

Urban Culturally and Ethnically Diverse Doctoral Students and Their Perceptions of  
Doctoral Program Design Features and Procedures: An Evaluation Report

By

Ann Nevin, Visiting Professor ([nevin@bellsouth.net](mailto:nevin@bellsouth.net))

& Professor Emerita, Arizona State University

Patricia Barbetta, Associate Professor ([barbetta@fiu.edu](mailto:barbetta@fiu.edu))

& Interim Associate Dean, Office of Graduate Studies

&

Elizabeth Cramer, Associate Professor ([cramere@fiu.edu](mailto:cramere@fiu.edu))

Department of Educational and Psychological Studies

College of Education

Department of Education and Psychological Studies

Special Education Programs

Florida International University

Miami, FL

Paper Presented at Hawaii International Conference on Higher Education

January 4, 2009

The research reported in this paper was funded in part through a grant from the US Department of Education Office of Special Education Programs pursuant to CFDA84.325D Personnel Preparation and the results should not be construed as representing UDDE OSEP policy.

Abstract

The mission for Urban SEALS (Special Education Academic Leaders), a federally funded doctoral preparation program, is to prepare doctoral-level special educators, including those who are culturally and/or linguistically diverse (CLD) to assume leadership roles in the education of urban students with disabilities who are CLD. This report provides information on participant evaluations of the third year of implementation which involved comprehensive examinations and dissertation proposal preparation.

The primary aim of the Urban Special Education Academic Leadership (SEALS) program is to prepare doctoral-level special educators who are culturally and linguistically diverse (CLD) to assume leadership roles in the education of urban students with disabilities who are CLD (Barbetta, Cramer, & Nevin, 2004<sup>1</sup>). The doctoral students participate in a program of study which includes courses and non-credit leadership activities with the goal of developing the knowledge and skills needed to fulfill leadership roles that (a) prepare teachers of CLD students with disabilities in urban settings, such as university professors and/or (b) support the education of students with disabilities in urban settings, particularly those who are culturally and linguistically diverse in roles such as special education program coordinators or directors.

The SEALS program of study was designed on the basis of several recommendations from the literature on retaining under-represented populations (e.g., Smith, Pion, Tyler, & Gilmore, 2003; Smith-Davis, 2000, Talbert-Johnson & Tillman, 1999; Wright, 1987). Specifically, the program faculty incorporated a cohort model, service learning and other leadership activities, a curriculum and program of study that enfolded TESOL and/or Urban Education cognates, and financial support for tuition and fellowships. Following the recommendations of the AAUP (2001), the faculty had developed an inviting Exceptional Student Education (ESE) program with an urban special education leadership focus. The program of study for Urban SEALS candidates was built on an existing infrastructure in the ESE doctoral program and the COE resources by enfolding principles articulated by Cochran-Smith (1999) to prepare urban

---

<sup>1</sup> The annual survey of program participants' experiences is a component of the Urban SEALS program evaluation plan which involves ongoing assessment during implementation of the project objectives. Process evaluation of program components occur regularly so as to monitor program implementation and modify program practices as indicated.

leadership personnel who teach for social justice. Cochran-Smith (1999, p. 118-119) established six principles to be used when preparing urban teachers to teach for social justice: enable significant work for all students within learning communities; build on what students bring to school with them: knowledge and interests, cultural and linguistic resources; teach skills, bridge gaps; work with (not against) individuals, families, and communities; diversify modes of assessment; make activism, power, and inequity explicit parts of the curriculum.

The Urban SEALS program embeds these principles within the processes used by faculty and doctoral candidates as they complete their individually designed courses of study leading to the doctorate in education (Ed. D.). In addition, the delivery of the coursework by university urban education faculty, special education faculty, and research methodology faculty reflects researched best practices such as establishing collaborative learning communities through a cohort model. Other evidenced based practices that are reflected in the program coursework include (a) creating a focus on standards based-outcomes, (b) utilizing problem based learning, and (c) arranging experiential-service learning opportunities as well as non-credit-generating activities such as guest lecturing, teaching undergraduate or master's level coursework, attending conferences, collaborating with faculty on research projects.

A descriptive study was conducted to obtain the perceptions of the first cohort of doctoral students in the Urban Special Education Academic Leaders (SEALS) program upon completion of the third year of coursework and experiences. During this third year of the coursework, the faculty arranged for a course in which cohort members were

coached to write for the comprehensive exam and to prepare the first three chapters of their dissertation research.

## Method

### *Participants*

At the time of the study, 13 Urban SEALS doctoral students completed the survey: 10 female participants and 3 male participants. Table 1 displays the key demographic variables that describe their characteristics.

Table 1. *Demographics of Urban SEALS: Year 3*

Variable	Category (N)			
Gender	Male (3)	Female (10)		
Ethnicity	Black (3)	Hispanic (6)	White (3)	Other (1)
Age	25-35 (7)	36-45 (5)	46-55 (1)	
Experience	0-5 (2)	6-10 (6)	11-20 (5)	

Ethnicity of the Urban SEALS ranged from those who identified themselves as Hispanic (N=6), Black (N=3), White (non-Hispanic) (N=3). One respondent chose “other.” As shown in Table 1, the majority of respondents categorized their ages between 25-35 (N=7) while 5 respondents categorized themselves between 36-45 years of age and 1 between 46-55 years. For years of teaching experience, two respondents indicated experiences in teaching for 0-5 years while 6 respondents indicated teaching for 6-10 years; 5 indicated teaching for 11-20 years.

