Doctoral Program (Ph.D.) in Higher Education

Leadership, Counseling and Research (MC0302)
1750 Kraft Dr., Suite 2000
Virginia Tech
Blacksburg, Virginia 24060
https://www.soe.vt.edu/highered/index.html

The University
Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University (popularly known as Virginia Tech) was established as a land-grant university in 1872, and has since developed into a major research university with an enrollment of approximately 31,000. Virginia Tech's 2,600-acre main campus is located in Blacksburg, Virginia, 40 miles west of Roanoke. There are also campuses of the university located in the Hampton Roads, Piedmont, Central, Roanoke, and Southwest and Tri-Cities regions of Virginia. The graduate program in Higher Education is offered on the Blacksburg campus only.

The University serves the state, nation, and world through its instruction, research, and outreach efforts. As one of the top research institutions in the nation, it is an institution that firmly embraces a history of putting knowledge to work. That tradition is rooted in our motto, *Ut Prosim: "That I May Serve,"* and our land-grant missions of instruction, research, and solving the problems of society through public service and outreach activities.

Program Overview
The Ph.D. in Higher Education is a 96-hour program that prepares graduates for a broad range of administrative and leadership positions in colleges and universities including academic affairs, student affairs, roles in policy, planning, and resource management, assessment, enrollment management, and others. Some graduates work as policy analysts for state and federal agencies, or professional organizations. The program also prepares students for faculty positions in graduate programs in higher education.

Degree
The HED program is one of four programs in Leadership, Counseling and Research. The LCR faculty is part of the School of Education that is housed in the College of Liberal Arts and Human Sciences. Graduates are awarded a Ph.D. in Higher Education.

Program Philosophy
Graduate professional education is concerned with enhancing a broad spectrum of talents in students. Some of these talents are addressed by structured, in-class activities determined primarily by faculty, while others are addressed by out-of-class activities that often are student-directed. Both types of learning opportunities are incorporated into each student's Plan of Study (described in the following pages).

The program assumes colleagueship between faculty and students throughout the period of graduate study. Each student and faculty member is expected to act professionally and to share responsibilities and duties of professional life. Developing active partnerships is encouraged, though each student ultimately is responsible for learning. Faculty serve as teachers, advisors, colleagues, and mentors to students.

Accreditation
The University is accredited by the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools (SACS). The School of Education is accredited by the Council for the Accreditation of Educator Preparation (CAEP).

Admission
Admission to the doctoral program in Higher Education is determined by an admission committee composed of program faculty. Admission criteria include: an earned GPA of 3.3 (on a 4.0 scale) on previous graduate work; a master's degree in counseling, student affairs, or a closely related field; and three years or more years of successful professional experience in student affairs or higher education administration. The student’s career goals should be consistent with professional status as an educational leader.

The School of Education requires all Ph.D. applicants to submit Graduate Record Examination (GRE) scores as part of the application packet, however there is no minimum cutoff score for admission. TOEFL scores are required of all international students whose first language is not English, except those applicants who have graduated from an accredited university where English is the language of instruction. TOEFL scores are not required of US permanent residents and US naturalized citizens. IELTS (International English Language Testing System) is also accepted; a 6.5 minimum score is required. International applicants should consult the [Graduate School web page](https://www.soe.vt.edu/highered/index.html) for more information about the TOEFL and other application requirements. Additional admission procedures are determined by the HED Admission Committee.

The initial application includes the following elements:

1. The [Graduate School](https://www.soe.vt.edu/highered/index.html) on-line application, including the supplemental material
2. Remission of the application fee to the Graduate School
3. An unofficial transcript(s) of all previous academic work
4. Three letters of recommendation, at least one from a college professor who knows the quality of your previous academic work, and at least one from a professional reference, such as a current or former employer
5. A current resume
6. A brief (2-3 page) personal statement focused on academic and professional goals.
7. GRE Scores

For full consideration, all application materials must be received by January 15. Meeting this deadline is important so that you may participate in subsequent deadlines leading up to Interview Weekend, including submitting a writing sample and applying for GA positions.

