

# **HIGHER EDUCATION Online Master's Program**

GRADUATE STUDENT HANDBOOK

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**DEPARTMENT OF  
EDUCATIONAL  
POLICY,  
RESEARCH  
AND  
ADMINISTRATION**

**COLLEGE OF  
EDUCATION**

**UNIVERSITY OF  
MASSACHUSETTS  
AMHERST**

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# INTRODUCTION

The Higher Education graduate program is geared toward people who are interested in pursuing careers as administrators, faculty, researchers, policy analysts, and student affairs professionals in colleges, universities, and state or federal agencies devoted to post-secondary education.

The program offers the face-to-face M.Ed. and Ph.D. degrees as well as an online M.Ed., and each program of study has structured course offerings as well as the flexibility to choose electives and design a plan of study that incorporates your personal interests while satisfying the program requirements. The M.Ed. programs emphasize preparation for a career as an administrator in student affairs or academic affairs.

We also offer an online graduate certificate in Higher Education Leadership and Administration. The graduate certificate is a 15-credit academic program focused on the study of leadership, management, and organization in higher education with an emphasis on the intersection of theory and practice. This graduate certificate is aimed at the many current and future leaders in higher education who would benefit from leadership training, but who do not need another advanced degree.

This handbook lays out program requirements and provides information to assist you throughout your graduate program. If you have any questions, please consult with your academic adviser or email [info-leadership@umass.edu](mailto:info-leadership@umass.edu). Information is also available on the [Higher Ed program Web site](#).

## INFORMATION FOR NEWCOMERS

Many UMass websites have information that will help you get adjusted to being a student here. Online students are encouraged to explore the resources for current students available through [University Without Walls](#), the [College of Education](#), and the [Higher Education Program](#).

### UMass Graduate School

Policies, procedures, and deadlines of the [Graduate School](#) as well as information on graduate student services. On the Graduate School home page, the “current student” link has helpful links with several important .pdf documents, one of which is a page specifically for new students (the new student checklist). Much of the new student checklist has been reproduced below.

### NetID

Your NetID and password allow you to access many resources, including SPIRE (the campus student information system), your courses in Blackboard Learn (BbL), and the library. It is sometimes also referred to as your SPIRE ID. You’ll receive your NetID via email after you fill out the Non-Degree Enrollment Application in SPIRE.

### SPIRE

SPIRE is the student information system used at UMass Amherst. SPIRE is used to enroll in courses, and is also where you check your grades.

### UMass Email

You will also receive a UMass email address, which will be your “official” email contact for the University. You can access your email through the Google Mail as part of Apps at UMass Amherst, and can also set it to forward to a different email address.

### Graduate Students in Higher Education “GSHE”

GSHE is the Graduate Student Organization for students in the Higher Education program. They also welcome members from other departments and programs within the College of Education. GSHE provides regular opportunities for collaboration between students through social events as well as professional and academic development. GSHE provides online resources for higher education students as well as events around campus. Connect with GSHE through [Facebook](#) and [Instagram](#).

# HIGHER EDUCATION PROGRAM COMPETENCIES

The eight competencies represent the basis of professional knowledge our students will develop as they complete their M.Ed. or Ph.D. degree. Knowledge of these competencies is gained through both in-class and out-of-class experiences. The mastery of these competencies will be shown in the Integrative Seminar's capstone project for M.Ed. students and serve as the basis for Ph.D. students' comprehensive examinations.

1. **Historical, Philosophical, and Theoretical Foundations** – knowledge of key historical events, perspective on the purpose and nature of higher education, and theoretical lenses for the analysis of interactions between individuals, colleges / universities, and social structures. Focus on the development and application of a critical frame with which to deconstruct contemporary higher education and trace present problems to their past antecedents. Ability to use a variety of social justice and ethical perspectives to analyze one's own actions, the actions of others, and the role of higher education institutions in promoting societal (in)equity.
2. **Leadership, Management, and Organization** – knowledge and ability to use skills necessary for establishing, prioritizing and achieving organizational goals; knowledge about the ways in which economic resources are developed and used by higher education systems, institutions, groups, and individuals; knowledge about the impact of emerging technologies in the classroom, in administration, and in social networking; an understanding of the ways in which enduring intentional change and development can be cultivated as a means for transforming higher education policy and practice. Students will learn the principles and practices of effective management in higher education, and they will study the transformation that has taken place in the definition of leadership and how this will help them to become better administrators and leaders.
3. **Student Learning and Development** – an understanding of how postsecondary education impacts student learning and development. Students will be exposed to different student development theories including, psychosocial, cognitive-structural, typology, and college impact theories, and how these theories can be used to enhance the role of an administrator. Also, students will study current trends in pedagogy.
4. **Assessment, Evaluation, and Research Methods** – an understanding of the range of qualitative and quantitative methods and designs used to increase knowledge about educational practice and policy in higher education. Students will learn about research and evaluation design; when it is appropriate to use qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods approaches; and the strengths and weaknesses of various methods. Students also have opportunities to develop skills and knowledge related to academic assessment as well as program evaluation relevant for higher education.

