

Rooted in Care, Designed for Impact:

Advancing Scholar-Practitioners through an Inclusive and Innovative EdD Program

Jessica Marotta 
Marymount University
jmarotta@marymount.edu

Clara Hauth 
Marymount University
chauth@marymount.edu

Jennifer Crystle 
Marymount University
jcrystle@marymount.edu

Ruth Boyd 
Marymount University
rboyd@marymount.edu

Jennifer Thompson 
Marymount University
jthomps@marymount.edu

ABSTRACT

This article highlights the design, implementation, and impact of Marymount University's EdD in Educational Leadership and Organizational Innovation, a program recognized as a finalist for the Carnegie Project on the Education Doctorate (CPED) Program of the Year Award. Grounded in equity, innovation, and care, the program prepares diverse mid- to senior-level professionals as scholar-practitioners who address complex problems of practice across sectors. Using the CPED Framework as a foundation, the program is organized around four High-Impact Student Experience pillars: intentional program design, high-touch student support, a reimagined dissertation mentorship model, and transformative student engagement. Through collaborative self-study, stakeholder reflection, and evidence of student, faculty, and alumni outcomes, this article demonstrates how the program advances leadership capacity, fosters equity-centered inquiry, and strengthens communities of practice. The findings contribute to scholarship on EdD program transformation and underscore the potential of CPED-aligned models to cultivate lasting institutional and societal impact.

KEYWORDS

EdD programs, CPED framework, equity-centered leadership, scholar-practitioners, program design

The Carnegie Project on the Education Doctorate (CPED) Program of the Year (POY) Award serves as a distinguished recognition of exemplary and innovative EdD programs that demonstrate commitment to the preparation of scholarly practitioners who are equipped to lead transformative change in organizational settings. While the award highlights a single annual winner, the finalists represent a select group of institutions whose contributions to doctoral education merit equal scholarly attention. This article emerges from such a distinction: our EdD program was named a finalist for the POY award, a designation that affirmed both the innovation embedded in our program design and the depth of reflection that informed our application process.

CPED's Program of the Year application process gave us the opportunity to pause, reflect, and celebrate what makes the Marymount EdD program both distinctive and deeply impactful. What began as a documentation effort quickly revealed itself as something more: a compelling narrative of innovation, care, and transformation that we were proud to share. From the program's inception, we set out to build something innovative: a doctoral experience grounded in equity, care, and innovation that would serve a diverse community of professionals across sectors. We discovered that we already had a powerful story to tell, which was rooted in data, student experiences,

and the evolution of a program intentionally designed around the CPED Framework. Our story included how our innovative EdD program has transformed not just our curriculum, but the lives of our students, faculty, and the communities they serve. It was a chance to engage in meaningful self-study, share evidence of our program's growth, and uplift the voices of our students and alumni who are driving change in real time. The application itself became a collaborative celebration of purpose, perseverance, and possibility, and we were honored to contribute to the collective learning and excellence of the CPED community.

While we were not selected as the final recipient of the Program of the Year award, the application process itself was both energizing and deeply affirming. Engaging in the rigorous self-study and critical reflection required for submission led to a collective re-examination of our program's theoretical foundations, pedagogical practices, and measurable outcomes. This introspective journey not only validated the strength of our model but also deepened our commitment to the CPED framework. As a result, we emerged with a clearer understanding of how its principles are realized across our curriculum, faculty development, student learning experiences, mentor training sessions, and the broader research contributions of our community.



New articles in this journal are licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 United States License.



This journal is published by Pitt Open Library Publishing.



This journal is supported by the Carnegie Project on the Education Doctorate: A Knowledge Forum on the EdD (CPED) cpedinitiative.org

impacting.ed.pitt.edu
Vol.11 No.2 (2026)

ISSN 2472-5889 (online)
DOI 10.5195/ie.2026.551



This manuscript shares the story of our program's development, innovation, and impact before, during, and following our POY application journey. We begin with an overview of the program's purpose and structure, followed by a demonstration of how the CPED principles are operationalized within our context. We then describe the process through which faculty and stakeholders engaged in collaborative inquiry and critical reflection, highlighting the innovations that emerged from this work. Finally, we offer evidence of the program's influence on students, institutions, and the broader educational community. In doing so, we aim to contribute to the growing body of scholarship on EdD program transformation and to inspire ongoing dialogue among CPED member institutions.

