LIBERTY
U N I V E R S I T Y

| SCHOOL OF EDUCATION | DOCTORAL PROGRAMS APPLIED RESEARCH HANDBOOK 2021-2022 |

This handbook is a guide to the applied research report for Liberty University School of Education doctoral students. It does not constitute a contract and is subject to change at the discretion of Liberty University School of Education. This version of the applied research handbook supersedes all previous versions.

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1. Introduction

1.1 Introduction to the Doctoral Program and the Applied Research Process

The Doctor of Education (Ed.D.) program in the School of Education (SOE) consists of two primary components: the coursework and the applied research report. The student completes coursework to develop critical thinking skills, writing skills, and knowledge. The purpose of the coursework is to prepare the student to become a doctoral candidate. The doctoral applied research report is the final academic requirement for the Ed.D. program and is designed to evaluate the candidate's capabilities to solve a problem of practice or improve a practice. The applied research report may also be referred to as the capstone project or educational report.

1.2 Purpose of the Handbook

The purpose of this handbook is to provide information about the applied research process and related policies. The handbook is a guide for the applied research report, including the writing, the proposal defense, and the final defense. In general terms, the roles and responsibilities of the candidate and the faculty mentor are outlined. The Doctoral Support Team is available to assist you with any questions or concerns during the applied research process, and candidates should contact SOEDocPrograms@liberty.edu immediately if they encounter any issues.

2. Academic Policies and Specialized Coursework

There are several academic policies that pertain specifically to the doctoral programs in the SOE. Some of the policies are dependent on the specific degree completion plan (DCP) the student is working under. More information about these policies is detailed below.

2.1 Degree Completion Time Limit

The maximum time limit for completion of the doctoral program is seven years. Any student who does not complete coursework within the permissible time limit for any reason, including discontinued enrollment, must reapply for admission. If the student wishes to continue in the program at a later date, he or she will need to reapply and, if accepted, will be subject to all requirements for the DCP for the current academic year. A student may reapply to the program only once, and the Administrative Chair of Doctoral Programs and Research will determine how many additional semesters will be granted. Students who wish to appeal for extra time in the program should submit a formal appeal via the [SOE Policy Appeals Form](#).

2.2 Number of NP Grades

Students are only allowed one No Pass (NP) grade as part of the doctoral program. Two NPs in any one course will result in removal from the program. This policy applies specifically to EDUC 880, 887, 888, 889, and 890. Candidates must earn at least 840 points in these courses for a passing grade.

2.3 Course Registration Limits for EDUC 887, EDUC 888, and EDUC 889

Candidates will register for EDUC 887 one time, EDUC 888 one time, and EDUC 889 up to two times before successfully completing the final manuscript of the applied research report. Exceeding the registration limit will result in removal from the program. If the registration limit is exceeded, students who wish to continue in the program must submit a formal appeal via the [SOE Policy Appeals Form](#) in order to request an extension. Each student must include a full justification of the request and, if applicable, documentation evidencing his or her faculty mentor's support of the extension. If the appeal for an extension is approved, the Administrative

Chair of Doctoral Programs and Research, in consultation with the Director of Applied Doctoral Research, will determine the new deadline for program completion. Any student who does not complete coursework within the permissible time limit for any reason, including discontinued enrollment, must reapply for admission. If students wish to continue in the program at a later date, they need to reapply and, if accepted, will be subject to all requirements for the DCP for the current academic year.

2.4 Continuous Enrollment Requirement

After completion of EDUC 880, students must be continually enrolled in the program until completion of EDUC 890 (Capstone IV). Continuous enrollment means that the student must be enrolled in at least one course that will count toward completion of the doctoral program per semester (including summer). Failure to maintain continuous enrollment will result in removal from the program. If students wish to continue in the program at a later date, they need to reapply and, if accepted, will be subject to all requirements for the DCP for the current academic year.

Note: Students returning to the program after breaking enrollment for more than one year may be required to complete additional coursework or retake courses at the discretion of the Administrative Chair of Doctoral Programs and Research in consultation with the Director of Applied Doctoral Research.

2.5 SOE Doctoral Community

The SOE Doctoral Community is a Canvas site that houses important information about the applied research process. While this handbook provides a general guide for the applied research report, the SOE Doctoral Community provides more detailed step-by-step information for each milestone in the process.

