

## Knowledge Utilization Brief:

### *Data-driven Assessments of Leadership Preparation Programs*



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In recent years, increasing numbers of educational leadership scholars have examined leadership preparation program practices (Hackmann, 2013; Orr, 2010; Pounder, 2012; Young et al., 2009). In addition to increased engagement in research and development work, Pounder (2012) noted that the formation of the Taskforce on Evaluating Leadership Preparation Programs, jointly supported by UCEA and the Learning and Teaching in Educational Leadership Special Interest Group of the American Educational Research Association, has engaged educational leadership faculty in the development and piloting of outcomes-oriented evaluations of leadership-preparation program quality. Now, UCEA has extended this work by formally sponsoring the refinement of previous evaluative instruments and developing a suite of leadership preparation evaluation instruments, the Initiative for Systemic Program Improvement through Research in Educational Leadership (INSPIRE) survey suite.

Expressing optimism regarding the collection of data across institutions, Pounder stated,

as more leader preparation programs collect these common data, aggregation of these data across programs can lead to some powerful large sample national studies to test the multivariate relationship among preparation program elements and short- and long-term program and leadership outcomes. (p. 271)

The reform-oriented research, tools, and improvement processes developed and disseminated from within the profession, whether individually or through collaborative initiatives, offer great promise. As with state-level reform work, however, the adequacy of capacity and resources to engage in this type of extensive work is an important consideration as well as a factor limiting influence and impact.

### **UCEA Institutional Standards**

UCEA Institutional and Program Quality Criteria are used to review programs for initial membership in UCEA as well as within its program renewal and improvement processes. Each of these processes is multistage, evidence based, and goal oriented.

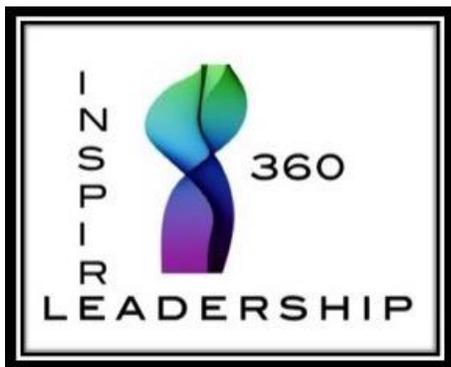
Membership in UCEA requires a rigorous, multistage review and renewal process—a process that carefully exams the quality of preparation and research programs. The process begins with the development of an application portfolio. Decisions on membership are made based on three categories of evidence: (a) eligibility, including consistency with UCEA’s standards of excellence; (b) consistency with UCEA’s Institution and Program Quality Standards (Appendix B); and (c) other supporting evidence. A set of rubrics and suggested sources of evidence are provided in the UCEA publication, *UCEA Institutional and Program Quality Criteria: Guidance for Master’s and Doctoral Programs in Educational Leadership* (Young et al., 2012).

After receiving an application portfolio, two UCEA Executive Committee members are assigned to thoroughly review the full set of application materials and provide an overview of the applicant’s strengths and weaknesses as well as note the absence of data necessary for rating the institution on one or more criteria. Depending on the strength of the application and availability of data, the Executive Committee will make a recommendation to either gather additional information, to send a site-visit team to the institution, or to let the institution know that its programs are ineligible for membership.

The site visitation is conducted by a team of two UCEA faculty with expertise in educational leadership development. The visit usually takes 2 full days and involves a combination of interviews with faculty, students, alumni, district partners, and institutional leadership; classroom observations; and a review of relevant program documents and evidence. Based on these sources of data, the visitation team submits a site-visitation report to the Executive Committee, which then makes a decision about recommending the institution to the broader membership for consideration, either as a full or provisional membership. Provisional membership is recommended for those institutions that are close to meeting membership criteria but still need to improve certain aspects of their program before full membership can be offered.

Representatives of member institutions are provided access to the applying institution's membership application portfolio and site-visit report. After a period of 30 days, the issue is put to a vote.

Continuation of membership in UCEA involves periodic self-study. The purpose of the self-study is to provide each member institution opportunities to (a) review its commitment to improve its programs in educational administration, (b) assess progress in the attainment of program goals, (c) exhibit unique program qualities and strengths, and (d) describe future program goals and opportunities. The self-study is facilitated by two UCEA resources: (a) *Developing Evaluation Evidence: A Formative and Summative Evaluation Planner for Educational Leadership Preparation Programs*, and (b) the [Initiative for Systemic Program Improvement through Research in Educational Leadership \(INSPIRE\) survey suite](#).