Program Overview

Situated in Arlington, Virginia, within the dynamic and globally connected Washington, D.C. metropolitan region, Marymount University is a comprehensive, private, Roman Catholic institution committed to fostering intellectual curiosity, service to others, and a global perspective. Guided by its institutional motto, *Learn with Purpose*, Marymount emphasizes community engagement and scholarly impact, preparing leaders who aim to enhance the quality of life, economic vitality, and social equity across the diverse communities they serve. As Virginia's only designated Hispanic-Serving Institution (HSI), Marymount University is ranked among the top 300 universities nationally by U.S. News & World Report, first among all private universities in Virginia, and its Graduate School of Education is also nationally ranked. Marymount University has received dual national recognitions in the recently released 2025 Carnegie Classifications of Institutions of Higher Education, earning both the Research Colleges and Universities (RCU) and Opportunity Colleges and Universities (OCU) designations. Marymount joins an elite group of only 33 institutions nationwide honored for both research excellence and expanding student access and success, reflecting its mission to foster innovation while supporting diverse learners. Marymount offers a richly inclusive academic environment that is grounded in diversity, innovation, and a commitment to purposeful leadership.

Marymount University's motto, *Learn with Purpose*, resonates deeply in our EdD program. Our students are not just earning a degree, they are stepping into a lifelong role as learners, leaders, researchers, and advocates for change. The Doctor of Education (EdD) in Educational Leadership and Organizational Innovation, launched in 2020, was conceived in alignment with Marymount's mission and the CPED framework to develop scholarly practitioners capable of leading transformational change across sectors. The program serves mid- to senior-level professionals from a wide array of disciplines, preparing them to address pressing challenges through inquiry, innovation, and practice. The EdD program is structured to accommodate working professionals, offering a flexible, online learning format with embedded fieldwork and collaborative inquiry. Each student's academic journey is scaffolded by faculty mentorship and supported through cohort-based learning communities that emphasize collective knowledge building and equity-centered leadership.

From the outset, the Marymount EdD program has sought to embody the CPED principle of "scholarly practitioners who blend practical wisdom with professional skills and theoretical knowledge to solve problems of practice" (CPED, n.d.). The diversity of our student body in terms of race, ethnicity, age, geography, and professional sector further illustrates our commitment to expanding access and

embracing the complexity of problems of practice across settings. Since its inception, the program has drawn students from over 40 U.S. states and three countries, representing a broad range of career sectors including education, business, healthcare, non-profit management, military service, and government leadership. What unites our students is a shared commitment to making a meaningful impact. They are thoughtful, collaborative, and eager to grow. This program is designed for those who are driven by a passion for leadership, equity, and innovation. It is for individuals who are determined to create positive change and leave their organizations and communities better than they found them.

The program enrolls two cohorts per academic year. Across Cohorts 1 through 10 (2020–2025), the program has enrolled students ranging in age from their twenties to their seventies, reflecting a truly intergenerational learning community. In terms of racial and ethnic diversity, 41% of students identify as Black, 36% as White, 5% as Hispanic, 5% as Asian, 4% as two or more races, and 8% as other or undisclosed. The program also reflects gender diversity, with 80% of students identifying as female and 20% as male. Our students embody the CPED vision of scholarly practitioners, who bring their own professional expertise and lived experiences, by learning with and from one another to drive change.

This diversity enriches classroom dialogue, enhances peer learning, and fosters a robust community of inquiry (Garrison et al., 2001), in which students draw upon personal and professional experiences to interrogate theory and apply research to practice. Since the program's launch, 211 students have successfully completed the degree, graduating in under three years, with an average retention rate of 77%. These outcomes reflect both the effectiveness of the program design and the supportive structures cultivated by a diverse and experienced faculty body. The program is led by 23 core faculty members and 78 Lead Doctoral Faculty Mentors (LDFMs). Lead Doctoral Faculty Mentors include full and part-time faculty who serve as dissertation chairs. Together, our community of faculty brings unique disciplinary expertise, practitioner experience, and regional perspectives to their mentorship of students.

Evidence of Alignment with CPED Principles: A Model of Innovation Rooted in Purpose, Community, and Care

"Creativity takes courage," Henri Matisse (The Socratic Method, n.d.) once stated, and this sentiment has come to symbolize the visionary ethos behind the development of Marymount University's EdD program. Designed not merely to fulfill an institutional mandate, but to boldly reimagine what a CPED-aligned professional practice doctorate could be, our program emerged from a foundational belief: that educational leadership should not only serve to administer systems but to transform them. Conceived in 2019 by a collaborative team of faculty and administrators within the School of Education, the Marymount EdD was rooted from its inception in the CPED Framework. We employed the CPED Design Concept as a blueprint for building an inclusive, innovative, and equity-driven program from the ground up. We intentionally grounded our early design discussions in CPED's mission to "prepare leaders who can construct and apply knowledge to make a positive difference in the lives of individuals, families, organizations, and communities" (CPED, n.d.).

