

**GEORGE MASON UNIVERSITY
SCHOOL OF EDUCATION
Education Leadership Program**

**EDLE 690, Section 602
Using Research to Lead School Improvement
Fall 2023, 3 credit hours**

Instructor: Samantha Viano, PhD
Office Location: Thompson Hall, Room 1304
Phone: 703-679-7672
E-mail: sviano@gmu.edu

Mailing address: George Mason University
4400 University Drive, MSN 4C2
Fairfax, VA 22030-4444

Office Hours: Online by appointment using Zoom
Find appointments here: <https://calendly.com/viano/>
and email for alternate times.

Course Meetings: **Time:** Tuesdays, 5:00-8:00 p.m.
Term: September 5 – December 5, 2023
Locations: Westfield High School, Library H110
Synchronously on Zoom
Asynchronously on Blackboard

I. COURSE DESCRIPTION

Prerequisite: EDLE 620

University Catalog Course Description

Using Research to Lead School Improvement (3:3:0) Develops skills, insights, and understanding of how leaders use research to improve schools, with emphasis on the use of assessment and research data to identify school improvement needs and to design school improvement projects.

II. COURSE DELIVERY METHOD

This course will be delivered approximately 33% in-person at Westfield High School, 33% synchronously on Zoom, and 33% using an asynchronous (not “real time”) format via the Blackboard learning management system (LMS) housed in the MyMason portal. You will log in to the Blackboard course site using your Mason email name (everything before “@gmU.edu”) and email password. In the event of inclement weather, quarantine, or school building closure,

course meetings may be rescheduled as synchronous or asynchronous at the discretion of the instructor which would affect the proportion of the course offered in each format. The course site will be available on September 5, 2023.

Under no circumstances, may candidates/students participate in online class sessions (either by phone or Internet) while operating motor vehicles. Further, as expected in a face-to-face class meeting, such online participation requires undivided attention to course content and communication.

III. COURSE MATERIALS

Required Text

Hinnant-Crawford, B. (2020). *Improvement science in education: A primer*. Myers Education Press.

Recommended Text

Bauer, S.C. & Brazer, S.D. (2012). *Using research to lead school improvement: Turning evidence into action*. Sage.

Bryk, A. S., Gomez, L. M., Grunow, A., & LeMahieu, P. G. (2015). *Learning to improve: How America's schools can get better at getting better*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard Education Press.

Other Assigned and Optional Sources

Assigned and optional source material will be available on their links listed on Blackboard. Assigned sources will also be listed on the tentative schedule below.

IV. TEACHING AND LEARNING

Each class week will include a variety of activities and exercises. Specific process goals for this class are as follows:

1. Classes will reflect a balance of activities that encourage the exploration of and the use of research in instructional leadership. To promote an atmosphere that allows us to accomplish this, we will:
 - a. agree to disagree respectfully during class discussions;
 - b. give others a charitable read by assuming good intentions;
 - c. strive to be open to new ideas and perspectives; and
 - d. listen actively to one another.
2. Candidate work will reflect what is expected from leaders. Hence, it is expected that candidates will:

- a. write papers that are well-researched, proofread, submitted in a timely fashion, and conform to APA guidelines;
 - b. participate actively in class discussions in a manner that challenges the best thinking of the class; and
 - c. provide constructive feedback to others both on their ideas and on their written work, striving to learn from each other and to test each other's ideas.
3. We will endeavor to create an environment that approximate what we know about learning organizations. Consequently, it is important that we create a space that allows participants to try out new ideas and voice opinions without fear or ridicule or embarrassment. The hallmark of a learning organization is a balance between openness and constructive feedback; hence, everyone is expected to:
- a. demonstrate appropriate **respect for one another**;
 - b. voice concerns and opinions about the class process openly;
 - c. engage in **genuine inquiry**;
 - d. recognize and celebrate each other's ideas and accomplishments;
 - e. show an awareness of each other's needs; and
 - f. **maintain strict confidentiality** regarding any information shared.

