From the first day of the program, students spend significant time planning for their dissertations in structured and supervised settings, particularly within the evidenced-based leadership modules and the applied research sequence that spans the program. Our systematic approach to the dissertation will allow students to defend in their last semester of the program.

Since students develop their dissertation questions early in the program, they ground the preparation of their dissertations in their classroom work and at their places of employment. Working closely with program faculty, students develop a dissertation research project designed to identify, analyze, report and make recommendations about an actual problem of leadership practice -- often their own practice and situated within their own educational organization.

Dissertations may include analyzing the effectiveness of a school district’s literacy program; developing a standards-aligned community outreach program for an independent school, or designing a district’s teacher professional development system and providing recommendations in preparation for upcoming contract negotiations. Early in the program, students refine their dissertation topics and the questions they seek to answer, starting in year one. Some may change topics completely as they assess the feasibility of their initial ideas. By the beginning of their second year in the program, students’ dissertation projects are defined broadly, refined with intensive faculty support into their proposal. Once approved, usually during the final term of their second year, students carry out the research, completing the study by the end of their third year. In addition to the final defense, students are supported, via writing and innovation coaches, to disseminate their work to the field.
RESEARCH SEQUENCE AND DISSERTATION SCHEDULE

First Summer, Fall: Begin to consider dissertation topics

Fall Yr. 1: Discuss possible topics with research director, faculty, mentor, etc.

Spring Yr. 1: Submit preliminary topic idea. You will be matched to a chair. Initiate meetings with chair.

Spring Yr. 2: Complete proposal; have proposal hearing; get IRB and other approvals. Collect data.

Fall Yr. 2: Monthly module sessions toward proposal development; consult with coaches, mentor; monthly chair meetings (min), assignments shared

Second Summer: Proseminar I - develop research question and begin literature review for proposal

Third Summer: Proseminar II - do most or all data analysis; start Inquiry Community; continued coach, mentor support.

Fall Yr. 3: Complete data analysis. Begin writing dissertation.

Spring Yr. 3: Finish writing dissertation, final defense, final revisions, "walk" or graduate in May.