Upon receipt of your application, program faculty will review your file and determine whether further consideration is warranted. Qualified applicants are then invited to an Interview Weekend scheduled at the end of February each year. Invited applicants will be asked to complete a writing assignment used to assess writing skills. Once completed, this exercise becomes part of the application file. (See the FAQs on the HED website for more detail)

During the Interview Weekend, candidates interview for admission as well as for graduate assistant (GA) positions. Subsequent to Interview Weekend, faculty members consult with GA supervisors to make a final decision about the candidate’s admission and GA status. The program faculty contacts the candidate indicating whether admission has been recommended. The candidate’s official notification of admission status is sent from the Graduate School. Applicants who are invited but are unable to attend the Interview Weekend may still be interviewed for admission and GA positions. Applicants are strongly encouraged to visit the campus for these interviews. Phone interviews and/or interviews at national conferences can be arranged for applicants who cannot travel to Blacksburg, however.

Generally slots in the cohort are filled by candidates whose applications are submitted by the January 15 deadline and who attend the Interview Weekend. Late applications may be considered if space is available.

**Plan of Study**

After completing 12 hours of academic credit, all HED students are required to complete a Plan of Study form listing all the courses the student intends to complete for the degree. The Plan is completed in consultation with the faculty advisor (see section on Qualifying Exam below). Once signed by the advisor and two other faculty members, it is approved by the School of Education and the Graduate School. Once approved, the Plan serves as the student’s academic contract with the university. Successful completion of all courses and other requirements listed on the Plan of Study ensures that the degree will be conferred. Changes to approved Plans of Study can be made by submitting additional paperwork.

**Curriculum**

The curriculum consists of studies in five areas: (1) Research/Measurement/Statistics, (2) Dissertation, (3) Foundations, (4) Concentration/Applied Studies, and (5) Cognate. A minimum total of 96 semester hours of graduate study, which includes the dissertation, is required for the doctoral degree. Since doctoral students matriculate with varying degrees of professional experience and master’s degrees from different institutions, each student’s program of doctoral study is individually designed and may include courses that are transferred in from the student’s master’s degree program. The faculty advisor and student examine the student’s preparation and design a program of study that complements and enhances the student’s educational and professional experience and interests.

A brief description of each of the five areas of study in a doctoral plan is provided below. Following each description, a partial list of courses offered to meet the requirement is presented. Other courses, or their equivalent, are expected to appear on all students’ plans of study in all but the Dissertation area. Other courses offered in the School, the College, other colleges on campus, and other institutions may be used to meet requirements. An asterisk (*) next to a course indicates that the course is required.

1. **Research, Measurement, and Statistics**

   All doctoral students must complete four core courses designed to provide preparation in basic quantitative and qualitative methods of research:

   - EDRE 6605 Quantitative Research Methods in Education I*
   - EDRE 6606 Quantitative Research Methods in Education II*
   - EDRE 6504 Qualitative Methods in Educational Research I*
   - EDRE 6524 Qualitative Methods in Educational Research II*

   Beyond the core research courses, each student’s program includes at least two advanced courses. These courses...
normally are selected to strengthen the student’s overall competence in research and evaluation theory and methods, or to develop a specific skill required for dissertation research.

The following is a list of some of the advanced courses that may be taken:

EDCI 6534 Ethnographic Methods of Research in Education
EDRE 6624 Measurement Theory in Education
EDRE 6634 Advanced Statistics (Regression)
EDRE 6654 Multivariate Statistics for Education Applications
EDRE 6664 Applications of Structural Equations in Education
EDRE 6794 Advanced Topics Research (Survey Design)
EDRE 6644 Advanced Research Design and Methodology
EDRE 6684 Instrument Development in Higher Education
EDRE 6694 Hierarchical Linear Modeling
EDRE 6704 Evaluation Methods in Education
EDRE 6744 Mixed Method Research Design

2. Dissertation
Research and Dissertation units (EDHE 7994) are academic credits for which students enroll when they are working on their dissertation research. A minimum of 30 semester hours must be taken. Enrolling for these units entitles students to time with the faculty with whom they are working on their research.