3. Applied Research Faculty Mentor

Candidates will work with one faculty mentor to complete the applied research report. The applied research mentor must hold an earned doctoral degree (Ed.D. or Ph.D.) in an education-related field and be employed by Liberty University. After completion of EDUC 880, candidates will be assigned a faculty mentor to begin working with in EDUC 887. Candidates will work with the same faculty mentor for the remainder of the doctoral program.

4. Registering for Applied Research Courses

Once assigned an applied research faculty mentor following EDUC 880, the SOE Doctoral Support Team will submit a registration request for each candidate's first applied research course. Subsequent registrations will also be submitted each semester by the Doctoral Support Team. For any questions related to registering for applied research courses, please contact SOEDocPrograms@liberty.edu.

5. Applied Research Report Guidelines

5.1 Applied Research Report Topics

The purpose of the applied research report is for candidates to gain practical experience solving a problem of practice or improving a practice at a specific educational site or organization with an academic component within their field. Candidates are encouraged to pursue an applied research report that is of personal relevance and significance; however, a candidate needs to ensure that the topic is researchable and that the proposed project is viable. The topic must be related to solving a problem of practice or improving a practice at one specific site. Because the applied research report is site-specific, the results and solution to the problem are not generalizable beyond the site, and the report will not be published, presented, or disseminated

beyond the site. Often the educational site will be a K-12 school setting or a university where the candidate is employed, however, it is possible to conduct an applied research report at an organization with an academic component when appropriate. Further, ethical concerns must be considered if the researcher has any type of authority over the participants (e.g., teacher, professor, or administrator). Candidates should start considering a possible applied research report problem of practice or practice to improve early in the program. Finally, faith integration within the applied research report is acceptable where appropriate. If a faith perspective is included, it should be well-integrated throughout the manuscript (not included as an afterthought or simply tacked on).

5.2 Applied Research Project Data Collection

The applied research project is conducted using applied research methods and should consist of three data collection approaches which is called a multimethod approach. Both qualitative and quantitative data collection methods must be included. The first approach must be interviews and must include a minimum of five participant interviews. The second and third approaches may be selected at the candidate's discretion and with the approval of their faculty mentor. Candidates MUST choose three *different* forms of data collection. The rationale for this requirement is for the candidate to learn three different data collection skillsets to use beyond the doctoral degree. Candidates may choose two of the following approaches for a total of three data collection methods (in addition to the first, required approach, which is interviews):

- focus group (You must conduct at least one focus group with five to eight participants, and you must include 5-10 focus group questions.)
- quantitative surveys (You must collect a minimum of 15 completed surveys, and you must

include demographic questions and at least 10 survey questions using only one or two scales.)

- qualitative questionnaire (You must collect at least 10 questionnaires, and questions/participants must be different than those interviewed to avoid duplicate data. A minimum of 10 questions must be included.)

- observations (You must observe at least once, and as many times necessary to gain enough data to address the research topic.)

- document analysis (You may include qualitative or quantitative data. Documents must seek to solve the problem and not to establish the presence of a problem.)

Any other approach/project requires written approval from the Administrative Chair of Doctoral Programs and Research to the Director of Applied Doctoral Research.

5.3 Required Textbook

Claxton, B. L., & Michael, K. Y., (2021). *Applied Research in Education* (2nd ed.). Kendall Hunt Publishing Company.

5.4 Academic Honesty

Honesty and integrity are highly valued at LU and in the SOE. The same principles and expectations of academic honesty and integrity in coursework are true for the applied research report. The [Liberty University Code of Honor](#) details specific definitions, penalties, and processes of reporting. The presence of plagiarism, including structural plagiarism, within any applied research report manuscript or document may result in dismissal from the program, failing the applied research course, and/or implementation of an intervention plan. The faculty mentor and the SOE administration decide the final consequences of academic dishonesty.

The applied research report needs to be an original work of the candidate, and the reuse of previous research (e.g., master's theses, publications) is not acceptable. Coursework from EDUC 816, EDUC 850, and EDUC 880 may be used to complete the applied research report. Other coursework may require approval from other professors. All previous work needs to be cited according to current American Psychological Association (APA) guidelines, and the APA manual's section on self-plagiarism should be reviewed. Properly crediting another individual's work is also an ethical imperative.