The evaluation planner is aligned with both the ELCC and UCEA standards and facilitates planning and data collection around preparation program evaluation and improvement. The planner includes a logic model, suggested sources of evidence to collect, worksheets, and key questions to drive program evaluation. The INSPIRE suite of surveys is also aligned with the ELCC and UCEA standards. It provides 360° data on the quality and impact of educational leadership preparation programs (teacher, leader and program perspectives), and it reflects the key elements of the evaluation planner logic model regarding how preparation impacts leadership, school conditions, and student learning.

## Quality Measures

The [QM Principal Preparation Program Quality Self-Assessment Rubrics](#) document asserts, “An effective self-assessment of principal preparation program quality requires a clear understanding by all participants in the process of what is meant by ‘quality’” (EDC, 2009, p. 4). Thus, the QM designers worked to develop user-friendly tools as well as a process that decreased ambiguity about what program elements were to be assessed and what would be considered as acceptable evidence.



QM places particular emphasis on the review and consideration of “supporting evidence” in determining the degree to which programs reflect research-based indicators of quality. Specifically, tools (e.g., rubrics and assessments) were developed to facilitate program self-assessment and to build consensus around the features and attributes of high quality programs. A hands-on program review involving program faculty and external consultants in the review of program artifacts, data, and faculty work is portrayed as invaluable and critical to the revision process. It is argued “that these tools and processes, when used together, will provide improved guidance to program self-assessment team efforts to more accurately determine the quality of their principal

preparation programs” (EDC, 2009, p. 2). They also calibrate the indicators of quality along a developmental scale (well-developed, developed, emerging, and beginning). These rubrics reflect the current research and lessons learned about principal preparation program quality and have been guided by the most recent version of the ISLLC standards (CCSSO, 2008a) and recent progress in the development of evaluation tools (Goldring, Porter, Murphy, Elliot, & Cravens, 2007) for assessing principal performance.

QM has been used primarily by principal preparation programs funded by The Wallace Foundation. Programs have used the QM rubrics, along with a handbook containing guidelines for selecting and analyzing credible evidence, to structure their self-assessment of core features. Self-assessments enable program teams to determine where they fall on a developmental scale and then use the results of the analysis to plan improvements in the quality of their programs.

Self-study models. The UCEA and QM process both involve a self-study component through which programs are gathering program information and candidate data to determine the degree to which (a) programs reflect the UCEA or QM criteria and (b) the impact of the program’s content and experiences on the candidate’s growth, career outcomes, and leadership performance. As described in Section 1, UCEA and QM offer tools (e.g., rubrics) to facilitate program self-assessments and to build consensus around the features and attributes of high quality programs. The tools reflect the current research and lessons learned about principal preparation program quality.

The new suite of preparation evaluation instruments available through UCEA enables faculty to dig more deeply into the questions of how preparation programs impact the knowledge and practice of graduates. The Initiative for Systemic Program Improvement through Research in Educational Leadership (INSPIRE) survey suite, includes a program features survey, a candidate survey, a practicing principal survey, and a teacher survey. Together the surveys provide data that help programs assess the quality and impact of various program features and content areas. When used in conjunction with the *Developing Evaluation Evidence* program evaluation planner (Orr, Young, & Rorrer, 2010), program faculty are guided through evaluation design, data collection, analysis

and improvement cycles. Given that most programs are guided by their own theory of action or program theory, which connect choices in program content, delivery, and design to expected outcomes, the surveys and planner support a variety of program designs and their unique features.

Critical friends reviews. Critical friends reviews reflect the processes used by UCEA, QM and the process described by Murphy et al. (2008). They generally involve program self-assessments; external review of program documents, data, and artifacts; feedback to program faculty including recommendations; and, in some cases, technical assistance. The QM handbook asserts, “These tools and processes, when used together, will provide improved guidance to program self-assessment team efforts to more accurately determine the quality of their principal preparation programs” (EDC, 2009, p. 2). These processes resemble in some ways the accreditation review processes used by NCATE and TEAC, in that they are standards and evidence based, but they take the review one step further by providing programs with actionable feedback and advice.



This brief is part of a Knowledge Utilization Brief series supported by a grant from The Wallace Foundation. The intent of the series is to highlight and share recent empirical research regarding effective leadership preparation and development, particularly research commissioned by The Wallace Foundation, with faculty, staff, and leaders at the program, institutional, and state levels, as these individuals are in positions to use this research to make positive changes. Available for downloading at <http://ucea.org/research-utilization-briefs/>

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