3. Foundations
Foundation courses pertain to core or disciplinary studies that undergird the field of higher education. The following are core courses that are required for all students:

EDHE 6044 Governance and Policy in Education*
EDHE 6064 Higher Education in the U.S.*
EDHE 6274 Higher Education Law*
EDHE 6084 Financial Administration in Higher Education*
EDHE 6094 University Leadership*
EDHE 6304 Theories of Educational Organizations*
EDHE 6914 Theoretical Foundations of Higher Education*
EDHE 6404 Designing Research Proposals in Education*

4. Concentration/Applied Studies
Concentration/Applied Studies refers to preparation for professional practice and includes courses, seminars, internships, and independent studies. The following may be taken although courses in other disciplines may also be appropriate and acceptable:

EDHE 5304 Intro to Student Affairs Profession
EDHE 5314 Theories of College Student Development
EDHE 5974 Independent Study
EDHE 6054 College and University Administration
EDHE 5404 Staffing Practices in Education
EDHE 5604 Seminar: Inclusive Practices in Education
EDHE 7714 Internship
EDCI 6024 The Analysis of Educational Concepts
EDCI 6644 College Teaching

Note: Students consult with a faculty member to arrange Internships and Independent Studies.

5. Cognate
The cognate requirement calls for a minimum of 9 hours of graduate-level study normally in a single discipline (such as sociology, psychology, management, political science, etc.). The cognate should be outside of one’s primary area of study, but might include concentrated studies in educational technologies, for example, or thematically linked studies across two disciplines (such as planning courses in the department of Public Administration and the department of Management Science). The cognate should complement the student’s professional interests and, therefore, is individually designed.

Phases of Doctoral Study
Doctoral study consists of six phases that all students must complete. Each phase is marked by an administrative procedure. In general, students will complete these phases in the following order:

Phase 1: General admission. Students apply for and are offered initial admission to the program. Students complete 12 hours of coursework.

Phase 2: The Qualifying Exam. Upon completion of 12 hours, students must file a plan of study by completing the Qualifying Exam. The Qualifying Exam serves two purposes. First, it serves as the final stage of admission to the program. Second, it is diagnostic, and allows the faculty to examine the student’s proposed plan of study and suggest areas in which the student needs additional coursework. To complete the Qualifying Exam, doctoral students take these steps:

- In conjunction with the faculty advisor, students prepare a Plan of Study form that details the courses the student plans to complete, and a timeline for completing those courses.
- The Plan of Study is provided to the Qualifying Exam committee. The committee is made up of three faculty members. Students should consult with their advisor about the composition of this committee.
- Other forms may be required if students are transferring in courses. Students should consult with their advisor about these forms.
- Note that students usually transfer no more than 12-15 hours of coursework into their Plans of Study.

The student schedules the Exam with the committee to review this Plan. During the Exam students discuss their professional goals with the committee. The student and committee discuss whether the proposed Plan of Study will assist the student in achieving these goals. Changes in the proposed Plan may be made during the Exam.
Revalidation of Course Work: In accordance with Graduate School Policy, all course work that is more than five years old must be revalidated. This typically involves units being transferred in from a master’s program. Students having such course work on their proposed plan of study will be examined on the content of these courses during the Qualifying Exam. Students may be asked to undertake additional efforts to revalidate courses after the Qualifying Exam if faculty members believe such efforts are warranted. Students who must revalidate course work should obtain more information about this process from their advisor. Once committee signatures have been affixed to the Plan it must be approved by staff in the School of Education and the Graduate School. Once approved, the Plan becomes the student’s contract with the University. Assuming the student completes all the assigned courses and other requirements in the time frame indicated, the doctoral degree will be conferred. Subsequent changes to the Plan may be made if approved by the student’s committee by filing appropriate forms. As noted above, the Qualifying Exam is the faculty’s final opportunity to approve admission to the program. Failure to pass the Qualifying Exam could result in the student’s dismissal from the program.

Phase 3: Residency. All students must complete a period of residency. Students may meet this requirement by enrolling for at least 9 semester hours in each of two consecutive semesters. For purposes of residency, consecutive semesters include fall/spring, spring/summer, and summer/fall. Students may also propose an individualized, alternative residency plan that is endorsed by the HED faculty and approved by the Graduate School. Details about individualized alternative residency proposals can be found in the Graduate Catalog.