V. COURSE OBJECTIVES

Students completing the course successfully will be able to:

- ✓ understand and apply planning, assessment, and instructional leadership that builds collective professional capacity;
- ✓ understand and apply systems and organization theory;
- ✓ understand and apply management and leadership skills that achieve effective and efficient organizational operations;
- ✓ understand and apply improvement science principles as part of professional practice;
- ✓ understand and apply research knowledge to a significant instructional problem.

Student Outcomes

Successful students will emerge from the course with the ability to:

- ✓ gather and analyze student achievement and demographic data available from their school, school division, and the state;
- ✓ search online databases for recent publications relevant to a specific topic, and prepare a brief summary of applied research on a topic relevant to the improvement of instruction at their school site;
- ✓ use education research to develop a position based on more than one's opinion;
- ✓ understand and be able to evaluate basic research designs;
- ✓ lead instructional and school improvement efforts using improvement science principles to fail quickly, learn fast, and accelerate improvement; and
- ✓ prepare and defend a proposal for the Internship Improvement Project (IIP) that becomes the blueprint for the capstone project required in the EDLE program internship.

VI. RELATIONSHIP OF COURSE TO INTERNSHIP (EDLE 791)

Although the internship is a separate course, the Education Leadership program has integrated internship-related activities into course work. During this course, students will prepare and present a proposal for an improvement project that they will implement and evaluate as a part of their internship activities over the remainder of the program.

VII. NATIONAL STANDARDS AND VIRGINIA COMPETENCIES

National Standards

The following National Educational Leadership Preparation (NELP) standard elements are addressed in this course:

NELP Standard 1: Mission, Vision, and Improvement. Candidates who successfully complete a building-level educational leadership preparation program understand and demonstrate the capacity to promote the current and future success and well-being of each student and adult by applying the knowledge, skills, and commitments necessary to collaboratively lead, design, and implement a school mission, vision, and process for continuous improvement that reflects a core set of values and priorities that include data use, technology, equity, diversity, digital citizenship, and community.

1.1 Program completers understand and demonstrate the capacity to collaboratively evaluate, develop, and communicate a school mission and vision designed to reflect a core set of values and priorities that include data use, technology, equity, diversity, digital citizenship, and community.

1.2 Program completers understand and demonstrate the capacity to lead improvement processes that include data use, design, implementation, and evaluation.

NELP Standard 3: Equity, Inclusiveness, and Cultural Responsiveness. Candidates who successfully complete a building-level educational leadership preparation program understand and demonstrate the capacity to promote the current and future success and well-being of each student and adult by applying the knowledge, skills, and commitments necessary to develop and maintain a supportive, equitable, culturally responsive, and inclusive school culture.

3.1 Program completers understand and demonstrate the capacity to use data to evaluate, design, cultivate, and advocate for a supportive and inclusive school culture.

3.2 Program completers understand and demonstrate the capacity to evaluate, cultivate, and advocate for equitable access to educational resources, technologies, and opportunities that support the educational success and well-being of each student.

3.3 Program completers understand and demonstrate the capacity to evaluate, cultivate, and advocate for equitable, inclusive, and culturally responsive instruction and behavior support practices among teachers and staff.

NELP Standard 6: Operations and Management. Candidates who successfully complete a building-level educational leadership preparation program understand and demonstrate the capacity to promote the current and future success and well-being of each student and adult by applying the knowledge, skills, and commitments necessary to improve management, communication, technology, school-level governance, and operation systems to develop and

improve data-informed and equitable school resource plans and to apply laws, policies, and regulations.

6.1 Program completers understand and demonstrate the capacity to evaluate, develop, and implement management, communication, technology, school-level governance, and operation systems that support each student's learning needs and promote the mission and vision of the school.

6.2 Program completers understand and demonstrate the capacity to evaluate, develop, and advocate for a data-informed and equitable resourcing plan that supports school improvement and student development.