*Instrumentation*

The survey (see Appendix A) is derived from a questionnaire originally designed by the project co-principal investigators to assess recruitment and selection procedures (Nevin, Barbetta, & Cramer, 2006) which had been evaluated by the leadership advisory board (comprised of national and local experts in special education and urban education) and the FIU Human Subjects Review Board. The procedures were deemed to protect the anonymity and confidentiality of respondents. The questionnaire was believed to meet the conditions required for face validity once minor format changes were made to the instrument (e.g., more space for responding to the open-ended questions). The following year, the co-principal investigators modified the original instrument to allow respondents to evaluate their experiences and to voice their views about instructional procedures and faculty interactions with them during the first year and first summer and reported at a national conference (Barbetta, Cramer, Nevin, & Moores-Abdool, 2006). To evaluate the third year of coursework, the questionnaire was modified slightly to preserve the content of as many items as possible to match similar items included in the previous surveys (2005, 2006, 2007) so as to allow comparisons across the years of the project. This allowed the co-principal investigators to (a) use the survey information to make programmatic changes and (b) trace the impact of programmatic changes based on the feedback from the participants in the program. In addition, one new item was added in response to a participant in the survey administered in Year 2 (2007) who had asked that the preparation for dissertation research be added as an item to evaluate in future surveys.

The questionnaire was comprised of four sections. One section asked respondents to briefly describe their experiences in the third year by responding to open ended

questions such as “What barriers or challenges, if any, did you experience in the recruitment process?” Another section collected demographic data (e.g., gender, ethnicity, age, years of teaching experience). Another section asked respondents to use a likert-style scale (with 1 = not at all to 5 = a great extent) to rate various statements about their perceptions of the procedures utilized by faculty, program co-principle investigators, program staff, and their cohort. The fourth section asked respondents to use a likert-style scale to evaluate various design features of the program.

#### *Data Collection and Analysis*

The instrument was distributed to all SEALS participants who had completed the third year of the program during a regularly scheduled meeting of the program participants. The completed surveys were collected by the project administrative assistant. For the few candidates who were absent, they emailed their survey responses as an attachment to the program administrative assistant who removed any indentifying characteristics.

Using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS, 2004), the researchers calculated frequencies and percentages for the demographic information and the ratings of program design features.

#### *Reliability*

Cronbach alpha coefficients for reliability of respondents' ratings were calculated for survey items related to perceptions of fairness of the instructional procedures. Cronbach alpha, also called the alpha coefficient, is a statistical measure of the degree to which the items consistently measure the same construct. In this study, an alpha coefficient of .787 was obtained for items paired for internal consistency (Q1, Q4, and

Q5 within the Perception Section of the questionnaire), as shown in Table 2. In other words, the alpha coefficient indicated good reliability for respondents consistency in ratings for similar items. For example, Gall, Gall, and Borg (2003) report that alpha coefficients of .52 and above are considered evidence of good reliability in exploratory research such as this study.

Table 2. *Reliability of Survey Items: Cronbach Alpha Coefficients*

Survey Item	Alpha Coefficient
To what extent do you believe the courses you've taken at FIU during Fall 2007, and Spring 2008 were taught by faculty who were fair and unbiased? I believe the teaching strategies during the Fall 2007, and Spring 2008 were fair and unbiased. I was treated respectfully by faculty during the Fall 2007, and Spring 2008 terms.	.787

Another indication of internal consistency is shown in Table 3. The means (4.6 out of a 5-point scale for all three items) and ranges of the ratings (3-5 for one item, and 4-5 for two items) indicate the close agreement.

Table 3. *Range, Mean, and Verbatim Comments for Perceptions of Program Fairness*

Survey Item related to Perception Scale: 1=Not at all to 5= A Great Extent	Range	Mean
To what extent do you believe the courses you've taken at FIU during the Fall 2007 and Spring 2008 terms were taught by faculty who were fair and unbiased?	3-5	4.6
I believe the teaching strategies during the Fall 2007, and Spring 2008 were fair and unbiased.	4-5	4.6
I was treated respectfully by faculty during the Fall 2007, and Summer 2009 terms.	4-5	4.6



## Results

Results are described in the following sections: Perceptions, Design Features, and Responses to Open-Ended Questions

*Perceptions*

Table 4 shows the mean and range of the ratings for questions 1, 4, and 5 so as to provide a sense of the perceptions of the 16 graduate students who responded to the survey.

Table 4. *Range and Mean of Ratings for Perceptions*

Survey Item	Range	Mean
1. To what extent do you believe the courses you've taken at FIU <b>during the Fall 2007 and Spring 2008 academic year</b> were taught by faculty who were fair and unbiased?	4-5	4.6
2. To what extent are you satisfied that your experiences <b>during the Fall 2007 and Spring 2008 academic year</b> have been facilitated by project personnel (project co-Principal Investigators, Project Coordinator, or faculty)? Comment from 1 participant: <i>R10 Comprehensive exam was biased!</i>	3-5	4.4
3. To what extent do you believe the coursework and experiences <b>during the Fall 2007 and Spring 2008 academic year</b> were designed for culturally and linguistically diverse individuals to be successful? Comments from 1 participant: <i>R5 Maybe during the fall, not the spring.</i>	2-5	4.4
4. To what extent do you believe that you were supported in preparing for your comprehensive exams? Comments from 2 participants: <i>R5 My cohort members helped a lot.</i> <i>R10 [The comprehensive exams] tested on information that was not covered in the courses.</i>	2-5	3.6
5. I believe the teaching strategies <b>during the Fall 2007 and Spring 2008 academic year</b> were fair and unbiased.	4-5	4.6
6. I was treated respectfully by faculty <b>during the Fall 2007 and Spring 2008 academic year</b> terms. Comment from 1 participant: <i>R10 [I] felt discriminated against.</i>	4-5	4.6
7. During the <b>during the Fall 2007 and Spring 2008 academic year</b> , I felt supported throughout the coursework. Comment from 1 participant: <i>R5 The fall semester was totally different than the spring; I don't think they can be compared.</i>	2-5	4.4

As noted, the written comments from 1 participant related to the items that rated faculty treatment as fair and unbiased. For the comprehensive exam, this participant felt that the exam was biased and that the participant felt "discriminated against." Further probing

would be necessary to identify the nature of the discrimination. In contrast, another participant added a comment about the value and support received through the cohort.

