

Leadership, Equity, & Inquiry

Coming in Fall 2026!

The Leadership, Equity, & Inquiry Educational Doctorate prepares educators to address critical challenges within communities, schools, and other organizations. As scholar-practitioners, students engage in deep reflection on key problems of practice, and the social and structural elements that undergird these via an interdisciplinary study of Chicago, its communities, and institutions. Further, doctoral students examine dynamics of leadership, organizational change and management, the policy formation process, the role of economics and finance in urban development, and so on. Students learn a variety of research methods focused on their applicability to the practical challenges that they face in their practice. Further, doctoral study centers on the development of key analytical and methodological tools that effectively serve to enhance the capacities of scholar-practitioners to improve the lives and life chances of those impacted by their work.

Admission Requirements:

Admissions

Prospective students seeking admission to the Leadership, Equity, & Inquiry EdD program must submit an application, participate in an interview as well as a group discussion of a scholarly text, and submit a critical reflection on this text. Each of these criteria are discussed below.

Application

Education and professional standing

Applicants must possess a master's degree from an accredited college or university with a GPA of 3.0 or higher. Additionally, they must have a minimum of three years of professional experience in the education sector (teaching, leadership, supervision, evaluation, curriculum design, policy advocacy, community organizing, and so on).

Statement of Goals and Objectives

Prospective students must submit a two-page statement addressing their goals and objectives specific to the EdD program. Specifically, one should address one's personal, academic, and professional experiences and how these relate to one's interest in the LEI program. Additionally, applicants should discuss their core professional concerns and the potential role that doctoral study can play in preparing them to addressing these more effectively.

Letters of Recommendation

Three recommendations must be obtained from professors and supervisors who can attest to your academic preparation and/or professional qualifications. One letter should be from a former professor if one has been in school in the last five years.

Interviews

Select applicants who meet the necessary criteria will be invited for individual and group interviews. The interview process will consist of three components: an individual interview, a group discussion, and a reflective essay on a scholarly text.

Individual interviews will entail an exploration of student's background, interests, goals, and professional concerns.

Group discussions will center on a collective dialogue concerning a scholarly text. Students will be expected to contribute meaningfully to the discussion, and express a notable degree of critical reflection on the topic(s) concerned.

Reflective essays will enable interviewees to engage in a critical exploration of both the scholarly text featured in the group discussion, critical ideas and questions raised in the dialogue, in addition to their own insights. Applicants are encouraged to situate their analysis in relation to their core professional and scholarly concerns.

The faculty admissions committee will meet to evaluate applicants' overall suitability for the program and to make a final determination regarding admission. Decisions to accept or reject applicants will be based on a holistic consideration of all components of the application process.

Requirements for graduation

Requirements for graduation from the Leadership, Equity, & Inquiry doctoral program consist of the successful completion of three key benchmarks:

1. Doctoral coursework
2. Portfolio Assessment
3. Dissertation-in-practice

Doctoral coursework

Required courses for the LEI program are listed below.

Seminar

LEI 601 Doctoral Seminar 1 1 CH

LEI 602 Doctoral Seminar 2 1 CH

LEI 603 Doctoral Seminar 3 1 CH

Total credit hours for doctoral seminar courses 3 CH

Core

LEI 611 Globalization and Education 3 CH

LEI 612 Issues in Urban Education 3 CH

LEI 620 Social-Historical Perspectives on Urban Education 3 CH

LEI 625 Literacies for the 21st Century 3 CH

LEI 631 Economics and Finance in Urban Institutions 3 CH

LEI 632 Policy Analysis, Formation, and Advocacy 3 CH

LEI 640 Urban Ecology and Human Systems 3 CH

LEI 651 Urban Leadership Seminar 3 CH

LEI 652 Organizational Change, Organization Improvement and Change Management 3 CH

Total credit hours for core courses 27 CH

Research methods

LEI 671 Educational Research Design 3 CH

LEI 672 Action Research Methods 3 CH

LEI 673 Evaluation Research Methods 3 CH

Total credit hours for research methods courses 9 CH

Dissertation

LEI 690 Dissertation Proposal Seminar 3 CH

LEI 699 Dissertation 9 CH

Total credit hours for dissertation 12 CH

Electives

Three courses from GCOE or other NEIU graduate programs 9 CH

Program total credit hours 60 CH

Grading policy

Program courses must be completed with a grade of B or better. No more than two grades of C can count towards the degree. Also, grades of D or F cannot apply towards the doctoral degree.

