

Preliminary Proposal for the M.Ed. in Higher Education Administration Curriculum Redesign

All concentrations within the Master of Education program provide practical, professional preparation rooted solidly in a theoretical foundation. The M.Ed. with a concentration in higher education was no exception. Students in the higher education concentration fell into three categories. The largest category represents practitioners employed in the field looking to expand their practice and move into leadership positions. The other two categories represent career changers – individuals looking to transition into higher education administration from another career and recent graduates – individuals with a bachelors who plan to enter higher education administration after the completion of their graduate studies.

Higher education, like much of the economy, is experiencing a shift towards specialization. Competing graduate programs in higher education offer practicums, specializations and focused approach to the sub-areas of higher education such as student affairs. The Northeastern program is one of several online programs. Current alumni and prospective students hoping to compete for positions in this competitive arena are best served by a program which offers opportunities to develop overarching competencies in higher education coupled with opportunities for specialization and the development of practical, employer sought skills. The transformation of the M.Ed. concentration in higher education to a standalone Master degree in higher education addresses the need for specialization sought by our current and prospective students as well as employers. It also allows for a curriculum expansion to address the unique challenges facing the next generation of workers. A standalone program allows the flexibility to build upon these skills in a customized manner unique to higher education. Therefore, a redesign into a standalone program is necessary and required. Two primary goals for the M.Ed. in Higher Education Administration program will guide the redesign.

Today, it's not enough to just be experiential and practical in higher education. As President Aoun and Northeastern 2025 recognize, education must develop foundational skills to allow students to thrive in a constantly changing world. Therefore, the first goal of the redesign is to create an experiential program that integrates vital disciplinary content and skills with the three literacies and four cognitive capacities outlined by President Aoun and Northeastern 2025. For example, all leaders in higher education need to be aware of the accreditation and assessment process. Approaching this content from the perspective of data literacy, systems thinking and critical thinking provides a unique opportunity to consider how to build the competencies of students to engage in current accreditation and assessment processes. Most importantly, it equips our students and alumni to become leaders who usher in the future of these processes. The redesign process will integrate specific literacies and cognitive capacities into each signature assignment and an emphasis on the capstone. This redesign will force to continue to rethink of the program from a programmatic goal standpoint rather than a course-based perspective. Redesigning our program to focus on content through the humanics lens creates incredibly valuable educational experiences for our students and will set the M.Ed. program apart.

The second goal, the creation of micro-certificates able to integrate into the curriculum or stand alone, creates opportunities for specialization for current students and provides an opportunity to create life-long learning opportunities for our alumni. Consisting of 4 elements which representing 8 credit hours, these specializations combine experiential and theoretical education attractive to employers – demonstrated entry level expertise with a relevant software, an XN project, a significant exploration of the theoretical and historical background of the specialization and a student reflection on their learning growth. Current students can swap two electives for the micro certificate. Alumni and others with earned advanced degrees are eligible to enter the micro certificate experience as a standalone process. Micro-certificates will be offered in fields that are constantly evolving, such as Title IX and international student regulations, thus offering a pathway for life-long learning for alumni and others not currently connected with Northeastern.

The redesign and establishment of the Master of Education in Higher Education Administration coupled with practical applied focus of Northeastern positions the program to remain competitive. It creates a stronger program that better positions our current main demographic of students – currently employed professionals – to immediately assume leadership roles. Furthermore, the opportunity to specialize and gain practical experience desired by employers, will expand our two additional categories of students – career changes and recent undergraduates – who require both specialized knowledge and practical experience to break into higher education. Furthermore, the micro certificate provides an opportunity for alumni and other professionals who wish to stay current in their fields and opportunity to engage with Northeastern in a meaningful fashion. This creates a new avenue for potential students supported by the M.Ed. program.