

To Have a Common Curriculum (or not)

Margaret Eisenhart

University of Colorado, Boulder

What is the problem?

- Current doctoral programs may not be preparing students to conduct high quality education research.

- Is this concern warranted? Yes.

Why?

- Ad hoc doctoral programs
- Few shared (or required) courses

– Limited resources

- 50% of Ed doctoral students receive no financial support (21% in other fields)
- Lower average assistantship amounts/year
- 75% enrolled part-time (37% in other fields)

– Limited prior knowledge of education research

- Lack of common language
- Lack of shared issues or arguments
- Lack of shared research norms and standards

– Breadth of field

- Many topics
- Multiple perspectives
- Multiple methods
- Need for expertise in substantive area and method

- University of Colorado Core Curriculum -
1st year

- Six required common courses, all taken first year (3 each semester)
- Each semester:
 - 1 “big ideas” (foundations/current topics) seminar
 - 1 qualitative methods course
 - 1 quantitative methods course
- 1 informal seminar in student’s specialty area

- 2nd year

- Focused and sustained course work in specialty area of education research (content and method)

- 3rd year

- Advanced course work in specialty area and preparation of dissertation proposal

Hard Issues

- **Balancing breadth in field and depth in specialty**
 - Developing commonalities and expertise
 - Providing a forum for learning about general issues that serves both as a foundation and a springboard for specialty area work
 - Including foundations, students' interests, and cutting-edge or time-sensitive topics of professional and public interest

- Equalizing opportunities for students
 - For research experience
 - For teaching experience

- Faculty resistance (student enthusiasm)
 - Tradition
 - Workload issues
 - Hiring issues
 - Power/control issues
 - Logistics

Leverage Points

- Broad faculty representation on planning committee
- Regular updates for faculty
- Interim opportunities for faculty input
- Powerful persuasion tactics, e.g., strong arm of the dean, backing of Carnegie