Phase 4: Written and Oral Preliminary Exam. Once students have completed (or nearly completed) all coursework they take the preliminary exam. The HED preliminary exam is offered each fall and spring semester and consists of a written and an oral component. Students consult with their advisor to determine their readiness for this exam. HED and EDRE faculty write questions for the exam. A four-person preliminary exam committee must be identified. The Committee consists of the student’s advisor, 1 EDRE faculty member, and 2 other HED faculty members (full-time or affiliated). Three of the 4 committee members must be tenured or tenure track faculty. All must hold terminal degrees. Students should seek the advice of their advisor before inviting another faculty member to serve on this committee. In some instances, it may be appropriate to invite faculty members from other institutions to serve on this committee. Students should remember that these individuals must be approved by the Graduate School and that 2/3 of the committee must be Virginia Tech faculty.

This exam must be scheduled through a form approved by the committee, School of Education, and the Graduate School. The results of the exam must be communicated to the Graduate School immediately upon its completion. Additional details about the Preliminary Exam can be found at:

http://www.soe.vt.edu/highered/Students/CurrentStudents/preliminary_exam_guideline/preliminary_exam.html#id294295-1

Phase 5: Dissertation Prospectus Exam. Once students have successfully passed the preliminary exam they typically start their dissertation. They select a full-time faculty member to serve as their dissertation advisor and work with that advisor to develop the idea for their dissertation research. In consultation with the advisor, students ask other faculty members to serve on their dissertation committee. Students prepare a dissertation proposal, normally the first three chapters of the study, and schedule the Dissertation Prospectus exam to review this proposal with their committee. The examining committee consists of four faculty members. The student’s advisor serves as the chair of the committee. One faculty member should be chosen from LCR’s research methods faculty. The remaining two slots may be filled by other Virginia Tech faculty or HED affiliated faculty members. Three of the four must be tenured or tenure faculty. All must hold terminal degrees. Students should seek the advice of their dissertation advisor before inviting other faculty members to serve on this committee. In some instances, it may be appropriate to invite faculty members from other institutions to serve on this committee. Students should remember that these individuals must be approved by the Graduate School and that 2/3 of the committee must be Virginia Tech faculty. In rare instances, a student may wish to have a faculty member outside Leadership, Counseling, and Research serve as the chair of the committee. In these cases, a member of the HED faculty must serve as co-chair.

This exam must be scheduled with the School of Education and approved by the advisor. Three of four committee members must grade the exam as satisfactory for the student to pass. Once faculty signatures are affixed on the appropriate form, students conduct the research.

Phase 6: Dissertation Final Defense. Upon completing the research and writing the results of the study, the student reconvenes the faculty committee and presents a final, oral defense of the research project. Students should work closely with their advisor to determine when to schedule the exam. The examining committee consists of those faculty members who participated in the student’s Prospectus Exam. Substitutions can be made only in the most extraordinary circumstances. The committee questions the student about the work and then votes to determine if the research meets the minimal dissertation
requirements. If the faculty votes to accept the research, and signs the appropriate online forms, the student’s degree requirements are nearly completed. The student must submit the dissertation to the Electronic Thesis and Dissertation database and comply with other Graduate School requirements to complete the degree.

Faculty

The HED faculty includes full-time and affiliated faculty members. Affiliated faculty members are full-time administrators at Virginia Tech who teach, supervise assistantships or internships, and serve as administrative mentors and committee members for the HED program.

Full-Time Faculty

Joan B. Hirt, Professor and Program Leader, Higher Education, College of Liberal Arts & Human Sciences

Steven M. Janosik, Associate Professor, Higher Education, Faculty Chair of Leadership, Counseling and Research, College of Liberal Arts & Human Sciences

Claire K. Robbins, Assistant Professor, Higher Education, College of Liberal Arts & Human Sciences

Gabriel R. Serna, Assistant Professor, Higher Education, College of Liberal Arts & Human Sciences

Affiliated Faculty:

Sharrika Adams, Affiliated Assistant Professor; Associate Dean of Students & Director of Student Advocacy

Catherine Amelink, Affiliated Assistant Professor; Director of Graduate Programs and Assessment, College of Engineering

Cynthia Bonner, Affiliated Faculty; Assistant Vice President for Student Affairs

Donna Cassell-Ratliffe, Affiliated Faculty; Director of Career Services

John Dooley, Affiliated Assistant Professor; Chief Executive Officer, Virginia Tech Foundation, Inc.

