productivity software (word processing, spreadsheets, presentation software).

What learning management system does the program use?

The program uses Blackboard as its learning management system, with Microsoft Teams for synchronous sessions.

What support services are available?

Doctoral students have access to: academic advising, dissertation committee support, library resources (online databases, research assistance), technology support, and writing resources. Specific support services will be detailed during orientation.

Will I have an advisor?

Yes. The Program Director serves as your initial advisor. During Year 2, you form a dissertation committee including a committee chair who provides primary guidance for your Dissertation in Practice.

After Graduation

What careers can I pursue with an Ed.D.?

The Ed.D. prepares you for senior leadership roles including superintendent, assistant superintendent, college dean, program director, executive director, quality improvement director, and educational consultant. Graduates also pursue faculty positions and contribute to educational policy development.

Will this degree qualify me for superintendent certification?

The program includes a 15-credit specialization in Superintendent and District-Level Leadership that aligns with superintendent preparation. Contact the program director to discuss specific Texas superintendent certification requirements.

Can I pursue an academic career with an Ed.D.?

Yes. Many Ed.D. graduates teach in educational leadership programs, particularly at institutions focused on preparing practitioners. However, Ph.D. programs are generally preferred for research-intensive faculty positions.

Program-Specific Questions

Why is this program focused on rural and borderland communities?

Most doctoral programs prepare leaders for large, well-resourced urban settings. This program is intentionally designed for leaders working in rural communities, borderland regions, and under-resourced settings that face unique challenges and require context-specific approaches to improvement.

Do I have to work in a rural or borderland community to apply?

Priority is given to applicants whose professional work aligns with serving rural, borderland, or underserved communities. However, strong candidates from other contexts who demonstrate commitment to these communities may be competitive.

What is improvement science?

Improvement science is a methodology for understanding complex problems, designing interventions, testing changes through iterative cycles, and learning systematically to drive organizational improvement. It emphasizes practical measurement, rapid learning cycles, and adaptation based on evidence.

Why does the program use improvement science?

Improvement science is particularly well-suited for educational settings because it produces actionable knowledge, works within existing constraints, emphasizes learning through doing, and can be applied by practitioners without extensive research infrastructure.

What if I'm not familiar with improvement science?

No prior knowledge of improvement science is required. The program teaches improvement science from foundational principles forward, and you will apply the methodology to your own organizational challenges throughout all three years.

Questions About This Historic Program

Why is this Sul Ross's first doctoral program?

Since 1917, Sul Ross has focused on undergraduate and master's-level education serving West Texas and borderland communities. The Ed.D. represents the university's evolution and commitment to providing the highest level of educational preparation for leaders serving these regions.

When will future specializations be available?

Specializations are planned for future implementation. These will follow the same 15-credit structure as the current superintendent specialization that is utilized in cohorts 1 and 2.

Still Have Questions?

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Expression of Interest: [Submit Here](#)