Continuous enrollment

Doctoral students must be continuously enrolled while in the program. This requirement can be temporarily waived for students who are requesting a leave of absence. Such a waiver is granted at the discretion of the program director. Students requesting a leave of absence must contact both their academic and faculty advisors.

Time limits

A doctoral student has eight years to complete their program. Students must petition to use courses that are more than eight years old toward the fulfillment of the requirements of the program.

A note regarding elective courses

Elective courses can be drawn from graduate courses offered throughout NEIU, however, students should take care to select courses that align with their goals and concerns as scholar-practitioners. Additionally, transfer of credit is allowed for up to 9 CH and can be counted as elective courses. Transferred courses must be graduate courses and thematically aligned with the overall curriculum of the Leadership, Equity & Inquiry EdD program. Prospective courses are subject to evaluation by the program director.

Portfolio Assessment

The portfolio assessment is a key benchmark used to evaluate alignment between LEI program learning outcomes and students' professional and academic growth. Students should begin working on this project in their first year of study, with an understanding that it should reflect their learning holistically, and that it must be completed prior to graduation.

Conceptual framework of the portfolio assessment

The LEI program eschews the use of a traditional qualifying exam in favor of an assessment that is anchored to students' identities as scholar-practitioners. The portfolio assessment serves as an evaluation of students' growth that utilizes artifacts taken from both their doctoral journey, as well as their work as educational professionals. As such, it seeks to capture a holistic portrait of students' development. Further, it provides a means of gauging the ways in which their doctoral study has been facilitative of these changes across a myriad of prospective measures.

Portfolio assessment requirements

Students, in consultation with their faculty advisory, will review the five program learning outcomes of the LEI program, and explore the ways in which these can be evidenced in their productivity and growth as scholars and practitioners. Students will select a total of ten artifacts that demonstrate their fulfillment of these outcomes. Artifacts can and should be variable, reflecting the breadth of students' scholar-practitioner engagement.

Artifacts must be drawn from students' academic work and their professional practice. These artifacts should be selected at between 50/50 to 70/30 ratios from these two domains.

Having selected ten artifacts, along with any necessary supporting documentation, students will then write a narrative that discusses their overall professional growth, using the LEI program learning outcomes as a framework. This narrative should discuss the relevance of each selected artifact as evidence of how it is demonstrative of their overall growth and development as scholar-practitioners, and how this growth has been facilitated by their doctoral study.

Evaluation

A portfolio assessment rubric will be employed to evaluate students' submissions. Portfolios will be reviewed by three LEI faculty members, including their faculty advisor. Once the evaluation is complete, evaluators will submit their scored rubrics along with any comments to the student's faculty advisor. The faculty advisor will consult with the evaluators to discuss the student's overall performance. This discussion should note any pertinent issues either in the student's artifacts or narratives, problems in doctoral program design or course delivery, and to determine if the student passed, failed, or if revisions will be needed. A minimum score will be needed to pass the portfolio assessment.

Students who score below the minimum threshold for passing will be given an opportunity to revise their portfolio and will work in concert with their faculty advisor to do so. Revised portfolios will be subject to the same evaluation procedure. Any student who fails to pass the portfolio assessment after two opportunities for revision will be dismissed from the program.

Dissertation-in-practice policies and process

The dissertation-in-practice represents the culmination of a doctoral student's journey. For students in the Leadership, Equity, & Inquiry doctoral program, this step centers upon the completion of a dissertation-in-practice. As such, dissertation topics should be informed by students' scholarly interests and professional concerns. Studies will address a practical concern, be it one of program evaluation, improvement of teaching, administration, curriculum design, community engagement, and so on. Students' research problems should be informed by their coursework, particularly the Doctoral Seminars, their research methods courses, and the Dissertation Proposal Seminar.

Committee

The dissertation committee consists of three persons, which includes the student's dissertation chair and two additional faculty members. Two of the members should have served as a reviewer for the student's portfolio assessment. The third member can be a faculty member who is external or internal to the university. All committee members must possess a terminal degree and expertise germane to the inquiry (i.e., the topic under investigation, research design, a particular theory or research paradigm, and so on).