#### *Ratings of Program Design Features*

Table 5 shows the mean and range of ratings for each program design feature. The majority of respondents did not offer any comments on the program design features.

Table 5. *Range and Mean of Ratings for Program Design Features*

Survey Item	Range	Mean
1. diversity content and experiences	3-5	4.4
2. cognate of courses directly related to the education of students who are CLD, (e.g., urban education and TESOL programs)	2-5	4.4
3. community-based action research projects in the local urban, multicultural educational settings through the COE <i>Center for Urban Education and Innovation</i>	2-5	3.6
4. field experiences with diverse students through service-learning projects	1-5	3.6
5. cohort model to promote and support group cohesiveness and motivate students to perform at an optimal level	1-5	3.1
6. an existing learning community of culturally and linguistically diverse individuals	2-5	3.9
7. ongoing student involvement and development through participation in a variety of non-credit leadership activities that require ongoing doctoral student development and involvement (e.g., presenting at conferences, teaching undergraduate courses, participating in community leadership projects)	1-5	3.9
8. Is there any other program design feature you'd like to evaluate? 4 participants offered comments; 9 did not.		

The majority of participants did not offer to comment or evaluate other program design features. Four participants added this comment regarding other program design features:

R1 wrote, "*Support was always available.*" R6 valued "*Preparation of the dissertation proposal.*" R3 noted, "*The program provided great support in preparing for comprehensive examinations, as well as guidance in writing a preliminary draft of the dissertation proposal.*" In contrast, R10 pointed out that candidates should be "*tested on area of interest for comprehensive exam only!!!*"

#### *Responses to Open Ended Questions*

The responses to the open-ended questions corroborate and instantiate the survey ratings. In responding to the question (*Overall, how would you describe your experiences during the third year of the doctoral program?*), 13 of 15 SEALS candidates completed the survey; all 13 of those who completed the survey commented on the overall impact of the third year. As shown in Appendix B, a total of 20 comments were coded: 1 (5%) was coded Neutral; 5 (25%) were coded as negative; and 14 (70%) were coded as positive. The most frequently mentioned challenge (N=5) was the overwhelming schedule and the writing demands that the comprehensive exam and proposal process entails while juggling home and work responsibilities. Moreover, appreciation for the cohort was the most frequently mentioned feature of the program. Appreciation for the project coordinators and selected faculty was mentioned by 1 respondent.

In the section of the survey which solicited comments about specific program procedures (see Appendix B), the responses to open-ended questions were equally revealing. All 13 participants offered 18 comments related to supports for their success, in response to the question, *What supports were in place to help you be successful in your doctoral program during the Fall 2007 and Spring 2008 terms?* Of the 18 comments,

100% were coded as positive. (See Appendix 2). Classes and seminars focused on the dissertation, faculty and staff were most frequently mentioned as supports (9 out of 18 or 50%), followed by the **cohort** model (6 out of 18 or 33%). Financial support in the form of stipends and books was mentioned in 2 out of 18 (11%) of the comments/

The majority of respondents (11 of 13) provided insights in response to the question: *What barriers or challenges, if any, did you experience?* (See Appendix B.) Of the 13 who completed the survey, 11 commented on barriers, offering a total of 12 comments. The majority reported the comprehensive examinations as a barrier (N = 3); and time and work demands (N = 3). Other barriers that were named included being a part time student, lack of support and mentorship, writing, reimbursement for travel expenses, and personal issues.

The majority of participants (11 out of 13) offered recommendations in response to the question, *Do you have any recommendations for modifying or improving the program?* (See Appendix B.) Of the 11 recommendations offered, 3 related to career goals (the professoriate or school administration) while 2 comments related to the comprehensive examination. The six remaining comments ranged from (a) requests to help students fund their research, (b) use on-line instruction, (c) establish a faculty-candidate mentorship process, (d) supervise the instructors, (e) creating a productive environment, and (f) using the grant as a motivating force, in particular the termination of grant funding for tuition and stipends.

### Discussion

An important component of successful recruitment of ethnically and linguistically diverse, traditionally underrepresented doctoral candidates is the subsequent retention of

candidates through their programs of study, through research and examination procedures, and to graduation. The literature on retention of people from culturally and linguistically diverse populations as well as ethnically different populations indicates that peer groups and mentoring must be established early in the program. Cohort models appear to be successful depending on the extent to which cohort members support and mentor one another (Teitel, 1997).

Several of the SEALS candidates have become actively involved with (a) adjunct professor opportunities at FIU and nearby colleges, (b) the University Upward Bound program, (c) the Center for Urban Education and Innovation which hosts a number of prominent eminent scholars, (d) the FIU Urban Studies faculty. Some of the doctoral students have affiliated with institutional support at this level such as student organizations (the COE Graduate Student Network), academic and tutorial supports such as a writing center, and a writing-for-publication class for doctoral students (Marshall-Bradley, Tucker, & Wilson. 2006; Wright, 1987). The SEALS program of study also includes a one-credit seminar which formally establishes processes that allow for the advanced graduate students to serve as mentors and buddies to the incoming cohort. In addition, scheduling cohort members into the same courses is another method the faculty used to create affiliations that can sustain participants through the program,

The results of the third year of coursework as represented by ratings on program features and the open ended survey responses are similar to those found by Twale and Kochan (2000). They reported that the cohort experience was found to be personally and professionally rewarding and promoted friendships and idea exchanges. The cohort experience continued to help candidates to meet existing challenges.

The goal of Urban SEALS is to prepare doctoral-level leaders in urban special education, particularly those who are culturally and linguistically diverse. Research has shown that new teachers in urban schools leave at a higher rate than their suburban counterparts (Haberman & Rickards, 1990; Ingersoll, 2001). However, teachers from culturally or linguistically diverse backgrounds are more likely to stay in urban schools (Clewell & Villegas, 2001). Not only are culturally and linguistically diverse professors needed to join the professoriate (e.g., AAUP, 2001; Cochran-Smith, 1999) but CLD leaders are needed to prepare and support CLD teachers in urban schools. This in turn could have a positive impact on the retention of CLD teachers in urban settings.

