Advice from School of Education Faculty for graduate students
About finishing your thesis / dissertation / ELP / EPP in a timely manner

Advice from the following professors: Mandy Jansen, Lauren Bailes, David Coker, Danielle Ford, Laura Eisenman, Liz Farley-Ripple, Ralph Ferretti, Roberta Golinkoff, and Elizabeth Soslau

TIMELINE

- Create a timeline to share with your advisor each semester that breaks down what you would like to accomplish at a grain size of about every 2 weeks at a time. This pushes you to think about and talk with your advisor about how to decompose your larger goals into smaller tasks.
- Work backwards from when you want to reach a certain stage when making your timeline.
- You'll want to build in multiple rounds of revision with your advisor before the thesis goes to your committee. This means time for the advisor to read and provide feedback (in my case, I tell my advisees that I need about a week to read and give feedback) and time for you to apply the advisor's feedback and revise. Multiple times. Allow time for this before the thesis goes to your committee.
- Build in time for your committee to read your thesis before your defense – giving committee members 2 weeks to read prior the defense is appropriate.
- After your defense, in almost all cases, the final dissertation/ELP will require some revision based on the committee's feedback at the defense. This is typical and not an indication of failure! It is likely that students will "pass" the defense and still need to make revisions. This is where additional learning happens. So, build in time and expect to do revisions post-defense.
- Everything takes longer than you think it will, so be generous to yourself when creating a timeline.
- Revise your timeline as needed and communicate those revisions to your advisor.
- Regarding timeline awareness, it can be difficult to understand the time it takes for revisions (1) at the time the final draft is shared with the advisor and (2) after the defense. The first can take months, the second can take weeks, and may require adjustments to timelines.
- Take note of when the major scholarship deadlines are for your field, and, if possible, work them into your timeline (e.g., January/February deadline for the university dissertation fellowship, October for NAE/Spencer, etc.). The university dissertation award is particularly challenging for students who have not yet defended their proposal - students don't realize they have to take into account the end of the fall semester crunch and holidays when planning out the timing of the completion of their proposal, time for faculty to read it, scheduling of the proposal defense, and completion of revisions prior to the fellowship application deadline.
- Choose a rather narrow, specific topic and a feasible research question or hypothesis because those will also determine the kind of data you have to collect and the kinds of analyses you undertake (which all come with different time allocations as well).
- Create a writing schedule every week - block out times on your calendar and hold them sacred
  - When organizing your day, do the hard things first. (writing stuff first -- emails last)
  - Use timers and other apps to track your time and manage your tasks
WORKING WITH YOUR ADVISOR / COMMITTEE MEMBERS:

- Ask your chair/advisor to help you narrow your ideas so that they are manageable.
- Before asking people to be on your committee, run your ideas for members past your chair/advisor. There might be inside information about teams of faculty that work especially well together (or not).
- Ask your advisor if you can send some ideas or parts of your writing piecemeal so you don’t get too far down the road when an earlier-course correction would have been helpful.
- If you decide to switch chairs/advisors - always talk to them first before making the switch (this sounds straightforward - but I've seen students get muddled in this process).
- Reach out to committee members prior to the defense to be check about any questions of concerns that committee members may have. It’s important to keep the committee in the loop throughout the process, but especially important to check in prior to the defense.

STRATEGIES FOR MAKING PROGRESS:

- Pick a topic you like. If you don't, the process will be painful.
- Choose a topic you really love, find interesting, or can apply frequently and readily because any culminating project demands a lot of attention - it helps to find that work worthwhile!
- Don't forget *why* you are conducting the dissertation study. I see a lot of students focus on the end goal, and on checking off the milestones on the way to the end goal. They lose the purpose of the journey. Stop and smell the roses sounds so cliched, but if students can't find joy in the moments when they conduct a fantastic observation, or find a pattern in their data that's meaningful, or read a new article that pushes their thinking, then they're forgetting what this is all about.
- Leave things on the table, even trim back your plans - maybe there is another angle in the data you didn't explore, maybe you didn't end up using all the data you collected, a fourth research question that broadens the work, maybe there's an obvious extension you'd love to work on... These are all tempting ways to expand the scope (AND the timeline) whereas they may make EXCELLENT fodder for job talks when the "future directions" and "research agenda" questions pop up.
- Pay attention to job postings and deadlines - sometimes an attractive job posting that lists ABD or some other requirement can serve as a motivation to finish up.
- the first piece of research a student does should NOT be their dissertation. They need to have their dissertation flow out of what they have been working on since they arrived. The dissertation shouldn't be the trauma it is IF students are comfortable with and have done prior research. So get started much sooner on conducting independent research.

SEEK SUPPORT

- Ask lots of successful/productive people how they did it - get advice everywhere.
- Start a writing club with other students who need to write.
Specifically for EDD students working on their ELPs

- We recommend that ELP 1, 2, 3 be taken in either Spring or Fall Semesters since these are 4 credit courses and each course has a substantial amount of work. ELP 1 includes identifying problem and the artifacts you will need to produce to attempt to solve the problem. There is also a contract the student and advisor sign related to the ELP plan. The student needs time to put together a committee and a proposal defense. ELP 2 is where the bulk of the work takes place—working on the artifacts/activities related to the problem. ELP 3 is finalizing the artifacts, writing the analysis—and this must be complete in time to define to the committee and give the college director and dean time to read the final ELP in time to graduate—this is often more than a semester so it may be Spring + Summer or Fall+Winter.

- Certification: The EDD does not lead to Principal Certification. It leads to Central Office Personnel and Assistant Superintendent/Superintendent Certification. If the student desires the certification they need to plan accordingly since there is a 6 credit internship course (EDUC 879 offered Summer and Spring) and this is 6/15 electives they would need to take.