5. **Academic Affairs** – an understanding of the academic side of higher education including the evolution and history of the academic profession, stages of the academic career, faculty roles and rewards, academic culture, the process of teaching and curriculum development, research and outreach, faculty professional development, academic advising, and pedagogical issues (including critical theory).
6. **Social Justice, Oppression, and Diversity** – a critical understanding of justice and oppression and how these concepts relate to higher education, as well as an appreciation for the multiple aspects of human diversity and how such diversity contributes to higher education. By introducing many perspectives on different issues, from larger societal issues such as the economy, to higher education specific issues, such as students' rights on campus, students will learn to question their previously held perspectives.
7. **Policy, Economics, and Law** - an understanding of how higher education functions within the larger context of public policy and law as well as how political economy, political structures and systems influence and are influenced by higher education.
8. **Student Success** – an understanding of how higher education institutions function as complex systems in order to enhance or inhibit student success outcomes. Examination of issues of access, choice, financial aid, within-college experience, retention, high-impact practices, and completion. Situation of students' higher education experiences on a broader success trajectory—beginning in early childhood and continuing beyond their experiences of undergraduate and/or graduate education.

# ACADEMIC REQUIREMENTS

This online master's degree in higher education prepares professionals for careers in the administration of colleges and universities. You complete a core of required foundation courses, a series of specialization courses, at least 120 hours of supervised practice, and a final integrative project. All coursework should help students develop an understanding of the **HIGHER EDUCATION PROGRAM COMPETENCIES**, which represent the basis of the higher education master's program. A minimum of 36 credit hours is required for the master's degree.

## Grading

All coursework for higher education students is taken for a letter grade. If a particular faculty member's general policy is to grade only on a Pass/Fail basis, please request a letter grade.

## Required Courses

All online master's students are required to take the following courses:

- ☐ EDUC 601A Foundations of Higher Education OR EDUC 643 Master's Seminar I
- ☐ EDUC 644 Master's Seminar II
- ☐ EDUC 697K Supporting Student Success
- ☐ EDUC 621 Managing Higher Education
- ☐ EDUC 697SK Helping Skills\*
- ☐ EDUC 601 College Student Development Theory
- ☐ EDUC 641 Student Life Research
- ☐ Practicum\*
- ☐ Integrative Seminar

\* In consultation with advisors, students with five or more years of professional experience may waive Helping Skills and/or Practicum and choose additional electives instead.

## Foundations of Higher Education (EDUC 601A) OR Master's Seminar I (EDUC 643)

Foundations of Higher Education/Master's Seminar I is designed to be the first course for students in the master's degree program. Online students are encouraged to take this course as early on in their coursework as possible since it is a prerequisite for Master's Seminar II.

There are several goals for the semester:

- As a survey course it is designed to introduce you to different areas of study within higher education. You'll discover topics that you'll be inspired to delve in to in greater depth during your time as a master's student.



- You'll become familiar with the eight competencies in which you are expected to develop expertise during your time in the program.
- We'll focus on your writing, particularly how to write an academic paper using scholarly resources, how to develop and support an argument, and the various aspects of APA style.
- We'll discuss the importance of good nutrition, adequate sleep, exercise and self-care in your life and develop strategies to maintain balance in your life, both while you are a student and during your professional career.

## **Integrative Seminar (EDUC 675)**

During their final semester prior to graduation, master's students take Integrative Seminar. This course is the capstone experience for students completing their masters' degrees in Higher Education Administration. It is intended to allow you an opportunity to reflect upon your educational experience in the master's program and to demonstrate your knowledge of the higher education program's core competencies. In the integrative paper you will investigate a real-life challenge that stems from your professional practice (this could be your practicum or other work experience). The course culminates in a formal presentation.

The goal for this course is for each of you to develop a deeper understanding of the eight competencies associated with the higher education program. With two or more years of coursework and many more years of experience in higher education, you possess a great deal of knowledge from many different sources—including your own experiences as a student and administrator, informal theories that you have developed, formal theories that you have read about, and information synthesized from these and other sources. Your goal is to figure out how all of these things fit together to offer creative solutions to the many complex problems we face as higher education professionals.