It is clear that the current cohort of doctoral students in the Urban SEALS program is culturally and linguistically diverse (including Blacks, Hispanics, and Whites non Hispanics). They have experienced challenges in balancing their work and family responsibilities with the demands of an intensive doctoral preparation program (see Tyler, Smith, & Pion, 2003). Yet, due to the cohort model, they have established working relationships that have sustained and supported them throughout the rigorous coursework typically associated with the doctoral studies nationwide. This increases the probability that they will continue until graduation.

In addition, the participants are actively engaged in thinking about their futures with respect to doctoral research, notably the composition of their dissertation committees and the nature and preparation for the comprehensive examinations. R noted, *“Both semesters prepared us for independent research. Both the class on urban research (participatory research) and independent research for our dissertations were very informative and allowed us to delve into personal areas of interest.”* They are also

actively involved in designing program improvements through enhancing existing coursework and creating meaningful alternatives that will allow for better program planning for future cohorts. For example, R1 wrote, "*I feel very prepared to become a professor based on the high quality instruction received.*" In other words, they are already thinking in ways that they would need to think and plan when they leave with their doctorates in hand, when they join the administrative or professional development forces of the local public schools or when they join the teacher education faculty at colleges and universities.

## References

- American Association for University Professors (AAUP). (2001). *Diversity and affirmative action in higher education*. Retrieved June 30, 2005, from <http://www.aaup.org/Issues/AffirmativeAction/>
- Barbetta, P., Cramer, E., & Nevin, A. (2004). Urban SEALS (Special Education Academic Leaders). Miami, FL: Florida International University College of Education, USDE OSEP CFDA84.325D Personnel Preparation.
- Clewell, B., & Villegas, A. (2001). *Absence unexcused: Ending teacher shortages in high-need areas*. Washington, DC: Urban Institute.
- Cochran-Smith, M. (1999). Learning to teach for social justice. In G. Griffin (Ed.). *Ninety-eighth yearbook of the National Society for the Study of Education—Part 1* (pp. 114-144). Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Gall, M. D., Gall, J. P., & Borg, W. R. (2003). *Educational research: An introduction*. Boston, MA: Allyn and Bacon, Inc.
- Haberman, M., & Rickards, W. (1990). Urban teachers who quit: Why they leave and what they do. *Urban Education*, 25(3), 297-303.
- Nevin, A., Cramer, E., & Barbetta, P. (2006, April). Strategies for democratizing the special education leadership workforce. Refereed paper presented at AERA, San Francisco, Apr 2006. ERIC Document Number ED491650.
- Smith, D., Pion, G., & Tyler, N. (2003). Leadership personnel in special education: Can persistent shortages be resolved? In A. Sorrells, H. Rieth, & P. Sindelar (Eds.). *Critical issues in special education: Access, diversity, and accountability* (pp. 258-276). NY: Pearson.
- Smith, D., Pion, G., Tyler, N., & Gilmore, B. (2003). Doctoral programs in special education: The nation's supplier. *Teacher Education and Special Education*, 26(3), 172-181.
- Smith-Davis, J. (2000). *Issues arising from insufficient diversity among education personnel*. Nashville, TN: Peabody College and Vanderbilt University. Alliance Project.
- Statistical Package of the Social Sciences (SPSS). (2004). Version 13.0. Chicago, IL: SPSS Inc.
- Talbert-Johnson, C., & Tillman, B. (1999). Perspectives on color in teacher education programs: Prominent issues. *Journal of Teacher Education*, 50(2), 200-209.



- Teitel, L. (1997). Understanding and harnessing the power of the cohort model in preparing educational leaders. *Peabody Journal of Education*, 72(2), 66-85.
- TIAA-CREF Institute (2005, September). Trends show faculty diversity still below par. *Review News & Notes*. NY: TIAA-CREF Institute.
- Twale, D. J., & Kochan, F. K. (2000). Assessment of an alternative cohort model for part-time students in an educational leadership program. *Journal of School Leadership*, 10(2). 188-208.
- Tyler, N., Smith, D., & Pion, G. (2003). Doctoral students in special education: Characteristics and career aspirations. *Teacher Education and Special Education*, 26(3), 294-205.
- Wright, D. J. (1987). Minority students: Developmental beginnings. In D. J. Wright (Ed.). *Responding to the needs of today's minority students* (pp. 5-21). San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass

APPENDIX A

**2008 Urban SEALS (Special Education Academic Leaders) Survey \***

We appreciate your help as we continue to evaluate the Urban SEALS program design and procedures utilized by project personnel. Your candid appraisal helps us to accurately assess and re-design our procedures. Your responses will be treated anonymously, and no personally-identifiable information will be reported. In this year's evaluation, we would like to concentrate on **your experiences during the Fall 2007 and Spring 2008 academic year.**

Sincerely, *P. Barbetta, E. Cramer, and A. Nevin*, Co-Principal Investigators

<b>Overall, how would you describe your doctoral program experiences s during the Fall 2007 and Spring 2008 academic year? [Please write 2 to 3 sentences explaining your reactions.]</b>

<b>Demographics</b>		
<i>Directions: Please fill in the blanks or check the items that apply to you.</i>		
Gender: <input type="checkbox"/> Male <input type="checkbox"/> Female  Experience teaching: <input type="checkbox"/> 0 - 5 years <input type="checkbox"/> 6 - 10 years <input type="checkbox"/> 11 - 20 years <input type="checkbox"/> 21 years +	Ethnicity  <input type="checkbox"/> American Indian or Native Alaskan <input type="checkbox"/> Asian or Pacific Islander <input type="checkbox"/> Black (non-Hispanic) <input type="checkbox"/> Hispanic <input type="checkbox"/> White (non-Hispanic) <input type="checkbox"/> Other (specify)	Age:  <input type="checkbox"/> 18 - 24 <input type="checkbox"/> 25 - 35 <input type="checkbox"/> 36 - 45 <input type="checkbox"/> 46 - 55 <input type="checkbox"/> 56 -

**Program Procedures: Please write comments below:**

1. What supports were in place to help you be successful in your doctoral program **during the Fall 2007 and Spring 2008 academic year?**
  
2. What barriers or challenges, if any, have you experienced during the **during the Fall 2007 and Spring 2008 academic year?** (Please explain.)
  