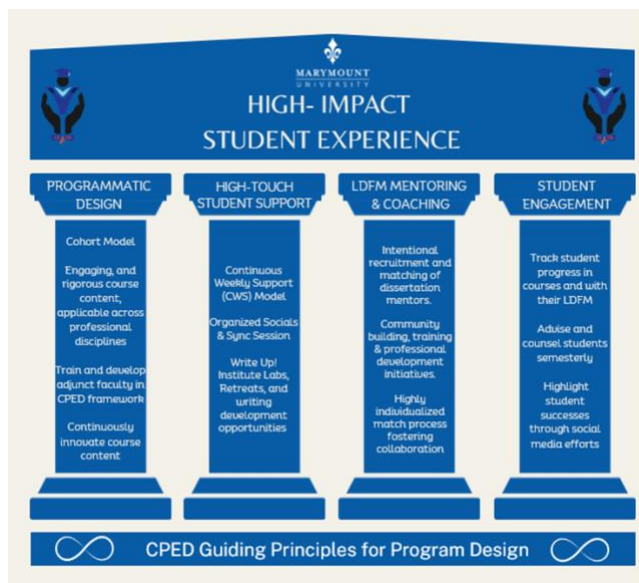


To ensure that our program design reflected both scholarly rigor and practitioner relevance, the founding faculty engaged in critical reflection, drawing on their own doctoral experiences and posing four guiding questions:

1. How can we expand the EdD across sectors to promote an inclusive community of scholarly practitioners equipped to promote social justice?
2. How do we foster authentic community among students, faculty, and mentors in a fully online setting?
3. How can we refine our high-touch support structures to ensure both academic rigor and holistic care?
4. How do we structure mentorship to cultivate scholarly practitioners rather than passive consumers of knowledge?

These reflective questions, infused with the values of equity, inquiry, and improvement and grounded in the CPED Guiding Principles, help our program offer a cohesive and humanizing approach to doctoral education, an approach we refer to as the *High-Impact Student Experience*, shaped by four interrelated pillars that work in concert to support transformational learning.

Figure 1. Marymount University EdD Program High-Impact Pillars



From the very beginning, intentional programmatic design, the first pillar, guided the structure and content of the program. Every course was strategically aligned with CPED’s six guiding principles, ensuring that students could connect theoretical concepts to practical applications across professional contexts. In spring 2022, an IRB-approved study invited students to share concrete ideas for more clearly integrating the CPED Framework into their learning experience. When students were asked how the CPED Principles influence their approach to work (Marotta, 2022), they shared that these principles have become an integral part of their professional mindset—informing their leadership style, guiding their decisions, and shaping their everyday practices. Many shared that these principles have sharpened their focus on equity and social justice, encouraging them to lead with empathy, elevate the voices of others, and address systemic challenges with a critical lens. The integration of theory, research, and practice was noted as especially impactful,

enabling them to apply what they have learned directly to real-world problems such as redesigning policies to implementing community-focused solutions. The emphasis on ethical leadership and collaboration has transformed how they communicate with colleagues and stakeholders, fostering inclusive partnerships and more intentional decision-making. Across roles and sectors, respondents from the study emphasized that the CPED Principles have equipped them not only to identify challenges but to pursue thoughtful, research-informed, and equitable solutions that make a meaningful impact (Marotta, 2022).

Our cohort model was adopted to foster peer collaboration and reduce the isolation often experienced in online doctoral programs (Perry & Abruzzo, 2020). Within these cohorts, students engage in reflective journaling, peer dialogue, and assignments that not only promote cross-sector understanding but also deepen each learner’s capacity to lead through inquiry and reflection. These design choices empower students from education, healthcare, business, and public service to engage fully and authentically with the curriculum through the lens of their unique experiences.

Complementing this strong design is a second pillar: high-touch student support, which comes to life through our Continuous Weekly Support (CWS). Rooted in the principles of andragogy (Knowles et al., 1973), transformative learning experiences (Mezirow et al., 2009; Taylor, 2007) and informed by the Community of Inquiry framework (Garrison et al., 2001), the CWS model ensures students receive regular feedback, timely communication, and personalized outreach. Faculty meet monthly to share strategies and revise supports in real time, ensuring that student needs remain at the center of the program’s evolution. Synchronous elements such as virtual office hours, course sessions, and cohort socials further reinforce a sense of belonging and build the social presence critical to online learning success. We believe that students grow by doing. They take on big ideas and apply them directly to the issues they are facing in their workplaces. Along the way, they build skills in strategic planning, communication, research, technology, collaboration, coaching, program evaluation, risk management, and ethical-focused leadership. It is not just about understanding theory. It is about driving meaningful change. Students complete the program equipped and empowered to lead that change in their professional settings.

