School of Education
Ed.D. Program in Educational Leadership

Dissertation Design Options:

The purpose of a dissertation in a Doctor of Education program is to provide the student with an opportunity to demonstrate the ability to use theory to investigate a problem or challenge of education leadership practice.

This requirement may be met through any of the following design options:

• An empirical inquiry that **advances knowledge** consisting of any of the following:
  ✓ Experimental methods
  ✓ Quasi-experimental methods
  ✓ Causal-comparative methods
  ✓ Qualitative methods
  ✓ Quantitative methods
  ✓ Mixed Methods
  ✓ Legal study methods
  ✓ Historical study methods
  ✓ Policy analysis methods
  ✓ Program evaluation methods
• An Analysis of Practice involving methods that **improves practice and/or enhances performance**.

The Analysis of Practice Dissertation

The Analysis of Practice dissertation design option places the student in the simulated role of “expert consultant” to a “client organization.” The student’s goal is to complete an analysis of an organization’s implementation of an educational practice or program, issue a written report to the client and present the findings and recommendations in a meeting. The practice may be identified by either the student or the organization and involves the development of researchable questions (developed by the client and/or the student) focused on educational practices **within a specific setting or context** as established by the client.
Analysis of Practice Dissertation Chapters

This dissertation design involves the development of eight (8) chapters rather than the traditional five-chapter format. These 8 chapters are organized as follows:

1. **Introduction.** This chapter has the same purpose of chapter 1 in the traditional dissertation. It provides the reader with an overview of the completed dissertation.

2. **The Context.** Here the reader learns about the client organization, describes the challenge or problem presented by the practice or program that will be studied.

3. **Review of the Literature.** The review presents the reader with a critique of the professional field’s understanding the practice or program being studied. The review presents the consensus among experts about “best practice” (if it exists) relative to the implementation of the practice. The review also presents questions or gaps in the field’s understanding of the practice. Finally, the reader is presented with an argument for using a theory (or theories) that is best suited to the analysis of this practice given the research questions that have been identified.

4. **Research Methods.** This chapter serves the same purpose as the methods chapter in the traditional five chapter dissertation. Specifically, it describes how the student will conduct the analysis of practice, including data collection methods, data analysis, how threats to validity will be controlled and limitations to the study. The dissertation proposal hearing will be a discussion of chapters 1-4.

5. **Presentation of Findings.** This chapter is organized in the same manner as in the traditional dissertation.

6. **Conclusions and Recommendations.** This chapter is organized in the same manner as in the traditional dissertation.

7. **Personal Reflections.** Herein the student writes about what she (he) has learned about: 1) the client’s implementation of the practice or program that was the focus of the study and how this reflected, or did not reflect, the professional field’s consensus of effective implementation; 2) the process of inquiry used in the analysis including the application of theory to the problem, data collection and data analysis processes; and, 3) lessons learned for yourself and other education leaders.

8. **Report to the Client.** This chapter takes the form of a memorandum to the client that: 1) provides a one page executive summary; 2) summarizes the genesis and rationale for the analysis of practice; 3) summarizes the literature and research about “best practice” implementation; 4) states the research questions and summarizes the data collection procedures; presents the findings, conclusions and recommendations to the client.

Common Questions About the Analysis of Practice Dissertation:

1. *Does this option allow me to do my dissertation in my current organization?*
   This option requires that you obtain the same permission for entry to conduct research but reduces the internal political hazards because it provides the student with an opportunity to
“add value” back into the organization by completing an analysis and issuing a written report that might otherwise cost the organization several thousand dollars.

2. **Must I still apply to the Manhattanville IRB?**
   Yes. And you must inquire into the approval process for conducting research in the client organization.

3. **Does an Analysis of Practice require less work than the traditional 5 chapter empirical dissertation?**
   No, this dissertation format requires about the same amount of time and writing as the traditional five-chapter dissertation.

4. **Are the data analysis requirements the same as in an empirical dissertation?**
   No. The “burden of proof” in data analysis procedures is less rigorous because the purpose of the Analysis of Practice is to improve practice or performance in the client organization. In the traditional empirical dissertation, the purpose is to advance the field of knowledge where the burden of proof will be higher.