3. Do you have any recommendations for modifying or improving the program?

---

\* Note: This survey has been approved by FIU's Institutional Review Board (Approval # 091806-00).

<b>Perceptions</b>		
<i>Directions: Please use the following scale to rate your perception of each statement, where 1 = not at all and 5 = to a great extent N/A=not applicable to you</i>		
8. To what extent do you believe the courses you've taken at FIU <b>during the Fall 2007 and Spring 2008 academic year</b> were taught by faculty who were fair and unbiased?  COMMENTS:	1 2 3 4 5	NA
9. To what extent are you satisfied that your experiences <b>during the Fall 2007 and Spring 2008 academic year</b> have been facilitated by project personnel (project co-Principal Investigators, Project Coordinator, or faculty)?  COMMENTS:	1 2 3 4 5	NA
10. To what extent do you believe the coursework and experiences <b>during the Fall 2007 and Spring 2008 academic year</b> were designed for culturally and linguistically diverse individuals to be successful?  COMMENTS:	1 2 3 4 5	NA
11. To what extent do you believe that you were supported in preparing for your comprehensive exams?  COMMENTS:	1 2 3 4 5	NA
12. I believe the teaching strategies <b>during the Fall 2007 and Spring 2008 academic year</b> were fair and unbiased.  COMMENTS:	1 2 3 4 5	NA
13. I was treated respectfully by faculty <b>during the Fall 2007 and Spring 2008 academic year</b> terms.  COMMENTS:	1 2 3 4 5	NA
14. During the <b>during the Fall 2007 and Spring 2008 academic year</b> , I felt supported throughout the coursework.  COMMENTS:	1 2 3 4 5	NA

<b>Program Design</b>	
<i>Directions: Please indicate to what extent the features of the Urban SEALS doctoral program were reflected in the coursework and experiences you faced during the Fall 2007 and Spring 2008 academic year. Please use the following scale to rate each feature, where 1 = no influence and 5 = a great influence.</i>	
1. diversity content and experiences	1 2 3 4 5
2. cognate of courses directly related to the education of students who are CLD, (e.g., urban education and TESOL programs)	1 2 3 4 5
3. community-based action research projects in the local urban, multicultural educational settings facilitated through the COE Center for Urban Education and Innovation, research or presentation collaborative activities with faculty and/or other doctoral students, and so on.	1 2 3 4 5
4. field experiences with diverse students through service-learning projects or applied research projects supervised by faculty	1 2 3 4 5
5. cohort model to promote and support group cohesiveness and motivate students to perform at an optimal level	1 2 3 4 5
6. an existing learning community of culturally and linguistically diverse individuals	1 2 3 4 5
7. ongoing student involvement and development through participation in a variety of non-credit leadership activities that require ongoing doctoral student development and involvement (e.g., presenting at conferences, teaching undergraduate courses, participating in community leadership projects)	1 2 3 4 5
8. Is there any other program design feature you'd like to evaluate (e.g., comprehensive examinations, preparation of the dissertation proposal)?	

*Thank you for completing this survey.*

## APPENDIX B

**Coding of Responses to Queries about Program Procedures**

What supports were in place to help you be successful in your doctoral program **during the Fall 2007 and Spring 2008 academic year?**

Comments	Coding		
	Positive	Negative	Neutral
R1 All instructors provided immediate corrective feedback and I felt my research interests were valued.	+		
R2 The cohort itself served as a support mechanism. Additionally, we were provided with the opportunity to meet other professors who assisted us in the dissertation course.	+		
R3 Course professors as well as professors from [other departments in] the College of Education in general were readily available when sought out for feedback on ideas and student work.	+		
R4 The only support available was being able to speak to certain faculty members about the direction of my coursework and possible future endeavors.	+		
R5 The continued support of the <b>cohort</b> experience [helped me to be successful.]	+		
R6 Seminars relating to specific areas of research, workshops, and independent text in dissertation process.	+		
R7 The <b>cohort</b> was amazing in assisting me and providing support.	+		
R8 My <b>cohort</b> has been very supportive.	+		
R9 [The availability of] SEALS staff for any concerns; support of the <b>cohort</b> .	+		
R10 <b>Cohort</b> members and family.	+		
R11 The constant supervision by Project Investigators and their staff.	+		
R12 Having classes that were extremely practical in nature helps out. One of the best classes I engaged in was during the spring term. I received valuable assistance and guidance in prepping for my comprehensive exams and the writing process. However, the best support available was the <b>cohort</b> model. As a group, we were able to help each other and bounce ideas back and forth.	+		
R13 Dissertation workshop, conference stipends, books for the spring course.	+		

What barriers or challenges, if any, have you experienced during the **during the Fall 2007 and Spring 2008 academic year?** (Please explain.)