NELP Standard 7: Building Professional Capacity. Candidates who successfully complete a building-level educational leadership preparation program understand and demonstrate the capacity to promote the current and future success and well-being of each student and adult by applying the knowledge, skills, and commitments necessary to build the school's professional capacity, engage staff in the development of a collaborative professional culture, and improve systems of staff supervision, evaluation, support, and professional learning.

7.2 Program completers understand and have the capacity to develop and engage staff in a collaborative professional culture designed to promote school improvement, teacher retention, and the success and well-being of each student and adult in the school.

7.4 Program completers understand and have the capacity to evaluate, develop, and implement systems of supervision, support, and evaluation designed to promote school improvement and student success.

Virginia Competencies

This course addresses the following Virginia Department of Education (VDOE) Competencies:

a. Knowledge understanding, and application of planning, assessment, and instructional leadership that builds collective professional capacity, including:

(2) Collaborative leadership in gathering and analyzing data to identify needs to develop and implement a school improvement plan that results in increased student learning;

(7) Identification, analysis, and resolution of problems using effective problem-solving techniques; and

(8) Communication of a clear vision of excellence, linked to mission and core beliefs that promotes continuous improvement consistent with the goals of the school division.

b. Knowledge, understanding and application of systems and organizations, including:

(1) Systems theory and the change process of systems, organizations and individuals, using appropriate and effective adult learning models;

(2) Aligning organizational practice, division mission, and core beliefs for developing and implementing strategic plans;

(3) Information sources and processing, including data collection and data analysis strategies;

(4) Using data as a part of ongoing program evaluation to inform and lead change;

(5) Developing a change management strategy for improved student outcomes; and

(6) Developing empowerment strategies to create personalized learning environments for diverse schools.

c. Knowledge understanding and application of management and leadership skills that achieve effective and efficient organizational operations, including:

(8) Application of data-driven decision making to initiate and continue improvement in school and classroom practices and student achievement.

f. Knowledge understanding and application of basic leadership theories and influences that impact schools including:

(1) Concepts of leadership including systems theory, change theory, learning organizations and current leadership theory.

VIII. TECHNOLOGY REQUIREMENTS

This course will be partially delivered on Mason's Blackboard platform, so students are required to have access to Blackboard. A Blackboard site is available to all students enrolled in the course at <http://mymason.gmu.edu>. You need to log on using your GMU username and password. To participate in this course, students will need the following resources:

- High-speed Internet access with standard up-to-date browsers. To get a list of Blackboard's supported browsers see: https://help.blackboard.com/Learn/Student/Original/Getting_Started/Browser_Support
- To get a list of supported operation systems on different devices see: https://help.blackboard.com/Learn/Student/Getting_Started/Browser_Support/Browser_Support_Policy
- Consistent and reliable access to their GMU email and Blackboard (at least daily access on weekdays), as these are the official methods of communication for this course.
- Students may be asked to create logins and passwords on supplemental websites and/or to download trial software to their computer or tablet as part of course requirements.
- The following software plug-ins for PCs and Macs are available for free download by clicking on the link next to each plug-in:
 - Adobe Acrobat Reader: <http://get.adobe.com/reader/>
 - Windows Media Player: <https://support.microsoft.com/en-us/help/14209/get-windows-media-player>
 - Apple QuickTime Player: www.apple.com/quicktime/download/
- You will use **Google Docs** to complete select assignments and to participate in various learning activities throughout the semester.
- **Video/Screencasting Tools:** You may use Kaltura, Jing, Camtasia, or Screencast-O-Matic to record videos throughout the semester.
- **A headset microphone** for use with Zoom for synchronous lessons to engage with the instructor. These can also be useful when recording videos for the course.

Email: Per university policy and in compliance with federal law, I will only communicate with candidates via their GMU email accounts and will be unable to respond to emails sent from other accounts (i.e., Gmail, yahoo, work email, etc.).

- **All candidates are required to activate and monitor their GMU e-mail accounts.**
- Any announcements concerning the course will be sent to your GMU email address.
- I will respond to emails within two business days of email receipt (i.e., excluding holidays and weekends).

