

**Commission of  
Professors  
of Adult  
Education**

**Standards for  
Graduate  
Programs in  
Adult  
Education**

**Revised  
November  
2014**



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# **Standards for Graduate Programs in Adult Education**

## **Rationale for Standards**

Adult Education is a recognized field of graduate study with a distinctive body of knowledge that embraces theory, research, and practice relating to adult learners, adult educators, Adult Education and learning processes, programs and organizations. Graduate Adult Education developed as a field of study in the 1920s and 1930s, and the Commission for Professors of Adult Education (CPAE) was established nationally in 1955. CPAE currently meets at the annual American Association for Adult and Continuing Education (AAACE) Conference and the Adult Education Research Conference (AERC). Adult Education university-based programs are dedicated to meeting the demand for providing graduate education for those interested in understanding, fostering and articulating the ways in which adults learn and can be helped to learn in a wide range of settings. There is an historic commitment to promoting innovation in teaching-learning strategies, adoption of emerging technologies, and social change.

Graduate students in Adult Education are seeking academic careers or preparation for leadership and practice in a range of Adult Education settings. Examples include continuing education, adult learning in postsecondary environments, distance and on-line learning organizations, program development, adult basic education, cooperative extension, workforce development, gerontology, nonprofit or community education, places of worship, as well as many other contexts. Adult Education, as a field, places emphasis on developing diverse and equitable cultural and economic sustainability in schools, colleges, universities, workplaces, and communities through online and face-to-face mediums for the facilitation of adult learning and collaboration among participants.

This document suggests guidelines and standards for high quality planning, administration and evaluation of Adult Education disciplinary graduate education. They are written for use by university academic graduate programs (or specializations, departments) as a part of a voluntary internal or external program assessment process. After a systematic process of reflection and discussion, the standards were endorsed by the national Commission for the Professors of Adult Education (CPAE).

This standards document is organized into the five distinct sections:

1. Administration
  - Mission and Values Statement
  - Resources
  - Examples of Indicators
2. Organization of Graduate Study
  - Learning Community
  - Admissions
  - Advisement
  - Thesis/Dissertation Process
  - Teaching Loads

3. Curriculum
4. Faculty Members
  - Faculty Member Qualifications
  - Adjunct or Courtesy-Appointed Faculty Members
5. CPAE Standards Revision History

## **1. Administration**

### **1.1. Mission/Values Statement**

CPAE acknowledges that Adult Education programs of study encompass a wide range of specialty areas and institutional contexts. Consequently, the CPAE standards require that each program creates and maintains statements that express:

1. The mission, purpose, and scope of the Adult Education program and alignment with the institution's mission.
2. The values, ethics, or principles which inform the practice and scholarship of the Adult Education program.
3. The commitment to and understanding of diversity and inclusion.
4. A strategic plan which sets forth statements about goals for improvement, change and future directions.

These statements should be easily accessible to all constituents: faculty, staff, administrators, students, and external stakeholders, and they should be periodically reviewed and updated.

### **1.2. Resources**

Adult Education graduate programs share a commitment to excellence and to creating a community of scholarship and practice. With this in mind, Adult Education graduate programs should be able to expect adequate resource support to accomplish these aims. While the standards cannot dictate the specific or ideal levels of resources allocated by institutions, the standards recommend:

1. The internal budget and support of the Adult Education graduate program be in proportion to other academic units in the college relative to the level of staff and other forms of tangible resource support. The Adult Education graduate program should have comparable shared access to resources available at the university and college level (e.g. technology support, instructional design, development/fundraising support, library collections/access, travel and faculty development funds, etc.)
2. Adult Education faculty and student representation and participation in college and university governance (e.g. committees, councils, decision-making bodies) should be proportional to representation of other program or department areas of comparable size in that particular university or college, and the Adult Education program's presence should be appropriately reflected in college or university language (mission statements, statements of purpose, web pages, etc.) and in communications to constituents.