6. The Prospectus

Leading up to EDUC 880, candidates will begin to develop the applied research report in EDUC 816 and EDUC 850. In EDUC 880, the candidate will continue to develop the prospectus. The Applied Research Report Template (See Appendix A) is used to develop the prospectus. The prospectus (Chapters 1, 2, and 3) is the first formal document candidates write as part of the applied research process. The prospectus is expected to be foundational to the formal proposal and then ultimately to the applied research report. The primary assignment in EDUC 880 is the prospectus (minus the literature review). To earn a pass on this assignment, the candidate is expected to incorporate all feedback from EDUC 816 and EDUC 850 professors. When submitting the manuscript for review, candidates must use correct APA formatting and grammar and ensure the research design and analysis sections include scholarly research text references. Times New Roman font is required throughout the applied research report. It is highly recommended that EDUC 880 be taken when the candidate has sufficient time to devote to developing a solid prospectus. Failure to do so could result in not passing EDUC 880, and this course may only be taken twice.

Upon entrance into EDUC 887, all feedback from the EDUC 880 course should be discussed with the faculty mentor. Failure to implement the feedback, especially in regard to design and analysis, will result in significant delays in the applied research process.

Candidate proposals may be submitted for a Director's review during weeks 1-14. Applied research reports may not be submitted beginning on day one of week 15 through the last day of the course.

7. Site Permission

While working on developing the literature review in EDUC 816, the candidate should work on obtaining site permission for the study. The candidate will need to secure an official letter from the gatekeeper of the proposed research site. This letter will need to be included in the proposal in the appendix before sending it to the faculty mentor for a formal review. If a candidate's site requires a document to be signed by a Liberty University employee, the document should be sent to SOEDocReview@liberty.edu for review, and if approved, it will be signed by the Administrative Chair of Doctoral Programs and Research. Mentors are not permitted to sign official or legal documents on behalf of Liberty University.

Note: The applied research is not intended to be generalized to a broader population. The information obtained from the project must not be published, presented, disseminated, or shared outside of the immediate stakeholders involved in the research. If a research site requires IRB approval, please visit the IRB website at www.liberty.edu/irb for more information. Finally, if a candidate is using a Department of Defense (DOD) government site, then full IRB approval is required per DOD protocol.

8. Milestone One: Applied Research Proposal Review

8.1 Develop the Proposal

Upon enrollment in EDUC 887, the candidate is provided access to the EDUC 887 Canvas course that is facilitated by the faculty mentor. Although EDUC 887 is not a typical course, as the primary objective is to fully develop the applied research report proposal, there are required assignments that must be submitted. EDUC 887 is an A-term course (full 16-week semester).

Upon enrollment in EDUC 887, the candidate immediately begins working with his or her faculty mentor to develop a solid applied research report proposal. The proposal needs to consist of Chapters 1, 2, and 3 of the applied research report.

Although the proposal is normally lengthened as the applied research report progresses, it may not change drastically once it is completed and approved as part of EDUC 887. After the topic has been approved in EDUC 816, candidates may not change the topic without approval from their course instructor. After the data collection methods have been approved in EDUC 880, candidates may not change the methods without approval from their mentor.

Note: Any drastic changes in the topic and/or design will require the submission of a Capstone Modification Form. Please contact SOEDocPrograms@liberty.edu to request the form. Changes to the capstone proposal will require a director review and may warrant the need for a candidate to complete additional coursework or retake courses at the discretion of the Director of Applied Doctoral Research.

8.2 Proposal Review

The faculty mentor always reviews the candidate's proposal manuscript first. The faculty mentor is responsible for making sure that the candidate's proposal has met every

requirement on the applied research project by using the Applied Research Report Template (See Appendix A). The proposal review must also include a permission letter from the gatekeeper of the proposed research site. The proposal may not be submitted for a Director Review without an official permission letter. When the faculty mentor approves the proposal, he or she will email it, along with the permission letter, to SOEDocReview@liberty.edu for a review by the Director of Applied Doctoral Research. A director review can take up to two weeks. No proposal defense can take place without approval from the Director of Applied Doctoral Research.

The candidate should expect that the proposal manuscript will go through multiple revisions with the faculty mentor before a proposal is submitted for approval by the Director of Applied Doctoral Research. Candidates should contact SOEDocReview@liberty.edu if two weeks is exceeded or the faculty mentor becomes unresponsive. Once the faculty mentor and Director of Applied Doctoral Research decide the candidate is ready, the faculty mentor may move forward with scheduling a proposal defense presentation.