Chair's role

The dissertation committee chair is responsible for determining the readiness of the student for their proposal defense, as well as for their final defense. Having made this determination in the affirmative, the chair will then schedule an oral defense including communicating with other committee members, reserving the room on campus and/or setting up the videoconferencing meeting, and submitting the required forms.

The chair will communicate to the student as to the format of the proposal hearing or final defense regarding their presentation (i.e., scheduling, format, etc.), formatting of text, availability of signature pages, guest attendees, and so on. Additionally, the chair will retain a record of feedback provided by committee members and work with the student on revising their dissertation. The chair will be responsible to ensure that any required changes are made prior to the student progressing on to continue their research after the proposal defense or before depositing their dissertation after the final defense. Chairs will also be responsible for working with doctoral students after their successful proposal defense on their study's review and approval by the Institutional Research Board (IRB).

Lastly, the student's faculty advisor will generally serve as their dissertation chair, however students can request that another faculty member serve in this capacity.

Dissertation process

The first stage of the dissertation is the proposal, the initial draft of which should be developed in LEI 690: Dissertation Proposal Seminar. Students should be in consultation with their chairs while developing this document. The student will work with their chair to ready the final draft of the proposal.

Following the successful completion of LEI 690 and while enrolled in LEI 699, the student, in consultation with their faculty advisor will work to finalize the dissertation committee. Once this committee has been finalized, requisite documentation to this effect must be submitted. Once the chair deems that

the proposal is ready for an oral defense, they will distribute the proposal to the committee and proceed (unless any objections are raised by committee members) to schedule the proposal defense.

At the oral defense students will be provided with twenty minutes to present their research proposal. Afterwards, committee members will pose questions and offer commentary on the proposed study. At the conclusion of this discussion, the committee will confer privately to come to agreement as to the acceptability of the dissertation proposal. Committee members will have several options: 1) to approve the proposal with no revisions, 2) to approve the proposal with revisions, or 3) to not approve the proposal. Students' whose proposals are approved with no revisions move on to complete their dissertation. Students who are given approval with revisions, must work with their chairs to revise their proposals before advancing to complete their dissertation. Students whose proposals are not approved must work with their chairs to re-do their proposals in preparation for a future proposal defense. Committee members will sign the signature page of the dissertation proposal indicating their approval or conditional approval of the proposal.

Doctoral students who successfully defend their dissertation proposals will be subsequently recognized as *doctoral candidates*.

The second stage of the dissertation process entails the development of the dissertation beyond the proposal. Students are encouraged to work with their chairs throughout the dissertation process. It is expected that chairs will provide feedback to students on the dissertation as it develops. Additionally, students must be continually enrolled in LEI 699 during this process, where they will receive on-going support from program faculty and participate within a scholar-practitioner community.

Once the chair has determined the readiness of the dissertation for a final defense, they will distribute the dissertation to the committee and proceed (unless any objections are raised by committee members) to schedule the final defense. At this meeting, students will be provided with thirty minutes to present their research. Afterwards, committee members will pose questions and offer commentary on the study. At the conclusion of this discussion, committee members will confer privately to come to agreement as to the acceptability of the dissertation. Once again, committee members will have several options: 1) to approve the dissertation with no revisions, 2) to approve the dissertation with revisions, or 3) to not approve the dissertation. Students whose dissertations are approved with no revisions can prepare to deposit their dissertations. Students who are given approval with revisions, must work with their chairs to revise their dissertation before depositing. Students whose dissertations are not approved must work with their chairs to re-do their dissertation in preparation for a future defense. Committee members will sign the signature page of the dissertation indicating their approval or conditional approval of the finished study. Students whose dissertations are not approved will be granted one additional opportunity to pass their final defense. Any student who fails to pass the proposal defense after a second opportunity will be dismissed from the program.

The final stage of the dissertation process is the depositing of the dissertation. Prior to depositing the dissertation, students will work with their chairs to ensure that any necessary revisions have been made satisfactorily. Additionally, dissertations will be formatted according to the guidelines of the Leadership, Equity, & Inquiry doctoral program and the Graduate College. Students must also ensure that their dissertations have been carefully proofread and edited to eliminate errors in formatting, spelling, and grammar. Once these items have been satisfied, students will proceed to upload their completed dissertations to Digital Commons, which will serve as a permanent and public repository for their work.

Students who complete each of these three requirements--doctoral coursework with a grade of B or better, the portfolio assessment, and the dissertation-in-practice--will be awarded an Educational Doctorate degree.