Comments	Coding
R1 I did not experience any barriers that I could honestly blame on the program or instructors. Opportunities were always available.	No barriers
R2 Comps were a challenge, but it served as a learning experience as well.	Comps
R3 Barriers were not due to the courses or professors; they merely came from our responsibilities at our work sites(the semester corresponded with heavy assessment timelines within our school district). This manifested itself in either missing some class sessions or limitation of time available to work on assignments.	Work
R4 It has been difficult to see your cohort advance to the comprehensive exam stage/dissertation and realize you still have coursework left to do.	
R5 Just personal.	Personal
R6 The timelines affiliated with the comprehensive exam—it was originally scheduled for summer; however, the test occurred much earlier.	Comps
R7 Time is always a factor in completing assignments or preparing adequately.	Time demands
R8 Writing for dissertation has been a challenge.	Writing
R9 Completing everything in a timely manner.	Time demands
R10 Lack of support and mentorship from staff.	Lack of support & mentorship
Issue related to conference travel expenses (for example, paying in advance/reimbursement procedures)	Reimbursement for travel
R11 NONE	No barriers
R12 My biggest challenge was not having the full doctoral experience because I was a part time student. Since I work a full time job, I don't have the opportunity to work closely with professors on research, learn how to publish well, or conduct research within the schools.	Being a part time student
R13 The sit-down 9-hour comprehensive exam mentally wiped me out for a few weeks after the exam; too much pressure.	Comps

Do you have any recommendations for modifying or improving the program?

Comments	Coding
R1 Yes, I think not everyone wants to be a professor or go into research. Perhaps two tracks should be offered in the future: research/professor and administration.	Goals—professoriate or school administration
R2 N/A	
R3 These two semesters have been very productive.	Productivity
R4 Allow the students to choose a leadership component which will coincide with the educational leadership qualifications necessary for administration.	Goals
R5 Do not place the pressure of financial support ending as a way to push students forward.	Motivating Candidates
R6 Not at this time.	
R7 Allow those who want FL certification in leadership to take [those courses] in lieu of some other electives.	Goals
R8 More informal meetings to strengthen the cohort bond.	More time for cohort meetings
R9 Ensure that instructors chosen for course are teaching the specific content students are expected to master by end of program.	Supervision of faculty involved in teaching the candidates
R10 Early mentorship from staff which will allow for success in doctoral program;	Establish a faculty mentorship process
Follow University guidelines for comprehensive exams.	University guidelines
R11 Conducting more activities via on-line interactions.	Use on-line instruction
R12 Assist program students in finding outside funding so they can take a leave from work and not be affected financially.	Funding student research
R13 Consider the option of allowing students to choose their comprehensive exam format.	Choice of comprehensive format

## APPENDIX C

**Valences for the Coded Responses of the Participants' Comments**

<b>Comment</b>	<b>Coding Valence</b>		
	<b>+</b>	<b>-</b>	<b>Neutral</b>
<b>Overall, how would you describe your doctoral program experiences during the Fall 2007 and Spring 2008 academic year? [Please write 2 to 3 sentences explaining your reactions.]</b>			
R1 I was extremely supported by all instructors and feel very prepared to become a professor based on the high quality instruction received.	+		
R2 The courses taken have been essential to moving [me] forward. We took a dissertation writing course that was extremely beneficial.	+		
R3 Both semesters prepared us for independent research. Both the class on urban research (participatory research) and independent research for our dissertations were very informative and allowed us to delve into personal areas of interest.	+		
R4 After a very full schedule during my first year, it was nice to have a more balanced work [time].	+		
The courses were challenging. It is still difficult to work full time and take more than 6 credits at the doctoral level.		-	
R5 The 2007-2008 academic year was a fairly challenging year. The preparation and experience of comprehensive exams were an experience I will never forget.	+		
I thank my cohort members for their support.	+		
R6 At this point, I feel overwhelmed with the amount of writing relative to my dissertation drafts.		-	
However, I have felt supported by my instructors, courses and additional academic opportunities.	+		
R7 I feel elated to be "ABD".	+		
The cohort was critical in getting me through the last of the coursework.	+		
R8 Very productive and informative.	+		
R9 Probably the most significant in preparing me to be a professor at the college level as well as writing for publication.	+		
R10 It was very challenging and overwhelming!		-	
R11 It went well.	+		
It did seem as if some of the classes should have focused more on how to conduct and write a dissertation.		-	
R12 My doctoral program experiences during the Fall 2007 and Spring 2008 academic year far exceeded what I imagined.	+		
All my efforts and hard work were finally coming to fruition and the support and encouragement I received during this time from my professors and colleagues was invaluable.	+		
R13 My doctoral program experience was intensive during spring 2008.			N
I felt too much pressure with the combination of comprehensive exams and the expectation of competing the 3 chapters of my dissertation.		-	



# Urban Culturally and Ethnically Diverse Doctoral Students and Their Perceptions of Doctoral Program Design Features and Procedures: An Evaluation Report

Ann Nevin, Patricia M. Barbetta, & Elizabeth Cramer  
Florida International University, Miami FL

Hawaii International Conference in Education  
January 2009

## Purpose

- Describe program need, goals, and features
- Summarize 3<sup>rd</sup> year program evaluation
  - participants' perceptions and
  - ratings evaluations of program faculty and staff, comprehensive examinations, and dissertation proposal preparation
- Discuss implications and recommendations for urban special education leadership preparation



## Need for Project Urban SEALS (Special Education Academic LeaderS)

- Critical shortage of special education (SE) leaders, particularly those who are culturally and/or linguistically diverse (CLD).
- Limited number of SE leaders with expertise in diverse students with disabilities.
- Need for research in issues related to urban special education.



## Goal of Project Urban SEALS

- Prepare doctoral-level special educators to assume leadership roles in the education of culturally linguistically diverse (CLD) urban students with disabilities.



## Unique Program Features

- Cognate of urban education courses related to education of students with disabilities who are CLD.
- Collaboration with FIU's Center for Urban Education and Innovation.
- Guidance from National Urban SEALS Board
- Engagement in urban-related, non-credit generating learning activities (e.g., conference presentations, university teaching.)
- Use of urban special education scholars through personal presentations and teleconferencing.

## Urban SPED Competencies I

- Recognize the unique strengths and needs of minority urban students w/ disabilities and the influential variables.
- Understand and develop effective leadership skills to facilitate the education of urban students with disabilities.
- Identify and maximize the resources available in urban settings to facilitate the education of students with disabilities.
- Understand the effects of community and culture on CLD urban students.

