

## Reimagining the EdD:

Innovations from the 2024 CPED Program of the Year Winner and Finalists

Harriette Thurber Rasmussen 

Drexel University  
htr25@drexel.edu

William Kyle Ingle 

University of Louisville  
william.ingle@louisville.edu

### ABSTRACT

This introductory article presents innovations from the 2024 Carnegie Project on the Education Doctorate (CPED) Program of the Year winner and finalists—Texas A&M University, Virginia Commonwealth University, Marymount University, and the University of Findlay. We highlight how these institutions exemplify CPED's commitment to inquiry as practice, equity and social justice, and the cultivation of scholarly-practitioner identity. Together, their models showcase distinctive approaches to community-building in online education, team-based capstone partnerships, high-touch mentoring ecosystems, and developmental assessment redesigns. By sharing these exemplars, we aim to illuminate emerging trends in EdD program design and to invite readers to consider how doctoral preparation can be reimagined to meet the complex challenges facing contemporary educational and organizational contexts.

### KEYWORDS

*program of the year, innovation, award winning*

The Carnegie Project for the Education Doctorate (CPED) established its Program of the Year (POY) Award in 2017 to honor "one or more institutions whose CPED-influenced programs show themselves to be distinctive, innovative, and useful to other CPED members" (CPED, n.d.-a). In bestowing the POY Award, CPED recognizes programs for their distinctive, innovative, and impactful designs and characteristics. Doing so also serves as a strategy to share innovative EdD design features and stimulate adaptations in EdD programs among our membership and beyond. As such, faculty, staff, and students at award-winning institutions become active contributors to the consortium's knowledge base.

As co-leads of CPED's Program of the Year (POY) Committee, we have the opportunity and honor to peek into the work of CPED member institutions. Every year, we conclude our work both awed and inspired by the innovation and wisdom these applications represent. Our applicants may range in size, scope, and region, but what they have in common are inclusive and exhaustive processes, what we have referred to as "reflective self-study," "institutional self-awareness," and "examination" (Ingle & Rasmussen, 2024, p. 1). In other words, we have learned that the process itself can be as impactful as being in the proverbial winner's circle<sup>1</sup>. It is also true that award applicants receive significant levels of feedback on their applications. Our 10-member POY Committee deliberations involve multiple rubrics, extensive dialogue, and numeric metrics as we seek

innovations that, to quote from the final application rubric, are "likely to cause members to grapple with something new or understand CPED principles in a different way" (CPED, n.d.-b, p. 2). As such, these awards go beyond simple recognition of outstanding programs to an invitation to consider how the EdD continues to evolve as a doctorate of *practice*. Faculty, staff, students, and alumni who encounter in the application process benefit by engaging in reflection about their programs, identifying opportunities for institutional growth, institutional coherence, and change ownership.

Although never easy, during the time we have co-led CPED's Program of the Year Committee (2019 to 2025), our deliberations have resulted in unanimous decisions. In 2024, while we had a clear winner (Texas A & M University), we found the quality and diversity of innovations represented among the semi-finalists to exhibit noteworthy programmatic creativity, courage, and commitment to equity across a diverse range of institutions. When we concluded our final meeting, we discussed the potential benefits of sharing the innovations of semi-finalists as well as the award winner with our membership. Thus, we proposed this special edition to do just that: to share the opportunity and honor we experience as reviewers as we introduce the innovations of Texas A & M University, Virginia Commonwealth University, Marymount University, and the University of Findlay.

<sup>1</sup> We document the journeys of six Program of the Year award-winners in *Innovation & Impact: The Origins and Elements of EdD*

*Program Excellence* where we report that the internal institutional impact has consistently been significant.



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](http://cpedinitiative.org)

[impactinged.pitt.edu](http://impactinged.pitt.edu)  
Vol.11 No.2 (2026)

ISSN 2472-5889 (online)  
DOI 10.5195/ie.2026.615



## Shared Commitments

What you will find across these stories are powerful examples of inquiry as practice; how these four institutions embed real-world problems of practice as the centerpiece of doctoral work. You will find a common commitment to equity and social justice, with deliberate steps to surface issues of diversity, equity, inclusion, and belonging – not as add-ons, but as structural commitments. You will find stories that exemplify community and belonging through cohort models, mentoring, and support mechanisms that reject the notion of doctoral study as an isolating journey.

## Distinctive Innovations

You will also find distinctions across these innovations. Our 2024 POY winner, **Texas A & M University (TAMU)**, redesigned an online EdD into a vibrant ecology of relationships to reduce the “distance” in distance learning and foreground the human connection. You will read about their CIRCLE model (Community, Individuals, Respect, Creating Leaders, and Excellence), an acronym that has become a beacon of connection and purpose for faculty and students alike.

Award finalist **Virginia Commonwealth University (VCU)** highlights its capstone model, wherein students work in teams with local partner organizations, contributing doctoral learning and expertise and affecting millions of dollars of pro bono impact in their communities. The program has also reimaged assessment by replacing traditional comprehensive exams with formative evaluations that guide and strengthen students’ scholarly journeys.

**Marymount University**, also a finalist and one of Virginia’s only Hispanic-serving institutions, describes a high-impact student experience organized around four pillars: design, support, mentorship, and engagement, and includes “high-touch” structures such as their *Write Up! Institute*, a year-round writing ecosystem with retreats, labs, and accountability groups. They explain how they have managed extraordinary and rapid program growth and frame the dissertations as “blueprints for change” while utilizing a personalized matching process that humanizes dissertation advising and ensures compatibility.

Award finalist **University of Findlay’s** quest for equity and excellence reimaged comprehensive exams by embedding them into coursework, transforming a high-stakes examination into a developmental course-embedded process that strengthens research competencies, reduces faculty load, and deepens the mentoring process. They have found this shift to deepen scholarly-practitioner identity and foster a stronger sense of belonging among students.

## Points of Convergence and Divergence

As you delve into these narratives, you will see that each program views assessment not as gatekeeping, but as a growth-oriented process that strengthens student identities as scholarly practitioners. Beyond that, TAMU emphasizes “community and belonging in online doctoral education.” You will read how VCU builds “collective capacity through teamwork and organizational partnerships” and how Marymount leans into “care, mentoring, and cross-sector diversity.” And finally, Findlay demonstrates how “assessment itself can be re-engineered as innovation.”

And now, we invite you to join our world of insight into innovation and to consider, as you do, what it takes to really reimagine doctoral preparation for scholarly practitioners in these times of complex educational and organizational challenges. We trust you will enjoy the journey as much as we have.

## REFERENCES

- Carnegie Project on the Education Doctorate. (n.d.-a). CPED Awards. Retrieved September 9, 2025 from <https://www.cpedinitiative.org/awards>
- Carnegie Project on the Education Doctorate. (n.d.-b). Program of the Year 2025: Scoring Rubric. Retrieved September 9, 2025 from [https://cpedinitiavemy.sharepoint.com/:w:/g/personal/monica\\_wilkerson\\_cped\\_org/EU5Y7ikfYFBqc\\_EcjmWyzkBDqpSRKIVs4MGfemQ4P7kA?rtme=GNifQkHu3Ug](https://cpedinitiavemy.sharepoint.com/:w:/g/personal/monica_wilkerson_cped_org/EU5Y7ikfYFBqc_EcjmWyzkBDqpSRKIVs4MGfemQ4P7kA?rtme=GNifQkHu3Ug)
- Ingle, W. K., & Rasmussen, H. T. (2024). *Innovation & impact: The origins and elements of EdD program excellence*. Myers Education Press.