3. The Adult Education faculty members' workload, evaluation and reward policies are clearly stated in terms of the balance of learning, discovery and engagement or other categories of academic responsibility that are pertinent at that particular university
4. If program benchmarking or assessment data is required to be gathered and collected for the college or university, adequate resources (staff, software, time) are provided to Adult Education faculty members to support the process.
5. Institutional support is provided for Adult Education Faculty members to participate in relevant Commission for Professors of Adult Education (CPAE) meetings, projects, and committee structures, the Adult Education Research Conference (AERC) and other appropriate professional organizations.
6. Due to the nature and mix of full- and part-time students, program data and definitions of categories should be clearly described and presented for enhancing external audiences' understanding of how the presence of part-time students may alter expectations regarding processes and data concerning Adult Education programs.

Adult Education programs and/or departments should voluntarily gather consistent and comparable information about their productivity and accomplishments, resources, and perceptions of the environment/climate. The information gathered may be compiled and shared for internal growth and development as well as external university and constituent purposes.

### **1.3. Examples of Indicators**

Indicators of a high quality Adult Education graduate program include several of the following examples:

- Teaching evaluations (hybrid, face-to face, online) based upon confidential and timely feedback of Adult Education faculty members by learners
- Publications (both quality and quantity) in refereed journals, conference proceedings, and other academic publications (books, reports) by faculty members, students, and graduates
- Additional alternative forms of scholarship (e.g.: white papers, public policy documents, evaluation project reports) by Adult Education faculty, students, and graduates
- Contributions by Adult Education faculty, students, and graduates to conferences at all levels (local, regional, national, international)
- Memberships by faculty members on editorial boards (e.g. *Adult Education Quarterly*, *Journal of Transformative Education*, *Adult Learning*) and conference (e.g. *Adult Education Research Conference*, *Human Resource Development*, *American Association for Adult and Continuing Education*)
- Adult Education faculty exchanges with colleagues at other universities and programs, both formal and informal (faculty and students)

- Alternative learner educational experiences as part of the Adult Education graduate program curricula (e.g., exchange, internship, service learning, research team experience)
- Service to the field and profession by faculty, students, and graduates (e.g. serving on CPAE, AAACE, or AERC leadership positions, or other appropriate professional associations)
- Reports of advancements in professional career placements, presentations and published scholarly achievements by Adult Education program graduates
- Evident and equitable participation by Adult Education faculty members and students in service to the surrounding college and university environments
- Visible commitment to principles of integrity, equity, and social justice in the educational process through coursework and other activities
- Shared perceptions by Adult Education faculty members and students of an educational environment that is collegial, collaborative and innovative

## **2. Organization of Adult Education Graduate Study**

A graduate program in Adult Education may be located in a variety of colleges (e.g. education, agriculture, human development) or form part of a multi or interdisciplinary unit. The strength of a high quality Adult Education graduate program lies in the caliber of its faculty, students, and graduates. Programs should be organized to maximize and support their contributions to theory, research, and practice in the field. While programs need to organize their efforts in relation to their institutional contexts, attention should be paid to the following general guidelines.

### **2.1. Learning Community**

As a field, Adult Education scholars and practitioners are committed to high quality and innovative instructional philosophies and practices with the understanding that Adult Education graduate students come from a range of professional and academic preparation backgrounds. There is a shared commitment that this diversity of backgrounds serves as an asset or strength in fostering a community of learning.

Other suggested ways to enhance the instructional process and learning community include:

- A commitment to providing Adult Education faculty members with opportunities for both formal and informal professional development experiences related to their teaching
- A commitment to providing Adult Education faculty members with appropriate levels of support and professional development regarding the integration and use of technology or other innovative practices in instruction
- A process for systematic review of courses, programs and procedures related to the formal curriculum and informal practices that support graduate teaching and learning

- A process for systematic feedback from current and former students, and other stakeholders regarding the quality of graduate programs (e.g., relevance of courses, appropriate pace and time to completion of studies, alumni accomplishments)
- An identifiable and equitable resource or process for resolving faculty and/or student issues, questions, or potential grievances
- The presence of informal learning opportunities for faculty and students such as colloquia, study circles, research, mentorship, service learning opportunities, and other special learning events
- Formal and informal contacts with faculties from other disciplines, in the interest of developing fruitful relationships that benefit Adult Education faculty, students, and alumni
- The presence of visible reward structures (local, regional, national, international) for innovative and high quality graduate teaching, advisement, and research