## Urban SPED Competencies II

- Develop vast knowledge and skills in instructional approaches in the education of urban students with disabilities.
- Conduct applied research that contributes to the knowledge base related to urban special education.
- Establish alliances to provide effective special education through interagency, community and family collaboration.
- Apply knowledge/skills through urban service-learning projects.

## SEALS Program Components



- Coursework w/ Urban Special Education Track
- Leadership Activities (Non-credit generating)
- Urban Special Education Teleconference
- COE Urban Center for Education and Innovation Student Associates Program

## Professional Studies Core (6 hrs.)

- EDP 7057: Educational Psychology: Advanced Applications
- EDF 7937: Advanced Topics in Social Foundations of Education



## Special Education Core: (21 hrs.)

- EEX 6535: Seminar in Special Education: Supervision and Leadership
- EEX 7933: Advanced Topics in Special Education (3)(Topics vary, repeated)
- EEX 7795: Advanced Issues in the Ed. of CLD Students with Exceptionalities
- EEX 7977 Candidacy Research and Evaluation in Educational Psychology & SPED
- EEX 7930: Professional Seminar in Special Education (repeated 6 times, 1 credit seminar)

## Research Methods and Statistics: (12 hrs.)

- EDF 6472: Research Methods in Education: Introduction to Analysis
- EDF 6486: Advanced Data Analysis in Quantitative Educational Research
- EDP 7058: Behavioral Intervention Research and Evaluation in Education
- EDF 6475 Qualitative Foundations of Educational Research

## Urban Special Education Cognate (15 hrs.)

- EDF 6689: Urban Education: Defining the Field
- EDF 6942: Multicultural Seminar and Practicum in Urban Education
- EDF 6925: Special Topics in Urban Education (2 times)
- ADE 6074: Writing for Publication



## Comprehensive Examination and Dissertation Study (24 hrs.)

- EEX 7964 Comprehensive Examination
- EEX 7980 Special Education Dissertation



## Non-credit Leadership Activity Areas w/ Examples

### Research and Evaluation

- Conduct independent research\*

### Professional Communication

- Submit proposals for conference presentations

### Personnel Preparation

- Independently teach one SE undergraduate course.

### Community

#### Leadership/Advocacy

- Provide leadership to a community agency project.

#### Grantsmanship/Administration

- Co-development of proposals of funded project

#### Designing Interventions

- Consult w/ families/agencies

## Urban SEALS National Board

### Function of Board

- To help ensure meaningful connections w/ stakeholders.
- Provide curricular and administration advise.
- Support recruitment and placement efforts.
- Participate in guest lectures and teleconference calls.



### Board Membership includes Grant PIs and

- Local members (e.g., SPED & Urban Ed. Faculty from local universities)
- National members (e.g., Drs. Gwendolyn Cartledge, OSU; Cheryl Utley, Juniper Gardens, U of Kansas)



## Urban Special Education Teleconferences

- One to two times per year, a teleconference session or face-to-face with recognized experts in urban issues.
- Co-directors and Leadership Board members recommend experts in collaboration with SEALS.
- Prior to the session, doctoral students agree to read articles submitted by the "visiting" expert and pose questions.



Dr. Cheryl Utley, U of Kansas—1<sup>st</sup> Year



Dr. Geneva Gay, U of Washington—2<sup>nd</sup> Year



Dr. Phil Ferguson Chapman U—3<sup>rd</sup> Year



## SEALS Cohort Building Activities

- Moving students through coursework as a cohort as much as possible to promote support and continuity
- Convening SEALS for a 1 credit seminar to bring all students together regularly (for 6 semesters)
- Arranging group collaboration on projects and presentations
- Sharing information and successes via Urban SEALS Newsletter
- Organizing social gatherings (pot lucks and barbeques)



## Urban SEALS Recruitment

### Recruitment Facilitators

- A SPED doctoral program with urban special education leadership focus,
- Expanded recruitment efforts
- Broadened admission process
- Ensured financial and academic support
- Option to attend full time or part-time
- Cohort model

### Recruitment Activities

- Emailing announcements to Universities
- Announcements on local district e-mail list
- Announcements through leadership board members
- Urban SEALS website link via FIU website



## SEALS Recruitment Outcomes

- During 2005-2006, recruited SEALS 16 students (14 females, 2 males): 4 Black (25%), 3 White (19%), 9 Hispanic (56%)
- During 2006-2007, recruited added 2 additional students, (1 female, 1 male): 1 Black, 1 Hispanic



## SEALS Survey Administration: Years 1 & 2

1<sup>st</sup> Year\*--Administered October 2006 during a Graduate Class\*

- N = 14 SEALS students responded: 12 females, 2 males Ethnicity (Hispanic=7, Black=3, White=3, Other=1).
- Ages: 12 between 25-35 years old and 2 between 36-45.
- Years of teaching experience: N = 5 for 0-5 years; N= 5 for 6-10 years; N= 4 for 11-20 years; and 0 for 21 years or more.

2<sup>nd</sup> Year\*\*—Administered September 2007 during a Graduate Class [those absent or not enrolled in the class contacted separately]

- ★ N = 16 SEALS students responded: 12 females; 3 males; 1 No Response
- ★ Ethnicity (Hispanic=7, Black=4; White=3; Other=1; No Response=1)
- ★ Age: 11 between 25-35; 3 between 36-45; 1 between 46-55; 1 No Response
- ★ Years of teaching experience: N=1 (0-5 yrs); N=6 (6-10); N=5 (11-20); N=2 (21 +); N=2 No Response

\*Barbetta, P., Cramer, E., Nevin, A., & Moores-Abdool, W. (2006, Nov.). Early lessons for planning and implementing a program to prepare urban special education academic leaders. Paper presented at refereed annual conference of Teacher Education Division, Council for Exceptional Children, San Diego, CA. ED494793.