When submitting an approved proposal for director review, submit it in the following format:

Lastname_Firstname_Proposal **or** Final_Date

Example: Campbell_Karen_Proposal_8_19_20

If you need an IRB Exemption Letter or a letter stating that you have an approved study from Liberty University, your mentor will request this letter when they submit your proposal for a director review.

9. Milestone Two: Applied Research Proposal Defense

Once the proposal has been approved by the Director of Applied Doctoral Research, the applied research mentor will schedule a proposal defense. The formal proposal presentation is facilitated by the applied research mentor and normally takes place via Microsoft Teams. The candidate is responsible for communicating possible dates and times to the faculty mentor for the proposal defense.

The formal proposal presentation and ensuing discussion is normally about 30 to 45 minutes in length. After prayer and preliminary remarks by the faculty mentor, the candidate presents the proposal to the faculty mentor. The proposal defense presentation needs to consist of Chapters 1, 2, and 3 of the Applied Research Report (see Appendix A). The focus of the presentation should be the data collection procedures. The following procedures are recommended for the formal proposal presentation:

- Opening prayer by faculty mentor

- 10-15-minute presentation of PowerPoint by candidate

- Questions and comments from faculty mentor

- The faculty mentor will decide the candidate's readiness to move forward with data collection.

- The faculty mentor will notify the SOE at SOEDocReview@liberty.edu of the outcome of the proposal presentation within 24 hours using the Defense Decision Form (see Appendix B)

A maximum of two proposals may be defended. Failure to gain approval to move forward within two successive proposal defenses could result in removal from the program or

remediation (e.g., enrollment in additional coursework) before progression in the applied

research report process. This decision is made by the Administrative Chair of Doctoral

Programs and Research in consultation with the Director of Applied Doctoral Research.

10. Data Collection

After the successful completion of the proposal presentation, the candidate will begin to

collect data. Written permission to conduct the applied research report must be obtained from the

administration at the intended site (e.g., the superintendent, principal of the participating school,

the key gatekeepers at any site, etc.). Include the permission letter in an appendix of the applied

research report. An applied research report may not be submitted for a director review, and data

may not be collected, without a permission letter. Collecting data without evidence of site

permission may result in removal from the program. LU does not require IRB approval for the

applied research project because it is site-specific, the results and solution to the problem are not

generalizable beyond the site, and the report will not be published or disseminated beyond the

site. However, some school systems and organizations outside of LU may have specific

requirements in order to use their site for your applied research report. This may require IRB

approval. If so, you should contact SOEDocReview@Liberty.edu.

Any ethical considerations or implications of the applied research report should be

discussed in the applied research manuscript. These might include securing the collected data

(e.g., locked filing cabinets and password protection for electronic files), usage, influence,

confidentiality (e.g., use of participant pseudonyms), and any other potential issues that might

arise and how they will be addressed. The information contained in this applied research report is

intended to solve a specific problem or improve a specific practice at a specific location for

specific stakeholders and is not generalizable to a broader population. Therefore, this information should not be shared or distributed outside of the site-specific stakeholders. If you plan to share this report outside of the immediate stakeholders, you must secure LU IRB approval before collecting. Failure to do so may result in removal from the program.

11. Milestone Three: Applied Research Report Review

By the time the candidate enrolls in EDUC 889, the candidate will continue to collect and analyze data and should work on the final applied research report. EDUC 889 is an A-term course (full semester) and candidates must enroll continuously, up to two times, until the final applied research report is approved. While in EDUC 889, candidates analyze the data and complete the final write-up before the final defense presentation. The entire applied research report must be a minimum of 100 pages in length.

11.1 Develop Final Applied Research Report

Under the guidance of the faculty mentor, the candidate refines the manuscript. The faculty mentor may advise the candidate to seek an outside editor to assist with revising or formatting the manuscript. The candidate and the faculty mentor are responsible for making sure that the candidate's final manuscript has met every requirement on the Applied Research Report Checklist (see Appendix A). The candidate should expect that the applied research manuscript will go through multiple revisions with the faculty mentor before a final manuscript is submitted for approval by the Director of Applied Doctoral Research. The applied research report outline is provided in the SOE Doctoral Community in Canvas (see Appendix A).