## **2.2. Admissions**

In universities where the admissions decisions are made at the program level, the standards recommend that:

- The student admissions committee includes at least one full-time or part-time member with a doctorate in Adult Education
- Criteria for admission should be discussed and understood by all admissions committee members within appropriate legal and institutional compliance, and if permitted, be clearly stated and available to prospective applicants
- Information (if any) on graduate assistantships should be available to all prospective applicants
- Information (if any) on the suitability and processes in place to support part-time graduate study should be available to all prospective applicants

## **2.3. Advisement**

The load for advisement depends on certain variables (e.g. number of thesis students and number of non-thesis students and number of doctoral advisees). For advisement, a distinction is made between full and part-time students. For faculty loads in advising, the following are suggested as guidelines for high-quality Adult Education programs, allowing for adjustments to be made to account for the proportion of masters and doctoral level students:

- A student handbook should be available to both faculty and students to serve as a written guide about the course and graduate school process requirements; exceptions to suggested process should be documented accordingly
- For students at the coursework stage of advisement, an active student/faculty ratio of no more than 25 to 1
- For Chairs/Primary advisors of students writing capstone projects, thesis or major dissertations, a combined active student/faculty ratio of no more than 8 to 1

## 2.4. Thesis/Dissertation Process

- Thesis/dissertation committees are to be chaired by Adult Education faculty members or related discipline faculty members subject to approval of the Adult Education unit. Whether the student chooses a thesis or non-thesis option, the chair and student select advisors or committee members who will best support student's desired competency and specialty areas.
- Program committees for doctoral students are to be chaired by Adult Education faculty members or related discipline faculty members subject to approval of the Adult Education unit. The chair and student select committee members who will best support a student's desired competency, specialty, and methodological areas.
- For special or interdisciplinary topics, co-chairs from appropriate disciplines may be selected on the basis of their contributions to the research topic or design.
- The student's thesis/dissertation/portfolio, both oral and written, should provide evidence that the student demonstrated knowledge and skills representative of the program outcomes related to Adult Education.
- The thesis/dissertation approval process follows students' successful completion of comprehensive exams (Ed.D./Ph.D.).

## 2.5. Teaching Load

The teaching load of a full-time Adult Education program faculty member varies according to many factors, such as face-to-face, hybrid and/or online course delivery, number and level (master's and doctoral) of student advisees, status of advisees (coursework, thesis/dissertation research), funded research/grant buyouts, and service commitments.

Attention should be paid to teaching loads over time (norms) rather than idiosyncratic semester-by-semester fluctuations in workload. The number of student advisees that exceeds the recommend guidelines will ideally result in course load reassignment.

For Adult Education faculty loads in teaching, the following are suggested general guides:

- Faculty members with fewer than 3 master's thesis or capstone students or fewer than 2 doctoral students at dissertation stage should not teach more than 5-6 courses (15-18 credit hours total) during the academic year. Programs on the quarter system may have a higher number of credit hours.
- Faculty members with 3 to 6 master's thesis students or 3-4 students at dissertation stage should not teach more than 4-5 courses (12 -15 credit hours total) per academic year.
- Faculty members with 7-10 master's thesis students or 5-7 students at dissertation stage should not exceed 3-4 courses (9-12 credit hours total) per academic year.
- Faculty members who teach over-enrolled courses (more than 25 students) should be awarded one course release per academic year.

### **3. Adult Education Graduate Program Curriculum**

Adult Education coursework should clearly distinguish between masters and doctoral levels in terms of defining outcomes relevant to beginning and advanced graduate study. For both levels, Adult Education places a value on innovative and holistic programming inclusive of integrating theory and practices in such a way that practice informs and enhances development and use of theory; and, in the reverse, that theory informs and enhances the development and application of practice. Adult Education places a high value on innovation and acknowledges the influence of technology both in terms of content and delivery of curriculum. The CPAE recommends consulting best practices for teaching face-to-face, hybrid, and online classes developed by relevant professional associations.