Video Conferencing: Students are encouraged to communicate with each other and the instructor using Zoom for both group collaboration sessions and the instructor's virtual office hours.

Microsoft Office: It is my expectation that all students have access to Microsoft Office. We will be using Word and Excel for this course. If you do not have access to this software, you are required to obtain it within the first two weeks of the course. It is best, but not required, to have the most recent version of the software.

Google Account: We will be using Google Drive to organize some of our collaborative work this semester. All students are required to have an active gmail account in order to participate in these activities. This gmail account should be distinct from your school division email address, even if you have access to google through your school division account (email should end in @gmail.com).

IX. COURSE REQUIREMENTS, PERFORMANCE-BASED ASSESSMENT, AND EVALUATION CRITERIA

General Expectations

Consistent with the expectations of a Master's-level course in the Education Leadership program, grading is based heavily on student performance on written assignments. The assignments constructed for this course reflect a mix of skills associated with the application of research to education leadership contexts. Overall, written work will be assessed using the following broad criteria:

- Application of concepts embedded in assigned readings and other materials and reinforced in class activities
- The quality of analysis, synthesis, and application
- The ability to write in a clear, concise, and organized fashion

Additionally, due to this course being partially online, a significant portion of the class grade will be based on participation and the contribution you make to class discussions.

Specific Performances and Weights

The overall weights of the various performances are as follows:

Class participation – 10 points

Candidates are expected to participate actively in class discussions, small group activities, and in serving as critical friends to other colleagues. Being absent to class, arriving at class more than 10 minutes late, or leaving more than 10 minutes before the end of class will result in loss of points. For asynchronous weeks, students are expected to complete all required exercises as stated on weekly check lists. *A rubric for attendance and participation is included at the end of this syllabus.*

In-Class Group Assignment - 10 points

In class, you will be organized into small groups based on common interests in improvement targets. In these small groups, called networked improvement communities (NICs), you will create a charter document in class to guide your collaborative work. *A rubric is included at the end of this syllabus.*

Written Assignments - 80 points

Several different types of performance-based assignments will be completed during the semester. Each assignment relates to the application of educational research in your school setting. *A description of each assignment and a rubric for grading each assignment are included at the end of this syllabus.*

The assignments are designed sequentially to help you define and plan the improvement project *you will be conducting as your capstone project for the internship*. Thus, in the first assignment, you examine school performance data and define a research topic. In the second, you review the available research literature on that topic, and begin to define the specific improvement project you will implement. For the final assignment, you write your Internship Improvement Project—the improvement project that will be implemented during your internship. The Internship Improvement Project is the program-level *Performance-Based Assessment (PBA)* for this course.

Submitting papers: All papers must be submitted **on time, electronically via Blackboard.**

Late work: Students' work is expected to be on time, meaning no later than midnight of the due date. Please take advantage of instructor availability to get assistance prior to assignment deadlines.

Grade Appeals: Grade appeals will only be granted when the number of points awarded for the assignment is less than 80 percent of the possible points available. Grade appeals will only be allowed for the first two written assignments. Students must resubmit the assignment within two weeks of receiving their original grade in order to receive a new grade.

Grading Scale:

A+ = 100 points
 A = 95 - 99
 A- = 90 - 94
 B+ = 86 - 89
 B = 83 - 85
 B- = 80 - 82
 C = 75 - 79
 F = 74 or below

VIA Performance-Based Assessment Submission Requirement:

Every student registered for an EDLE course with a required performance-based assessment is required to submit these assessments to VIA through Blackboard. EDLE 690's required performance is the **Internship Improvement Project**. Evaluation of the performance-based assessments by the course instructor will also be completed in VIA through Blackboard. Failure to submit the assessment to Blackboard will result in the course instructor reporting the grade as Incomplete (IN). Unless the IN grade is changed upon completion of the Blackboard submission, the IN will convert to an F nine weeks into the following semester.