Martha Glass, Affiliated Assistant Professor; Director for Assessment and Professional Practice, Division of Student Affairs

Rodd Hall, Affiliated Assistant Professor; Senior Associate Director for Administration, Virginia Tech Transportation Institute

Michael Herndon, Affiliated Faculty; Director of University Summer and Winter Sessions

Patricia Hyer, Affiliated Faculty; Associate Provost Emerita, University Provost’s Office

David Knight, Affiliated Assistant Professor; Assistant Professor Engineering Education

David Kniola, Affiliated Assistant Professor; Visiting Assistant Professor, Educational Research and Evaluation

James Orr, Affiliated Assistant Professor; Director, Undergraduate Honor System

Patty Perillo, Affiliated Assistant Professor; Vice President for Student Affairs

Ellen Plummer, Affiliated Assistant Professor; Associate Vice Provost for Undergraduate Academic Affairs

Karen Eley Sanders, Affiliated Assistant Professor; Associate Vice Provost for Undergraduate Academic Affairs

Frank Shushok, Affiliated Associate Professor; Associate Vice President for Student Affairs

Ken Smith, Affiliated Faculty, Vice Provost for Resource Management and Institutional Effectiveness

Kimberly Smith, Affiliated Assistant Professor; Director, University Academic Advising Center/University Studies

Edward Spencer, Affiliated Associate Professor; Vice President Emeritus for Student Affairs

Sherwood Wilson, Affiliated Assistant Professor; Vice President for Administration

Other faculty in the College of Liberal Arts and Human Sciences and in colleges from which students complete cognate course requirements will teach classes taken by HED students and often serve as GA or internship supervisors or on student committees for examinations. A complete list of faculty is provided in the Graduate Catalog.

Advising

All HED students are assigned an academic advisor who is a full-time faculty member in the program. The academic advisor assists students with course selection, plans of study, and other curricular issues. Additionally, all HED students have the option of working with a professional advisor who is an administrative faculty member. The professional advisor serves as a professional mentor for the student, assisting with career guidance, job search skills, and assimilation into the profession. Students who are interested in working with a professional advisor should consult with their academic advisor.
The advisor-student relationship is a vital ingredient to success in the program. Advisors are expected to be knowledgeable about university procedures, program requirements, and professional issues and to share these insights with students regularly. Students are expected to seek consultation frequently with advisors about program plans, personal or developmental issues, and professional concerns. The goal of the relationship is to teach, to learn, and to develop colleagueship.

Advising is teaching in out-of-class settings. Faculty commitment to the process is unequivocal and all matters pertinent to teaching and learning are subjects for advising action. Attention is given to both challenge and support of students. Monitoring of student progress is a regular part of advising.

Additional Program Requirements
In addition to the academic requirements of the program, all doctoral students are required to engage in related professional activities. These include:

1. Membership in at least one national professional association, such as ACPA – College Student Educators International; NASPA – Student Affairs Professionals in Higher Education; or the Association for the Study of Higher Education (ASHE).
2. Participation in related campus professional activities, including the Virginia Tech Higher Education Association (see details below).

Virginia Tech Higher Education Association (VTHEA)
The Virginia Tech Higher Education Association is a local professional association devoted to graduate student opportunities for professional development and education. Its members include graduate students, faculty, and professional practitioners from Virginia Tech and nearby colleges and universities. Its purposes parallel the intentions of any professional association but VTHEA concentrates its programming on graduate student interests and needs. Its officers are elected graduate students. No other category of membership may serve as officers of the Association.

All doctoral students in the higher education program are required to hold membership in VTHEA and to assist the organization in achieving its goals.

Financial Support
There are two forms of financial assistance for students in the HED program: Graduate Assistantships (GAs) and wage positions.

GA positions require that students work (normally 20 hours per week) on campus in some pre-professional capacity. In exchange, the hiring department pays the student’s in-state tuition and a stipend during the 9-month academic year (a few are 12-month positions). All GAs are considered in-state students for purposes of tuition. There are a number of GA positions funded by departments in the Division of Student Affairs on campus. HED students receive priority consideration when these positions are awarded. HED students frequently compete successfully for GA positions funded by other departments on campus, such as the Provost’s Office and the Student Success Center. Varying GA positions are open to students each year and hiring is competitive.