A third innovation is our reimagining of dissertation mentorship through the Lead Doctoral Faculty Mentor (LDFM) model which incorporates a deeply personalized and student-centered matching process to humanizes the dissertation experience and support meaningful mentor-mentee relationships. This process is intentionally designed and led by a dedicated team that invests considerable time and care into ensuring each student is thoughtfully paired with a mentor whose expertise, availability, and advising style aligns with the student’s needs and research focus. Potential LDFMs are invited to participate in virtual information sessions, after which interested individuals submit a brief video and their CV. These materials are carefully reviewed and coded by the LDFM leadership team to identify potential matches. Our LDFMs, drawn from both academic and professional backgrounds, serve as personalized guides throughout the dissertation process, helping students navigate the rigor and relevance of research while fostering a scholarly identity.

Students are introduced to the LDFM process in their third semester through a live session and are given a digital roadmap booklet that outlines the value of the mentoring relationship and guidance on how to navigate their dissertation journey. They also



complete a detailed Topic and Match Survey, which captures key information about their research interests, methodology, preferred working style, and anticipated challenges. This information is used to make intentional matches that prioritize compatibility and support. The mentoring relationship officially begins in the fourth semester, and from the outset, students benefit from this tailored support system. LDFMs receive ongoing professional development, participate in coaching conversations, and contribute to a vibrant community of mentorship. This approach is rooted in an ethic of care (Noddings, 2013) and is designed to ensure that every student feels seen, supported, and empowered. Alumni consistently describe the LDFM match as a transformative experience that not only enhanced academic progress but fostered personal growth and confidence throughout the dissertation process.

Our fourth pillar, transformative student engagement, is exemplified by the *Write Up! Institute*, a signature program that addresses one of the most challenging aspects of doctoral work: scholarly writing. Originally launched as a writing retreat, the Institute has evolved into a year-round ecosystem of support, offering synchronous labs, asynchronous modules, writing accountability groups, and author talks. These events function as living laboratories of practice, where students build writing fluency, research confidence, and academic momentum, particularly for those entering the program without a strong research background. Responsive to student feedback, the *Write Up! Institute* continues to grow and adapt, ensuring that writing support remains accessible, inclusive, and empowering.

Together, these four pillars form a comprehensive and interconnected model of doctoral education that goes beyond degree completion. At Marymount, students are not just completing coursework but they are developing as scholar-practitioners who lead with inquiry, advocate for equity, and build communities of care and impact within their professional spheres. The program's design reflects more than academic alignment with CPED's mission; it embodies a philosophy of learning that is rigorous, relational, and transformative. Through this model, we continue to prepare leaders who learn with purpose and lead with courage. Above all, we hope they leave the program with a strong, confident understanding of themselves as leaders who are actively influencing the future of their organizations and communities.

Our program design is supported by CPED's call to engage students in inquiry as practice and to address equity, ethics, and social justice. Students are supported to identify their Problem of Practice early in the program and engage with it iteratively across their coursework. This scaffolded engagement leads to the development of a five-chapter dissertation focused on real-world impact and community transformation. Their dissertations are more than just academic exercises, they are blueprints for change. We have had students influence legislation, improve access in schools, and launch innovations in healthcare and business.

In alignment with CPED's guiding principles, we view innovation not as a one-time initiative, but as a sustained commitment to reflection, responsiveness, and community-centered change. Our growth—from 30 students in the first cohort to over 300 enrolled and 211 graduates in under five years—is a testament to the relevance and vitality of our model. Yet, beyond numbers, it is the lived experience of our students, faculty, and alumni—their transformation into scholarly practitioners and agents of change—that best reflects our program's alignment with CPED values and vision.

Program's Impact on Students, the Institution, Communities Served, and Faculty

Our program has generated meaningful and wide-reaching impacts on students, faculty, alumni, and the diverse communities they represent. Anchored in the CPED mission to develop scholarly practitioners who use inquiry to advance equity and drive systemic change, the program's innovative design—its High-Impact Student Experience—has led to significant measurable outcomes at the individual, organizational, and community levels.

Impact on Students as Scholarly Practitioners

The program has cultivated a strong scholarly identity among students and alumni, evidenced by the growing number of participants who have shared their engagement in research, publication, conference presentations, and advocacy. Survey and interview data consistently reflect that students' perceptions of themselves as scholar-practitioners have been transformed through their engagement with rigorous coursework, high-touch mentorship, and the Dissertation in Practice (DiP) process.