#### **3.1 Adult Education Master Degree Programs**

For some Adult Education programs, masters and doctoral students will have some overlap in core coursework. When they are taught separately, the following core topical areas, taught from diverse and critical perspectives, are suggested at the master's level. These suggestions are for topical areas, and are not necessarily equivalent to separate courses:

- Introduction to the nature, function and scope of Adult Education
- Adult learning and development
- Teaching adult learners
- Curriculum and Program Planning
- Introduction to the study of technology and online Adult Education
- Historical, philosophical and sociological foundations of Adult Education
- Overview of educational research

These core areas are supplemented by additional study appropriate to student needs and goals, which may emphasize a range of leadership roles (e.g. administrator, teacher, counselor). A student's area of specialty may relate to study within the range of specialty areas reflected in the Adult Education faculty members or may extend to study with other faculty members in related fields. In general, it is unlikely that any Adult Education graduate program will contain all the supporting courses that students require (e.g., business, community development, philosophy, political science, sociology, psychology, etc.), and students should be encouraged to seek out and supplement program instruction through selected coursework and learning experiences with other appropriate faculty members or program areas.

#### **3.2 Adult Education Doctoral Degree Programs**

At the doctoral level, these suggestions are for topical areas, and are not necessarily equivalent to separate courses. The suggested core topical areas include:

- Advanced study of adult learning and development (theory and research)
- Historical, philosophical foundations of Adult Education
- Study of leadership, including theories or organizational leadership, administration and change

- Changing role of technology in Adult Education
- Policy issues in relation to Adult Education
- Globalization and international issues or perspectives in Adult Education
- Social, political and economic forces that have shaped the foundations and discourse of Adult Education
- Diversity and equity in Adult Education
- Advanced specialty courses relevant to unique program and faculty strengths (e.g., continuing professional education, workplace learning, social movement learning, etc.)
- Qualitative and quantitative research methodology coursework to support dissertation research and ability to utilize existing literature

Students entering doctoral study with a master's degree in another field may be asked to take prerequisites from the Adult Education master's level courses. At the master's level, select doctoral courses may be used as a supplement to additional study congruent with students' needs and goals.

Adult Education doctoral study can lead to Ph.D. or Ed.D. degrees, or both options may be available at some institutions. Institutions offering both doctoral options should provide clear information on the distinctions between the two degrees. Generally, the Ed.D. focuses on translating theory and research into practice, and has the larger goal of preparing practitioners or scholar-practitioners who will be well-informed, credible leaders in the field of Adult Education. The Ph.D. emphasizes the study and synthesis of theory and research and can produce dedicated scholar-researchers committed to the advancement of knowledge and scholarship in the field. The Ph.D. may also produce scholar-practitioners who wish a strong in-depth research preparation for practice.

## **4. Adult Education Faculty Members**

### **4.1 Adult Education Faculty Member Qualifications**

Institutions offering a graduate degree, major, certificate or specialization in Adult Education appear in a variety of organizational forms and with differing language. For example, some programs are independent departments while others are combined with other program areas into departments with interdisciplinary degrees with specializations in Adult Education. Full-time members of the Adult Education faculty should have an earned doctorate (Ed.D./Ph.D.) in Adult Education or a related designation. Other designations or language may include, though are not limited to: lifelong education, community education, cooperative extension, and continuing, workplace or workforce education. Additional part-time, adjunct or courtesy-appointed faculty should have earned doctorates in Adult Education or relevant related fields with knowledge of and, preferably, experience in Adult Education. Other criteria for consideration are as follows:

- Academic rank necessary for graduate status in a tenure eligible position (where applicable)

- Record of leadership, as evidenced by significant positions in the Adult Education field, profession and university
- Evidence of contributions to Adult Education scholarship
- Continuing commitment to Adult Education theory, research and knowledge of current best practices

Selection or hiring of faculty should be on the basis of their particular expertise and contributions, and the following general criteria:

- Earned doctorate or specialization in the Adult Education area of their competency or a closely related discipline approved at the discretion of the Adult Education faculty
- Evidence of interest and commitment to the field of Adult Education
- Record of contributions to scholarship relating to courses to be taught or areas of advisement (e.g., adult basic education, community development, continuing professional education, human resource development)

Resources available to Adult Education faculty members should be on par with resources made available within the surrounding college and university contexts in terms of salary, office support, travel support, graduate student assistantship, or other forms of research support.