X. ONLINE EXPECTATIONS

Course Week: Because we are scheduled for a Tuesday night class, our week will generally **start** on Tuesdays and **finish** on Mondays, with exceptions communicated to students via email. Besides major assignment deadlines, course activities should be completed on or before the Monday of the course week.

Log in Frequency: Students must actively check the course Blackboard site and their GMU email for communication from the instructor, **at a minimum this should be three times per week**.

Participation: Students are expected to actively engage in all online course activities throughout the semester, which includes viewing of all course materials, completing course activities and assignments, and participating in course discussions and group interactions.

Technical Competence: Students are expected to demonstrate competence in the use of all course technology. Students are expected to seek assistance from the instructor or GMU IT if they are struggling with the technical components of the course.

Technical Issues: Students should expect to experience some technical difficulties at some point in the semester and should, therefore, budget their time accordingly. Late work will not be accepted based on individual technical issues.

Workload: Please be aware that this course is **not self-paced**. There are **specific deadlines** and **due dates** listed in the **class schedule** section of the syllabus to which you are expected to adhere. **Plan to spend about 10 hours a week to complete all course activities** (including time in class during in-person and synchronous weeks).

Advising: If you would like to schedule a one-on-one meeting to discuss course requirements, content, or other course-related issues, we can meet via telephone or web conference. Send an email to schedule a one-to-one session or use the instructor's automated meeting scheduling calendar (<https://calendly.com/viano/>).

Confidentiality: By federal law, any materials that identify specific students (via their name, voice, or image) must not be shared with anyone not enrolled in this class.

- Videorecordings — whether made by instructors or students — of class meetings that include audio, visual, or textual information from other students are private and must not be shared outside the class
- Live video conference meetings (e.g., Collaborate or Zoom) that include audio, textual, or visual information from other students must be viewed privately and not shared with others in your household or recorded and shared outside the class

Netiquette: Our goal is to **collaborative**, not combative. Experience shows that even an innocent remark in the online environment can be misconstrued. A following is a list of suggestions for interacting with others online:

- Re-read your responses carefully before you post.
- Be positive in your approach to others and be diplomatic with your words.
- Remember, you are not competing with each other. You are sharing information and learning from one another as well as the instructor.
- Use descriptive subject lines. Give readers a clue about what's inside.
- Do not use all caps.
- Avoid slang, abbreviations, and acronyms.
- Avoid sarcasm, joking, or other communication styles reliant on visual cues.
- Avoid multiple exclamation points.
- Assume good intentions. Err on the god side of all contributors.
- If you are referring to something that was said or read on the online forum, "cite" the original source to give credit to who originally shared the idea.

XI. GMU Policies and Resources for Students

Policies

- Students must adhere to the guidelines of the Mason Honor Code (**see** <https://catalog.gmu.edu/policies/honor-code-system/>).
- Students must follow the university policy for Responsible Use of Computing (see <http://universitypolicy.gmu.edu/policies/responsible-use-of-computing/>).
- Students are responsible for the content of university communications sent to their Mason email account and are required to activate their account and check it regularly. All communication from the university, college, school, and program will be sent to students **solely** through their Mason email account.

- Students with disabilities who seek accommodations in a course must be registered with George Mason University Disability Services. Approved accommodations will begin at the time the written letter from Disability Services is received by the instructor (see <https://ds.gmu.edu/>).

Campus Resources

- Support for submission of assignments to VIA should be directed to VIAhelp@gmu.edu or <https://cehd.gmu.edu/aero/assessments/>. Questions or concerns regarding use of Blackboard should be directed to <https://its.gmu.edu/article-categories/teaching-learning/>.

Notice of mandatory reporting of sexual assault, interpersonal violence, and stalking: As a faculty member, I am designated as a “Non-Confidential Employee,” and must report all disclosures of sexual assault, sexual harassment, interpersonal violence, and stalking to Mason’s Title IX Coordinator per [University Policy 1202](#). If you wish to speak with someone confidentially, please contact one of Mason’s confidential resources, such as [Student Support and Advocacy Center](#) (SSAC) at 703-380-1434 or [Counseling and Psychological Services](#) (CAPS) at 703-993-2380. You may also seek assistance or support measures from Mason’s Title IX Coordinator by calling 703-993-8730, or emailing titleix@gmu.edu.