The inclusion of students from diverse professional sectors has been a clear and consistent strength of our program, with 100% of respondents affirming that it added value to their experience. Students shared that interacting with peers from fields such as business, healthcare, non-profits, and government broadened their perspectives, allowing for richer, more nuanced discussions around leadership and organizational change. These cross-sector interactions sparked innovation, as students borrowed ideas and best practices from outside their own industries. The diversity of thought also enhanced problem-solving skills, encouraged collaborative learning, and reinforced the practical application of course content in multiple contexts. Many students noted that this mix of backgrounds helped them avoid *echo chambers* and fostered a deeper appreciation for varied approaches to similar challenges. In addition to academic enrichment, students valued the relationships they built across sectors, forming supportive networks and friendships that extended beyond the classroom. The professional diversity within cohorts not only elevated the learning environment but also contributed meaningfully to students' personal growth, leadership development, and career readiness.

In a recent alumni survey, 96.4% of respondents affirmed that the DiP experience was a profoundly transformative journey for students, both professionally and personally. Many described the process as their first real immersion into scholarly research that challenged their assumptions, stretched their skills, and ultimately built their confidence in designing, conducting, and applying research to real-world problems. Students reported gaining a deeper understanding of how to integrate data, validate practice, and communicate findings with clarity and confidence which are skills central now to their professional leadership. Beyond the technical growth, the DiP journey served as a powerful vehicle for personal reflection and emotional growth. For some, it was an opportunity to honor loved ones or confront long-standing challenges within their communities. Others found renewed motivation and clarity in their purpose, often naming the DiP as the moment they truly began to see themselves as scholars and leaders. The experience also fostered a strong sense of community and collaboration, helping students build lasting peer networks and combat feelings of imposter syndrome. Overall, the DiP was more than a culminating project. It was a transformational process that reshaped how students



understand themselves, their roles, and their capacity to lead meaningful change.

Additionally, students consistently apply their doctoral learning to their workplaces. From succession planning in government agencies to trauma-informed policies in education and equity initiatives in corporate settings, students report using their coursework and research to effect meaningful change in real time. The responses from alumni clearly demonstrate that their doctoral education has had a powerful and lasting impact on their motivation to pursue career advancement. For many, the decision to enroll was driven by a desire to grow professionally, and the program has exceeded those expectations by equipping them with the confidence, leadership skills, and scholarly identity necessary to explore new opportunities. Graduates have shared that the program inspired them to seek roles in school and district leadership, nonprofit management, corporate learning and development, and higher education, including teaching and research positions. Some were promoted or actively applied for new roles during the program, while others expressed newfound aspirations to influence policy or pursue a second career in academia. Even those not immediately seeking a change noted a renewed sense of empowerment and readiness. Collectively, these reflections underscore the program's ability to cultivate bold, capable, and mission-driven leaders prepared to make a meaningful impact in their respective fields.

When asked how the EdD program will continue to influence their lives, alumni described it as a transformative journey with enduring effects on both their personal growth and professional trajectories. Many anticipate continued career advancement, with aspirations to take on leadership roles in higher education, corporate learning, and research-focused positions. Equally prominent is the theme of lifelong learning, as alumni expressed a commitment to ongoing research, application of theoretical knowledge, and revisiting program materials to inform future work. The program has also shaped students' leadership identities, instilling confidence, critical thinking, and a readiness to lead with integrity and purpose. Importantly, many noted the value of the networks and relationships formed during the program, which they expect to draw on for professional collaboration and personal support. Graduates also described an increase in credibility and recognition, citing greater respect from peers, enhanced professional visibility, and a stronger sense of authority in their fields. In addition, the program fostered significant personal growth, building self-confidence, resilience, and a renewed sense of purpose. Lastly, many reflected on their ongoing contributions to their communities and professions, underscoring the program's ability to cultivate scholar-practitioners who lead with impact, empathy, and a deep commitment to service.

Impact on the Program and Institutional Culture

In our program, continuous feedback is not just a process; it is a part of our program's DNA. From day one, the EdD program was designed with intentional mechanisms for reflection and improvement, and this commitment has fueled a steady cycle of meaningful innovation. Mid-course evaluations, alumni surveys, and structured faculty discussions have helped the program evolve thoughtfully while remaining true to its original mission. Key enhancements, such as strengthening the LDFM mentoring model, expanding the *Write Up! Institute*, and more deeply embedding CPED Principles into the curriculum, are direct results of listening to and learning from the community it serves.

Marotta's (2022) study invited students to share concrete ideas for more clearly integrating the CPED Framework into their learning experience. Their feedback was both insightful and actionable. Faculty responded by redesigning syllabi, refining assignments, and aligning fieldwork more explicitly with CPED's Guiding Principles, ensuring that students could clearly see the connection between their coursework and their development as scholar-practitioners. The program's continued involvement in CPED's national Rubric Study only underscores its commitment to data-driven improvement.

