

Program Leadership & Faculty

Doctor of Education in Educational Leadership

Sul Ross State University

Program Director

John Decman, Ed.D.

Professor of Educational Leadership

Founding Program Director, Ed.D. in Educational Leadership

Dr. John Decman serves as the founding Program Director for the first doctoral program in Sul Ross State University's history, which welcomed its inaugural cohort in August 2026. He brings extensive experience in educational leadership preparation and improvement science methodology, with a sustained commitment to rural and borderland educational communities.

Prior to joining Sul Ross, Dr. Decman served as Executive Director of the Texas Council of Professors of Educational Administration (TCPEA) from 2020–2026, where he built networks and partnerships across Texas educational leadership programs. He previously held a tenured faculty position at the University of Houston-Clear Lake, where he held administrative appointments while he prepared educational leaders and conducted research on leadership, school improvement practices, and organizational improvement.

Dr. Decman holds degrees from Ball State University, Indiana University, and Purdue University. He is the author or co-author of more than twenty-five peer-reviewed publications and the author of *Demystifying Dissertations* (Kendall Hunt). His scholarly work focuses on educational leadership development, superintendent practices, improvement science in education, and leadership preparation in underserved contexts. He is an active member of the International Council of Professors of Educational Leadership (ICPEL) Executive Board and a recipient of the James A. Vornberg TCPEA Living Legend Award for sustained contributions to the field.

Dr. Decman's commitment to this program extends beyond administration. He teaches in the program, chairs dissertation committees, and works directly with students throughout their doctoral journey. Under his leadership, the program was accepted into the Carnegie Project on the Education Doctorate (CPED) Network. He also designed the program's seven-node regional network, which organizes candidates into place-based studios across Far West Texas and the borderlands so their learning builds on shared regional context. His vision for the Ed.D. is grounded in the belief that rural and borderland communities deserve doctoral education designed specifically for their contexts, led by faculty who understand their realities and are committed to their success.

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Program Faculty

The Ed.D. in Educational Leadership is supported by a carefully selected faculty team combining deep expertise in improvement science, rural and borderland education, and practice-focused doctoral education. Faculty members bring both scholarly expertise and extensive practitioner experience, ensuring students learn from scholar-practitioners who understand the complexities of leading in real organizational settings.

Core Faculty

Faculty teaching in the Ed.D. program hold terminal degrees in educational leadership or related fields and demonstrate expertise in improvement science methodology, CPED-aligned doctoral education, and commitment to serving rural and borderland communities. Core faculty teach in the program, advise doctoral students, and serve on dissertation committees.

Jane Cooper, Ed.D.

Associate Professor

Dr. Jane Cooper's research interests include novice teacher development, relational practices, and collaborative inquiry. Her scholarship employs collaborative qualitative methods, primarily narrative inquiry and self-study methodologies, to enhance pedagogy, curriculum, and program quality. She has authored more than sixteen peer-reviewed empirical articles focused on these topics, including studies on teachers' observational score trends, paired course curriculum development, dialogical practices, and international doctoral collaboration. Her additional research has examined district partnerships, community outreach, bilingual educator pipelines, novice educator experiences, productive educational ecosystems, and collaborative rituals designed to promote rigor and commitment.

Dr. Cooper brings over ten years of experience working with and mentoring doctoral students. During that time, she has served on more than 40 dissertation committees as methodologist and/or chair for both Dissertations in Practice (DiPs) and traditional dissertations. Her teaching and research have been recognized with several awards, including Early Career Faculty Awards at her previous institution.

She is excited to be Core Faculty in the inaugural doctoral program, where she can apply her passion for research and pedagogical expertise to support educational leaders as they inquire into their own contexts, collaborate with community stakeholders and partners, and drive meaningful improvements in their schools and communities.

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Affiliated Doctoral Faculty

These faculty members hold primary appointments in other Sul Ross programs and contribute to the Ed.D. in Educational Leadership alongside their primary teaching and research responsibilities.

Faculty Member	Profile
Dr. Kevin Badgett	<i>Faculty Profile</i>
Dr. Jennifer Haan	<i>Faculty Profile</i>
Dr. Shelly Landreth	<i>Faculty Profile</i>
Dr. Jennifer Miller Ray	<i>Faculty Profile</i>
Dr. Jeanne Qvarnstrom	<i>Faculty Profile</i>
Dr. Diana Rodriguez	<i>Faculty Profile</i>

Dr. Michel Torres	<i>Faculty Profile</i>
Dr. Gayle White	<i>Faculty Profile</i>

Dissertation Committees

Each doctoral student works with a dissertation committee consisting of:

Committee Chair	A core program faculty member with expertise relevant to the student's Problem of Practice and improvement work. The chair provides primary guidance throughout the dissertation process.
Committee Members	Additional faculty (typically 2–3 members total) representing diverse expertise relevant to the student's work. Committee members may include core program faculty, Sul Ross faculty from related disciplines, or external members with specialized expertise.

Committee composition is finalized during Year 2 as students' Problems of Practice and improvement initiatives become clearly defined (at conclusion of milestone 3). Students work closely with the Program Director to identify committee members whose expertise aligns with their scholarly and professional needs.

Practitioner and Community Partnerships

While faculty provide the scholarly and methodological foundation for doctoral education, the program also draws on the expertise of educational practitioners and community leaders who:

- Serve as guest speakers sharing insights from leadership practice
- Provide feedback on improvement initiatives and dissertation work
- Offer perspectives on problems of practice in rural and borderland contexts
- Connect students with professional networks and leadership opportunities

These partnerships ensure the program remains grounded in the realities of educational practice and responsive to the needs of the communities it serves.

Faculty Commitment to Student Success

Faculty in the Ed.D. program are committed to supporting students through a rigorous and rewarding doctoral journey. This commitment includes:

Accessibility

Faculty maintain regular office hours, respond to student communications promptly, and are available for consultation on coursework and dissertation development.

Mentorship

Faculty serve as mentors who guide students' professional and scholarly growth, not just evaluators of academic work.

Collaborative Learning

Faculty model collaborative scholarship and improvement-focused inquiry, demonstrating the scholar-practitioner approach students are developing.

Individual Support

Faculty recognize that doctoral students are working professionals with competing demands and provide flexible, responsive support that respects students' contexts.

Continuous Improvement

Faculty engage in ongoing professional development to strengthen their capacity to support practice-focused doctoral education and improvement science scholarship.

Advisory and Leadership Support

In addition to teaching faculty, the program benefits from:

College of Education Leadership

Dean and associate deans providing institutional support, resources, and strategic guidance for program development and sustainability.

ICPEL and CPED Networks

Connections to national networks of educational leadership faculty and CPED member institutions, providing access to best practices, professional development, and collaborative learning opportunities.

Rural, Statewide, and Regional Partnerships

Relationships with rural school organizations, Texas educational leadership programs, school districts, and professional organizations that enrich students' learning and create pathways for impact beyond graduation.

These networks ensure the program remains connected to broader conversations about educational leadership preparation, improvement science, and practice-focused doctoral education.

Questions About Faculty?

Dr. John Decman, Program Director

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