11.2 Submit the Applied Research Report Manuscript for a Professional Edit

The final defense may not be scheduled until the faculty mentor and Director of

Applied Doctoral Research have reviewed the applied research report and each granted approval for a final defense. During the final revision process, a professional edit of the manuscript may be required. The professional edit should be performed prior to submission for a final director review. Candidates may select the professional editor of their choice.

11.3 Applied Research Report Review

When the faculty mentor approves the final applied research report, he or she will send it to SOEDocReview@liberty.edu for a review by the Director of Applied Doctoral Research. A director review can take up to two weeks. *No applied research report defense may take place without approval from the Director of Applied Doctoral Research*.

12. Milestone Four: Applied Research Report Defense

Once the applied research report is approved by the faculty mentor and the Director of Applied Doctoral Research, the faculty mentor will schedule a time for the final defense presentation. The candidate is responsible for communicating possible dates and times to the faculty mentor for the final defense. The defense date must be scheduled and the defense successfully completed at least four weeks prior to the last day of the semester term, which is Week 12 of the A-term (specific deadline dates for each semester are noted in the SOE Doctoral Community in Canvas). At this point, the candidate should also submit the applied research report to the Manuscript Turnitin Submission Assignment in EDUC 889 in Canvas.

12.1 Preparing for the Applied Research Report Defense

The candidate prepares a 15-20-minute presentation of his or her applied research report for the final defense; a visual presentation (e.g., PowerPoint) is required. The presentation should be sent to the faculty mentor in advance. Candidates are required to use a webcam, have

reliable internet and phone connections, be in professional dress, be in a professional location, and have technological support on hand, if needed, to ensure the presentation runs smoothly. Microsoft Teams must be used, and the faculty mentor is responsible for setting up the Teams meeting.

The applied research report defense takes approximately 45 minutes to complete. The only people who must attend the defense are the candidate and the faculty mentor. It is optional to invite key stakeholders and/or community partners from the applied research project site who may wish to attend the presentation. The following procedures are recommended:

- ☐ Opening prayer by faculty mentor

- ☐ 15-20 minute presentation by candidate

- ☐ Questions and comments from the faculty mentor

- ☐ Final remarks

After prayer and preliminary remarks by the faculty mentor, the candidate presents the applied research report PowerPoint presentation. The presentation needs to include the following: an overview of the study's purpose and significance (both practical and empirical), the research questions, the methods, the analysis, the findings, and the solution to the problem. The visual presentation (e.g., PowerPoint) should be used as an aid. Reading from the presentation or script is not acceptable. Following the presentation, the faculty mentor and optional invited stakeholders and/or community partners may ask questions.

Once the candidate has successfully defended his or her final applied research report, the faculty mentor will notify the Doctoral Support Team at SOEDocReview@liberty.edu. The notification

must include the following three items:

1. Final approved manuscript

2. Faculty Mentor approved Turnitin Report

3. The Defense Decision Form (see Appendix B)

Once the applied research report is successfully defended and the SOE receives the three items noted above, candidates will be enrolled in EDUC 890, which is a zero-credit hour course that is added to the final semester.

Using the Defense Decision Form (see Appendix B) for guidance, the faculty mentor will make one of the following decisions and inform the candidate:

- PASS: Approved with minor or no further revisions
- PASS: Provisionally approved with major revisions
- NO PASS: Not approved with recommendations to revise or rewrite

If the faculty mentor makes one of the first two decisions, the faculty mentor delineates the required steps and specifies a timeline for completion (usually within 7 days). It should be noted that, at the discretion of the faculty mentor and dependent upon the number of revisions that need to be made, the faculty mentor may require that the candidate have his or her manuscript professionally edited again. A maximum of two applied research report defenses may be completed. Failure to successfully defend the applied research report within two attempts will result in removal from the program.

13. Graduation

As a reminder, the candidate must complete requirements and paperwork necessary for graduation and should plan to attend the hooding ceremony and graduation exercises in May. Graduation information can be found on the Registrar's website. Application for graduation

should be completed no later than the beginning of the term in which the candidate intends to

complete and defend the applied research report.

Appendix A: Applied Research Report Template and Checklist

Note: This appendix has been moved to the SOE Doctoral Community in Canvas.

Appendix B: Defense Decision Form

Note: This appendix has been moved to the SOE Doctoral Community in Canvas.