Faculty engagement has been equally strong and equally reflective. When surveyed and interviewed, faculty consistently described the CPED Principles as essential to their pedagogy, particularly in designing inclusive, practice-based assignments and fostering deeper collaboration in an online environment. This spirit of reciprocal engagement, where students and faculty learn with and from one another, is central to Marymount's identity as a vibrant, evolving community of scholarly practitioners.

Alumni reflections on their time in the EdD program consistently highlight a deep and authentic sense of care that extended far beyond academics. Many shared powerful stories of receiving emotional support during some of life's most difficult moments, grief, illness, and personal crises, where faculty, mentors, and peers prioritized their well-being just as much as their academic progress. The program's culture of compassion was evident through flexible deadlines, personalized check-ins, and a willingness to adapt expectations with empathy. Students frequently noted how faculty recognized their full humanity, offering not only academic guidance but emotional reassurance and encouragement. In addition to faculty care, the bonds formed within peer groups created a strong sense of belonging, where students cheered one another on and stayed connected well beyond the classroom. This atmosphere of support had a transformative impact: it restored motivation, reduced stress, improved mental health, and reignited confidence in both learning and leadership. For many, this care became a lifeline, allowing them to persevere, succeed, and thrive both academically and personally within a program that truly lived its values.

Impact on Communities and Organizations Served

Through their DiPs and professional roles, our EdD students are serving as change agents in education, healthcare, government, non-profits, and corporate sectors. DiP titles reflect pressing issues in policy, practice, and equity—ranging from university hazing prevention to mental health support for educators to succession planning in public agencies.

Survey and interview data reveal that alumni are not only transforming their own practices but also influencing broader organizational and community change. Graduates consistently described how they have directly applied coursework, concepts, and activities across a wide range of leadership settings. Many credited the coaching and leadership development courses with transforming how they mentor colleagues, lead teams, and build capacity within their organizations. Others used their learning to design and implement crisis management plans, succession strategies, and inclusive policies that promote equity and belonging. Program evaluation frameworks were also widely adopted, helping alumni refine initiatives and assess effectiveness within their workplaces. Enhanced communication skills, drawn from course materials and discussions, have improved their ability to connect with stakeholders across roles. The program also spurred personal growth by



encouraging deeper self-awareness, empathy, and leadership clarity. Several alumni shared that they are using their research to guide organizational change, teaching courses, or sharing scholarly resources with staff. Perhaps most inspiring is the ongoing network of professional relationships and collaborations that continue to flourish, further extending the reach of what they learned. From strategy to scholarship, the EdD program has left a lasting and measurable imprint on how alumni lead, grow, and influence their professional environments. A particularly compelling example is that of Dr. Courtney White (Cohort 2), whose dissertation on hazing led to national-level policy and training programs that have influenced both high schools and universities.

When alumni were asked if they observed any positive impact on others because of their EdD journey, their responses make it clear that the ripple effects of the EdD journey extend far beyond individual transformation. Graduates are inspiring change in their communities, organizations, and professional networks. Many described how their research and leadership development have empowered them to raise critical questions about equity, advocate for more inclusive practices, and expand opportunities for those they serve. Their work has sparked new conversations, motivated others, and led to tangible improvements in team collaboration and organizational effectiveness. Some have contributed to civic initiatives or influenced public discourse, while others are using their expertise to uplift colleagues and build stronger, more equitable systems. Whether through mentoring, policy development, or simply modeling effective leadership, alumni are not only growing themselves, but they are igniting growth and change in others.

Impact on Faculty

Faculty have experienced their own professional growth through involvement in the High-Impact Student Experience. Many reported that working with a diverse student body from across sectors broadened their perspectives and expanded their own scholarly practices. Faculty also model scholarly engagement by co-authoring articles, presenting at national conferences, and participating in CPED learning exchanges. The number of these collaborations have been consistently growing over time. Moreover, the LDFM model has redefined mentorship as a collaborative, equity-centered practice. Through structured onboarding, professional development, and community-building efforts, the LDFM network functions not just as a student support mechanism but as a faculty learning community grounded in CPED's mentoring framework. The shared ethic of care (Noddings, 2013) and mutual learning between mentors and mentees deepens the program's overall impact and sustains its high levels of retention and student satisfaction. Our faculty have provided their perspectives on how an ethic of care within the context of education emphasizes a holistic approach to student well-being, empathy, strong relationships, recognition of external responsibilities, and strong mentorship. We are proud to share our faculty's perspectives on their role in the High-Impact Student Experience, through individualized support, comprehensive guidance, empathy for students' unique challenges, and fostering an inclusive, supportive community.