Students on wage positions work for an hourly rate in an office on campus. No tuition is provided to wage employees, but the wages provide support for living expenses. Students in GA positions may work up to 10 hours per week in a wage position with permission from their advisor and the Graduate School.

The overall goal is to provide all HED students with both tuition and a source of income through a GA position. In recent years, the HED program has been able to accomplish this goal, although there is no guarantee of support to any student. Finally, students should be advised that GA positions do not cover student fees, so students should calculate this expense into their budget, along with expenses for books, living costs, etc.

Student Progress
Students must maintain a 3.0 GPA to remain in good standing in the program. In accordance with procedures of the Graduate School, students will be placed on academic probation when they fail to maintain this average and will be allowed only one term to remedy the performance deficiency. Additionally, all students are required to complete a Progress Toward Degree form each spring semester, reporting what actions they have undertaken to complete degree requirements.

Faculty of the program regularly review student progress and recommend that students be placed on or removed from academic probation. They also recommend continuation or discontinuation of enrollment in the program. Notification of any action related to academic standing will be made in writing (electronic or hard copy) to the student.

From time to time, students may find it necessary to interrupt their study in the doctoral program. For example, students may find it necessary to take an official Leave of Absence for family or health issues. Such requests must be submitted two weeks before the beginning of the semester for which the leave is to take place. The leave of absence must be approved by the student’s advisor and the Faculty Chair or Graduate Program Director for the unit before submission to the Graduate School. Students taking a leave of absence for less than one academic year
must notify their academic unit and the Graduate School upon their return from the leave of absence for the student’s graduate status to be reactivated. Students taking a leave of absence for more than one academic year must submit a Readmission Application for admission consideration before the planned semester of re-enrollment. Readmission is not guaranteed.

Students may be offered employment before all program requirements are completed. While HED faculty members are prepared to work with students to achieve their degrees, students are expected to complete all degree requirements within five years of their matriculation or three years beyond completion of their course work. Students who do not complete their degrees within these time limits may be dis-enrolled from the program.

Other unforeseen circumstances may cause a student to be unable to complete the requirements of a specific course or courses. An Incomplete (I) grade, which is not calculated in the GPA, may be given when the requirements of a course have not been completed because of illness or extenuating circumstances. It is at the discretion of the instructor whether the circumstances warrant the assignment of an Incomplete. Unless otherwise agreed to, Incompletes should be removed, by completing the course requirements within the next two academic semesters.

Records of previous student persistence, graduation, and employment files are maintained in the Program Office. The program leader is available for consultation with any prospective or current student relative to these matters.

Ethics, Professional Behavior, and Principles of Community

Ethical conduct is expected of all faculty and students. The preparation program adheres to the principles and standards of ethical conduct of the ACPA – College Student Educators International and NASPA – Student Affairs Administrators in Higher Education. Copies of these ethical statements are available from the Associations’ web sites.

No form of academic, intellectual, professional, or personal dishonesty will be tolerated. Plagiarism by students, for example, is an offense likely to result in dismissal from the program. Students and faculty are expected to be fully aware of ethical principles and standards of the profession and will be held personally accountable for violations of these standards.

To help create a common understanding about these issues, the Graduate School requires all students to participate in a program on scholarly ethics and integrity. Participation in this program is mandatory. Student attendance and satisfactory completion will be verified on the student’s Plan of Study.

In addition, the HESA faculty strongly encourages students to review, adopt, and practice the Virginia Tech Principles of Community. These Principles are vital to the University’s ongoing efforts to improve access, equity, diversity, and inclusion in the Virginia Tech community.

Program Evaluation

The HED program is periodically reviewed and evaluated by the faculty to ensure that the curricular and administrative requirements reflect current issues in the field and are consistent with the missions of the School, College, and University. Student comments about the program are sought during this process and incorporated into the evaluation.

Computers

All graduate students in the School of Education are required to own a laptop computer. Details about this policy can be obtained from the School of Education office, 220 War Memorial Hall.

Checklists and Forms

Virtually all transactions between students and the University require the completion of an appropriate form. It is the student’s responsibility to execute these forms accurately and on time. Students should consult with their advisors when questions arise about the need for and the use of these forms. Most forms can be obtained from the Program Office, the School of Education website, or the Graduate School website. When completing forms, students should use only the last four digits of their student ID number to protect the security of that ID number.