\*\*Barbetta, P., Cramer, E., & Nevin, A. (2008, February). Impact of implementing strategies to increase retention of under-represented populations in a special education leadership doctoral program. Paper presented at annual conference of American Association of Colleges of Teacher Education, New Orleans, LA. ED500999

## SEALS Survey Administration

- 3<sup>rd</sup> Year—Administered September 2008 during regularly scheduled meeting [those absent emailed separately]
- Demographics

Variable	Category (N)			
Gender	Male (3)	Female (10)		
Ethnicity	Black (3)	Hispanic (6)	White (3)	Other (1)
Age	25-35 (7)	36-45 (5)	46-55 (1)	
Experience	0-5 (2)	6-10 (6)	11-20 (5)	

## Year 3 Survey Results—Perceptions of Fairness\*

*Range and Means for Perceptions of Program Fairness*

Survey Item (Rating Scale: 1=Not at all- 5= A Great Extent)	Range	Mean
To what extent do you believe the courses you've taken at FIU during the Fall 2007 and Spring 2008 terms were taught by faculty who were fair and unbiased?	3-5	4.6
I believe the teaching strategies during the Fall 2007 and Spring 2008 terms were fair and unbiased.	4-5	4.6
I was treated respectfully by faculty during the Fall 2007 and Spring 2008 terms.	4-5	4.6

\*Cronbach alpha coefficient for internal consistency of responses = .78. Gall, Gall, & Borg (2003) report that alpha coefficients of .52 and above are considered evidence of good reliability in exploratory research such as this study.

## Year 3 Survey Results: Program Design Features

### *Range and Mean of Ratings for Program Design Features*

Survey Item (Rating scale: Likert Scale: 1 = not at all; 5 = a great deal)	Range	Mean
diversity content and experiences	3-5	4.4
cognate of courses directly related to the education of students who are CLD, (e.g., urban education and TESOL programs)	2-5	4.4
community-based action research projects in the local urban, multicultural educational settings through the COE <i>Center for Urban Education and Innovation</i>	2-5	3.6
field experiences with diverse students through service-learning projects	1-5	3.6
cohort model to promote and support group cohesiveness and motivate students to perform at an optimal level	1-5	3.1
an existing learning community of culturally and linguistically diverse individuals	2-5	3.9
ongoing student involvement and development through participation in a variety of non-credit leadership activities	1-5	3.9
any other program design feature you'd like to evaluate? <i>4 participants offered comments; 9 did not.</i>		

## Year 3 Results--Participants' Comments

- The majority of participants did not offer to comment or evaluate other program design features.
- Four participants added comments regarding other program design features:
  - R1 wrote, *"Support was always available."*
  - R6 valued, *"Preparation of the dissertation proposal."*
  - R3 noted, *"The program provided great support in preparing for comprehensive examinations, as well as guidance in writing a preliminary draft of the dissertation proposal."*
  - In contrast, R10 pointed out that candidates should be *"tested on area of interest for comprehensive exam!!!"*

## Year 3 Survey Results: Open Ended Responses

### Q: How would you describe your experiences?

- Out of 13 respondents, all 13 wrote comments.
- A total of 20 comments were coded:
  - 1 (5%) coded Neutral  
Example: R11: It did seem as if some of the classes should have focused more on how to conduct and write a dissertation.
  - 5 (25%) coded Negative  
Example: R13: I felt too much pressure with the combination of comprehensive exams and the expectation of competing the 3 chapters of my dissertation.
  - 14 (70%) coded Positive  
Example: R3 Both semesters prepared us for independent research...allowed us to delve into personal areas of interest.

## Year 3 Survey Results

### Q: What barriers or challenges and supports, if any, did you experience?

- Overwhelming schedule and the writing demands that the comprehensive exam and proposal process entails while juggling home and work responsibilities (N = 5)
- comprehensive examinations (N = 3)
- time and work demands (N = 3)
  
- classes and seminars focused on the dissertation, faculty and (9 out of 18 comments, or 50%)
- cohort model (6 out of 18 comments, or 33%).
- financial support in the form of stipends and books (2 out of 18, 11%)

## Year 3 Survey Results

Q: Do you have any recommendations for modifying or improving the program?

- 11 recommendations offered
  - 3 related to career goals (the professoriate or school administration)
  - 2 comments related to the comprehensive examination.
  - 6 remaining comments ranged from
    - (a) requests to help students fund their research,
    - (b) use on-line instruction,
    - (c) establish a faculty-candidate mentorship process,
    - (d) supervise the instructors,
    - (e) creating a productive environment, and
    - (f) using the grant as a motivating force, in particular the termination of grant funding for tuition and stipends.

## Overall Conclusions

- Open-ended questions corroborate and instantiate the survey ratings.
- This means that the results seem to have validity and reliability.
- We can trust that the doctoral students report their perceptions without fear of reprisal.
- We can take action on the results with confidence.

## Urban SEALS Progress Report

- By the end of the third year of the program, eleven students had completed their coursework.
- They had successfully passed the written and oral comprehensive examinations and had achieved candidacy status.
- Currently, the eleven candidates are in the process of completing the first three chapters of the dissertation and anticipated defending their proposals during the fall semester.

## Final Comments

- R noted, *“Both semesters prepared us for independent research. Both the class on urban research (participatory research) and independent research for our dissertations were very informative and allowed us to delve into personal areas of interest.”*
- R1 wrote, *“I feel very prepared to become a professor based on the high quality instruction received.”*

## Conclusion

In other words, they have been thinking in ways that they would need to think and plan

- when they leave with their doctorates in hand,
- when they join the administrative or professional development forces of the local public schools or
- when they join the teacher education faculty at colleges and universities.

## Acknowledgment

- We acknowledge the support of the U. S. Department of Education, Office of Special Education and Rehabilitation Services, through a grant award (CFDA 84.325D) which funds this project.



Urban SEALS PIs  
Dr. Patricia M. Barbetta,  
Dr. Ann Nevin &  
Dr. Elizabeth Cramer