Faculty highlight the strong and consistent value they place on the CPED Guiding Principles in shaping Marymount's EdD program. Faculty emphasize that the principles serve as a foundation for ensuring both the quality and focus of the program, offering a clear framework that is woven throughout coursework, instructional design, and the overall student experience. They note that having a

shared set of principles provides a cohesive vision that informs decision-making at every level from individual course design to faculty collaboration and long-term program planning. This shared philosophy supports consistency, intentionality, and alignment with the program's mission. Additionally, faculty speak to the importance of CPED as a professional learning community, offering opportunities for collaboration, reflection, and innovation beyond the institution. Engaging with the broader CPED network encourages ongoing growth and prevents insular thinking, allowing faculty to exchange ideas, draw from best practices, and refine their approach to developing scholar-practitioners. Together, these insights reflect the deep influence CPED has on the program's culture of continuous improvement, shared leadership, and collective purpose.

Faculty have offered powerful examples of how the CPED Guiding Principles are seamlessly woven into the fabric of Marymount's EdD coursework. One of the most compelling themes to emerge was the intentional connection to real-life experiences as faculty described how they adapt course content to reflect current events, using timely examples and interactive feedback to ground learning in the realities their students face as professionals. Assignments are purposefully designed to be practical and relevant, such as the toolbox and passion project activities, which challenge students to design meaningful, equity-centered solutions for real-world problems. These are not just abstract exercises. They are blueprints for action students can carry back into their organizations. Faculty have also fostered emotional and personal engagement by sharing their own stories, inviting students to connect with the material on a deeper level, and creating space for reflection that sparks both empathy and insight. Throughout their courses, instructors emphasize the construction and application of knowledge, encouraging students to learn from historical missteps, critically assess systems, and apply what they've learned to drive positive change. Altogether, these examples reflect a learning environment that is intellectually rigorous, emotionally resonant, and rooted in practice which bring the CPED Principles to life in ways that are both powerful and enduring.

In response to how diversity across professional sectors enhances the uniqueness of our program, faculty emphasized that one of Marymount's EdD program's greatest strengths lies in the wide range of experiences, perspectives, and insights students bring from their varied fields (Marotta, 2022). With students coming from sectors such as education, healthcare, the military, law, business, and counseling, the classroom becomes a dynamic space where real-world application and interdisciplinary insight flourish. Faculty emphasized how students not only learn from course content, but equally from one another, often drawing unexpected connections across professional boundaries that deepen understanding and foster collaboration. This diversity transforms assignments, online synchronous sessions, and discussions into opportunities for shared learning, where a special education teacher and a corporate executive can engage meaningfully with the same leadership concepts. For faculty, this environment also sparks their own professional growth, challenging them to adapt their roles from content experts to coaches and collaborators, especially when mentoring students in fields far outside their own. In this way, the program's diversity is not only a hallmark of its student experience but also a driver of continuous innovation in faculty practice.

Faculty have noted that the diversity of professional sectors has stretched them to reveal a rich opportunity of growth, reflection, and renewed purpose. Many describe how teaching in the EdD program



has pushed them beyond their disciplinary comfort zones, prompting ongoing learning and adaptation to effectively support students from fields such as healthcare, business, law enforcement, and nonprofit leadership. This continual learning has become a defining aspect of their practice, as faculty seek out new resources, explore unfamiliar sectors, and translate content into multiple professional languages. Just as significantly, faculty have expressed deep humility and inspiration from their students, often noting that they learn as much from student experiences and insights as they offer in return. This mutual learning dynamic has expanded faculty members' perspectives on leadership, enriched their teaching strategies, and opened new avenues for critical inquiry. The result is a more collaborative, innovative environment where faculty reimagine their roles, not just as instructors, but as responsive, equity-minded partners in a shared learning journey. The diversity of the student body, in short, has not only elevated classroom dialogue but has also fundamentally transformed the way faculty approach their craft.

Behind the Appendices: A Collaborative and Reflective Process

The appendices (almost 30) included in our application were the result of thoughtful planning, sustained time investment, and collaborative engagement among faculty, staff, students, and alumni of the Marymount EdD program. Together, these materials reflect a program deeply committed to self-study, data-informed decision-making, and community-driven innovation, which are all hallmarks of our approach to continuous improvement.

As we assembled these documents, we quickly realized that the story of our program was already embedded in the data and experiences we had been collecting all along. What emerged was not just evidence, but a compelling narrative of how an intentionally designed program can foster transformational learning, leadership, and care. Over several months, faculty and leadership contributed time beyond their teaching, mentoring, research, and service responsibilities to ensure the data were both accurate and meaningful. Their collaborative efforts extended to the technical and visual presentation of these materials, enhancing clarity and accessibility.