For information on student support resources on campus, see <https://ctfe.gmu.edu/teaching/student-support-resources-on-campus>

For additional information on the College of Education and Human Development, please visit our website <https://cehd.gmu.edu/>.

Plagiarism:

- **Plagiarism Statement:** Plagiarism means using the exact words, opinions, or factual information from another person without giving that person credit. Writers give credit through accepted documentation styles, such as parenthetical citation, footnotes, or endnotes; **a simple listing of books and articles is not sufficient.** Plagiarism is the equivalent of intellectual robbery and cannot be tolerated in an academic setting. Student writers are often confused as to what should be cited. Some think that only direct quotations need to be credited. While direct quotations do need citations, so do paraphrases and summaries of opinions or factual information formerly unknown to the writers or which the writers did not discover themselves. Exceptions for this include factual information which can be obtained from a variety of sources, the writers' own insights or findings from their own field research, and what has been termed common knowledge. What constitutes common knowledge can sometimes be precarious; what is common knowledge for one audience may not be so for another. In such situations, it is helpful, to keep the reader in mind and to think of citations as being "reader friendly." In other words, writers provide a citation for any piece of information that they think their readers might want to investigate further. Not only is this attitude considerate of readers, it will almost certainly ensure that writers will never be guilty of plagiarism. (Statement of English Department at George Mason University)

- Plagiarism and the Honor Code: George Mason University operates under an honor system, which is published in the University Catalog and deals specifically with cheating, attempted cheating, plagiarism, lying, and stealing. Please familiarize yourself with the honor code, especially the statement on plagiarism (<https://oai.gmu.edu/full-honor-code-document/>). If you have questions about when the contributions of others to your work must be acknowledged and appropriate ways to cite those contributions, please talk with the professor or utilize the GMU writing center.
- Plagiarism and the Internet: Copyright rules also apply to users of the Internet who cite from Internet sources. Information and graphics accessed electronically must also be cited, giving credit to the sources. This material includes but is not limited to e-mail (don't cite or forward someone else's e-mail without permission), newsgroup material, information from Web sites, including graphics.
- If you have questions about when the contributions of others to your work must be acknowledged and appropriate ways to cite those contributions, please talk with the professor utilize the GMU Writing Center.

Academic Integrity & Inclusivity: This course embodies the perspective that we all have differing perspectives and ideas and we each deserve the opportunity to share our thoughts. Therefore, we will conduct our discussions with respect for those differences. That means, we each have the freedom to express our ideas, but we should also do so keeping in mind that our colleagues deserve to hear differing thoughts in a respectful manner, i.e., we may disagree without being disagreeable. <https://oai.gmu.edu/>

Diversity, Religious Holiday: Please refer to George Mason University's calendar of religious holidays and observations (<http://ulife.gmu.edu/calendar/religious-holiday-calendar/>). It is the student's responsibility to speak to the instructor in advance should their religious observances impact their participation in class activities and assignments.

Student Privacy Policy: George Mason University strives to fully comply with FERPA by protecting the privacy of student records and judiciously evaluating requests for release of information from those records. Please see George Mason University's student privacy policy <https://registrar.gmu.edu/students/privacy/>.

Professional Dispositions: Students are expected to exhibit professional behaviors and dispositions at all times. See <http://cehd.gmu.edu/students/policies-procedures/>.

Core Values Commitment: College of Education and Human Development is committed to collaboration, ethical leadership, innovation, research-based practice, and social justice. Students are expected to adhere to these principles: <http://cehd.gmu.edu/values/>.

Other Concerns: If you have concerns or issues relating to the content or conduct of the class, please talk with me directly. Although the specifics of these conversations are entirely confidential, they may provide me with useful suggestions that may be shared indirectly with the class to improve the learning experience for all students. As a matter of policy, I do not respond to anonymous e-mails.