## **4.2 Adjunct or Courtesy Appointed Education Faculty Members**

Adult Education programs should develop and document an explicit rationale for the participation of full-time, part-time, and adjunct/associate faculty with understandings about what roles, responsibilities, contributions, and privileges faculty members should expect to have based upon their full-time, part-time, adjunct/associate and tenure eligible/non-tenure eligible position. In exceptional cases, suitable experience may be substituted for the doctorate when appointing part-time or adjunct/associate faculty members. Part-time or adjunct/associate faculty members are individuals whose assignments to the Adult Education area are limited due to:

- A full-time administrative role at the university
- A major commitment as a faculty member in another program or university
- A formal joint appointment between Adult Education and another recognized unit in the university
- A research appointment related to grants or contract funded work
- An assignment outside of the university (business, government, voluntary agency, consultant)
- A retired or emeritus Adult Education faculty member

## 5. CPAE Program Standards Revision History

### Standards for Graduate Programs in Adult Education Project (2008)

*Originally Approved November 13, 2008, CPAE Business Meeting during the AAACE Annual Conference, Denver CO.*

The 2008 project to further develop the original Standards for Graduate Programs in Adult Education began at the CPAE meeting in November, 2005 in Pittsburgh. A panel consisting of Dr. Fred Schied (Penn State University), Dr. W. Lee Pierce (University of Southern Mississippi) and Dr. Carol Kasworm (North Carolina State University) discussed their views on maintaining standards for graduate programs in Adult Education and suggestions for modifying those standards. Dr. Susan Bracken (North Carolina State University) agreed to serve as Project Chair along with other volunteers.

#### **CPAE colleagues who contributed to this project include:**

**Chair:** Dr. Susan Bracken, North Carolina State University

#### **Committee Members in alphabetical order:**

Dr. Carol Kasworm (North Carolina State University)

Dr. Fred Schied (Penn State University)

Dr. Henry S. Merrill (Indiana University)

Dr. Patricia Brewer (Union Institute and University)

Dr. Catherine A. Hansman (Cleveland State University)

Dr. W. Lee Pierce (University of Southern Mississippi)

### Standards for Graduate Programs in Adult Education Project (2014)

*Revised Standards approved November 6, 2014, CPAE Business Meeting during the AAACE Annual Conference, Charleston, SC*

The 2014 project to further develop and revise the 2008 Standards for Graduate Programs in Adult Education was taken up at the 2013 AERC Conference in St. Louis, MO. A committee, co-chaired by Dr. Catherine Hansman (Cleveland State University), and Dr. Edward Taylor (Penn State Harrisburg), discussed their views and made suggestions for revising the standards for graduate programs in Adult Education. The suggested revisions were subsequently sent out to CPAE members electronically prior to the CPAE Business meeting in 2014 for further comments and suggestions from CPAE members. The resulting revisions to the standards were discussed and approved by a majority of CPAE members who were present at the November 6, 2014 CPAE business meeting.

#### **CPAE colleagues who contributed to the revised 2014 standards include:**

**Co-Chairs:** Dr. Catherine Hansman (Cleveland State University); Dr. Edward Taylor (Penn State Harrisburg)

#### **Committee Members in Alphabetical Order:**

Dr. Royce Ann Collins (Kansas State University)

Dr. Ed Cunliff (University of Central Oklahoma)

Dr. Gary Dean (Indiana University of Pennsylvania)

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Dr. Patricia Holt (Armstrong Atlantic State University)

Dr. Larry Martin (University of Wisconsin at Milwaukee)

Dr. Mitsunori Misawa (University of Memphis)