To authentically represent the scope and impact of the program, we engaged a wide array of stakeholders, including current students, alumni, Lead Doctoral Faculty Mentors (LDFMs), full- and part-time faculty, and program staff. Through formal surveys, individual interviews, and informal conversations, we invited them to share their insights, reflections, and lived experiences. This outreach spanned all cohorts and professional sectors, ensuring the diverse perspectives that shape and strengthen our program were meaningfully included in every appendix.

Demographic data and survey findings were gathered through systematic program assessment processes and IRB-approved studies. These include mid-course surveys, exit surveys, alumni feedback, and interview protocols. Quantitative data were synthesized into charts and visual representations, while qualitative responses were analyzed thematically to identify trends, values, and areas of strength or improvement. Faculty and student experiences were documented through structured interviews and reflective prompts. These interviews provided invaluable insight into the program's ethic of care, the impact of the CPED framework, and the evolving role of faculty mentors. Special attention was paid to

understanding how diverse professional backgrounds influenced learning, leadership growth, and community impact.

The assembly of these appendices required not only information gathering but also thoughtful curation, ensuring that each item contributed to a holistic understanding of the program. Materials were carefully selected to showcase the alignment with CPED Principles, the intentional design of the student experience, and the lasting effects on practice, leadership, and equity. Together, these appendices stand as a testament to the intentional, inclusive, and reflective culture of the Marymount EdD program. They represent not just documentation, but the shared commitment of a scholarly community dedicated to preparing leaders who learn with purpose, lead with care, and transform the world around them.

Summary: A Ripple Effect of Transformative Practice

The Marymount EdD program exemplifies a living, reflective model of doctoral education. Through collaborative inquiry, continuous self-study, and a steadfast commitment to the CPED Framework, faculty and stakeholders have created a program that does not simply implement innovation but generates it, studies it, and reimagines it in service of students and their communities. Our EdD program continues to grow in scope, relevance, and impact. Through its four pillars, Intentional Program Design, High-Touch Student Support, LDFM Mentorship, and Transformative Engagement, the program exemplifies CPED's vision of a professional practice doctorate. The program's emphasis on inclusion, inquiry, and leadership is producing graduates who are transforming not only their own professional paths but also their organizations and communities.

As alumni from early cohorts continue to rise into leadership roles, publish scholarly work, and mentor others, the ripple effect of the Marymount EdD becomes increasingly visible. This sustained and systemic impact affirms the promise of the program and its alignment with CPED's mission: to develop scholarly practitioners who enact change grounded in research, guided by ethical principles, and driven by a commitment to equity and excellence. We were honored to document for our POY application what we have been witnessing firsthand: how personalized support, a sense of belonging, and access to rigorous, relevant learning environments empower students to thrive. Student success is not just completion of coursework, grades, or a degree. Student success is about transformation, confidence, a mindset, and readiness to lead with purpose.

REFERENCES

- Carnegie Project on the Education Doctorate (CPED). (n.d.). *The CPED Framework*. <https://www.cpedinitiative.org/the-framework>
- Garrison, D. R., Anderson, T., & Archer, W. (2001). Critical thinking, cognitive presence, and computer conferencing in distance education. *American Journal of Distance Education*, 15(1), 1, 7–23. <https://doi.org/10.1080/08923640109527071>
- Knowles, M. S., Holton, E. F. III, Swanson, R. A., & Robinson, P. A. (1973). *The adult learner: A neglected species*. Gulf Publication Company.
- Marotta, J. (2022). [Unpublished raw data on the perceptions of CPED principles in online EdD program]. Marymount University.
- Mezirow, J., Taylor, E. W., & Associates. (2009). *Transformative learning in practice: Insights from community, workplace, and higher education*. Jossey-Bass.



- Noddings, N. (2013). *Caring: A relational approach to ethics and moral education*. University of California Press.
- Perry, J. A., & Abruzzo, E. (2020). Preparing the scholarly practitioner: The importance of socialization in CPED-influenced EdD programs. In J. C. Weidman, & L. DeAngelo (Eds.), *Socialization in higher education and the early career: Theory, research and application*. (pp. 129-146). Springer.
- Taylor, E. W. (2007). An update of transformative learning theory: A critical review of the empirical research (1999-2005). *International Journal of Lifelong Education*, 26, 173–191.
- The Socratic Method. (n.d). Henry Matisse: 'Creativity takes courage.'
<https://medium.com/@jenprecourt/creativity-takes-courage-e0f5f9ec8808>