

Educational Leadership & Policy Studies
Doctoral Cohort Evaluation 2002
Summary Report

Summary

The following preliminary findings come from two focus groups and four follow-up interviews conducted by staff at the Research Institute for Studies in Education (RISE). RISE staff conducted focus groups with 10 students from Cohort Three and 7 students from Cohort Two. Interviews were conducted with four students from Cohort One. A total of 21 current and former ELPS students were involved in the data collection.

The overall tone of all data collection was positive. Students and alumni are pleased with the doctoral program, although they offered several constructive criticisms and suggestions. Since this is a preliminary working report, this document focuses on areas of potential change and improvement.

The major themes that emerged from the data collection included the cohort/seminar structure; the learning environment and faculty; and communication with/from the department.

The Cohort/Seminar Structure

Students need a more clearly articulated and communicated definition of the “cohort” structure. Students enter the doctoral programs with preconceived ideas of “cohort,” based on previous experiences with cohort experiences (Pre-LEAD, TL2C2, K-12 programs). These preconceived notions, without the intervention of a clearly articulated definition from ELPS, color how students experience their program.

Students perceive large discrepancies in expectations for the program. This includes individual faculty/course expectations, as well as great discrepancies in expectations regarding the capstone experience and cohort seminars.

Depending upon each student’s wants or needs, his or her feelings differ about the need for informal, “get-to-know-you” time in the cohort. Expectations about the need for informal gathering differ as well. Again, clearly articulating the goals of the doctoral program could alleviate this discrepancy.

Students often confuse the cohort group with the seminar experience. Often, “cohort” is used to mean the seminar experiences.

The cohort/seminar experience is motivational and encourages students to “think outside the box.”

Students recognize the seminars as topically important; but they do not see the importance of their order and the rigidity of enrollment requirements.

Other Observations:

- When taught by one faculty member, the seminars may lose their “integrated” nature. Several times students in the focus groups referred to seminars as “the Educational Administration-related Seminar” or the “Higher Education-related Seminar” depending upon who taught the seminar.
- The content of the seminars related to “Governance & Administration” and “Law/Ethics” seem to overlap.

Learning Environments and Faculty

Students believe learning occurs best in those classes that have small enrollments, active “seminar” formats, and high expectations for the quality of student work. Many, but not all, ELPS faculty and courses provide this environment. Some students seem to prefer courses that are limited to doctoral level students only.

The students want constructive, thorough feedback on their written work.

Other Observations:

- Scheduling of Committee meetings remains a concern of doctoral students. Several view the difficulty to schedule faculty meetings as a symptom of a lack of faculty availability.
- Student with stronger personal/professional relationships with individual faculty members (or who spent more time on 2nd floor Lagomarcino) had a greater understanding, and were more positive, of the program and faculty.
- The strength of the faculty is viewed, by many, as the strength of the department.

Communication from/with the Department

Some students lack basic communication with the department, which often leads to a feeling of disconnectedness. Emails and other outreach efforts are seen as very positive. Students would like this continued and refined.

Students continue to want more written guidance regarding capstones and portfolios. Further, rubrics should be more widely disseminated.

Students sometimes perceive mixed messages from ISU, ELPS, and the faculty. This seemed to relate to the expectations around the cohort seminars, as well as the department’s acceptance of distance-learners and part-time students. This results in ill feelings toward the program and a sense of being marginalized as a student.