Students with outstanding incomplete grades are not eligible for enrollment in this class. All outstanding work for courses with incompletes must be handed in to the instructor prior to the beginning of the semester when you plan to take Integrative. As part of this course, students will demonstrate their proficiency with the **HIGHER EDUCATION PROGRAM COMPETENCIES** through a capstone project and an oral defense, as designed by the course instructor.

## **Independent Studies & Supervised Practice**

Students interested in an academic topic that is not covered in the offered courses are invited to work on an independent study. Independent work may receive credit as an Independent Study provided that the work is performed under the guidance of a graduate faculty member and the course is properly recorded as part of the student's registration. When registering for an independent study, students create an Independent Study Contract to be signed by their advisor and supervising instructor.

Supervised Practice is also an option for those who would like another experiential component in their curriculum. Students have a faculty member sign off on the plan of study, and an external person typically

jointly supervises. You can think of this opportunity as a second practicum experience, which is how the College technically considers it.

Generally, students can take a maximum number of six independent study or supervised practice credits. If you have a compelling reason to take additional independent credits, talk to your advisor about your plans and submit your written request to the faculty as a whole for approval.

Forms for Independent Studies and Supervised Practice can be found on the College of Education [Degree Forms and Milestones page](#).

## **Advisor and Advising Forms (College of Education)**

Advising is an important part of our program, as we work with each student to make sure that the program meets your professional goals. The Higher Education Program assigns an adviser to each student during the admissions process. We recommend that students talk to their advisers during the first semester in order to select check in about course selection.

During your first semester, you may connect with a faculty member who is not your assigned adviser and decide you want to change advisers. Change of Advisor forms are on the [Degree Forms and Milestones page](#).

There are a series of forms to complete between starting coursework and graduating. The first form (M-1) details an intended program of study and should be filed during the first semester. Information pertaining to these forms can be found under the [Degree Forms and Milestones page](#).

## Sample Course of Study (5 Courses per year)

### First Year Courses (15 credits)

#### *Fall Semester*

Master's Seminar I OR Foundations of Higher Education  
College Student Development Theory

#### *Spring Semester*

Master's Seminar II  
Supporting Student Success

#### *Summer Semester*

Managing Higher Education

### Second Year Courses (15 credits)

#### *Fall Semester*

Student Life Research  
Helping Skills

#### *Spring Semester*

Practicum  
Elective

#### *Summer Semester*

Elective

### Third Year Courses (3 credits)

#### *Fall Semester*

Integrative Seminar  
Elective

## Sample Course of Study (3 Courses per year)

### First Year Courses (9 credits)

#### *Fall Semester*

Master's Seminar I OR Foundations of Higher Education

#### *Spring Semester*

Master's Seminar II

#### *Summer Semester*

Elective

### Second Year Courses (9 credits)

#### *Fall Semester*

Student Development Theory

#### *Spring Semester*

Supporting Student Success

#### *Summer Semester*

Elective

### Third Year Courses (9 credits)

#### *Fall Semester*

Student Life Research

#### *Spring Semester*

Managing Higher Education

#### *Summer Semester*

Practicum

### Fourth Year Courses (9 credits)

#### *Fall Semester*

Helping Skills

#### *Spring Semester*

Elective

#### *Summer Semester*

Integrative Seminar

## Sample Course of Study (Completed Certificate)

### First Year Courses (9 credits)

#### *Fall Semester*

Student Life Research  
Student Development Theory

#### *Spring Semester*

Master's Seminar II  
Supporting Student Success

### Second Year Courses (9 credits)

#### *Fall Semester*

Practicum or Elective  
Helping Skills

#### *Spring Semester*

Integrative Seminar

## Summary of Requirements

To summarize, all master's students must complete the following:

<b>FOUNDATION (CORE)</b>	<b>27 credits</b>
<i>Master's Seminar I or Foundations of Higher Education</i>	<i>(3 credits)</i>
<i>Master's Seminar II</i>	<i>(3 credits)</i>
<i>Managing Higher Education</i>	<i>(3 credits)</i>
<i>Supporting Student Success</i>	<i>(3 credits)</i>
<i>Student Development Theory</i>	<i>(3 credits)</i>
<i>Student Life Research</i>	<i>(3 credits)</i>
<i>Helping Skills</i>	<i>(3 credits)</i>
<i>Practicum</i>	
<i>Master's Integrative Seminar</i>	<i>(3 credits)</i>
	<i>(3 credits)</i>
<b>SPECIALIZATION COURSES</b>	<b>9 credits</b>
<b>TOTAL CREDITS</b>	<b>36 credits</b>