

## FAQs for Ph.D. in Curriculum Studies

### **Why could this be a worthwhile program for me, as an educator?**

Whatever your line of work in education (school or non-school, formal or informal), the substance of that endeavor is the heart of the matter. Organization, policy, finance, strategy, and more are necessary but not sufficient. Something good and beneficial needs to be offered to those who participate. We might call that which is beneficial content or experience or relationship or embodied meaning, but without the substance of benefit, there is no reason for the orchestration. It is like having a finely tuned orchestra all ready to go, but with no music to play.

### **What if I do not teach in schools or any kind of educational organization?**

Those most deeply engaged in any vocation, avocation, creative endeavor, or even mundane task can find an educational dimension – something that has potential to edify. If any of this resonates with you, Curriculum Studies at UIC may be the Ph.D. Program for you.

### **What if my interests are so broad that I cannot decide what major I want?**

Curriculum Studies is the quintessential interdisciplinary study. The phenomena, interests, and problems it poses and seeks to understand can be studied from the vantage points of many disciplines, areas of study, and practical and productive realms of experience. The disciplinary character of Curriculum Studies derives from dynamic and eclectic use of a wide range of knowledge to fit needs of the dynamic flow of situations.

### **Is this a new program?**

It is a new name for the old Ph.D. in Curriculum Design. The name represents how the program has evolved for nearly thirty years. The new name also is commensurate with the label of the field, e.g., as used by the American Educational Research Association (AERA), which changed their curriculum Division from Curriculum and Objectives to Curriculum Studies.

### **Why did this name change evolve?**

It represents a change in the pervasiveness of study. The curriculum field emerged early in the Twentieth Century to facilitate increased participation in universal schooling. Though a worthy cause indeed, an area of scholarship needs to be more than the *how-to* development of curriculum for schools according to state or other guidelines.

### **What, then, does Curriculum Studies study?**

A central curriculum question is put simply as: What is worthwhile? More elaborately: What is worth knowing, needing, experiencing, doing, being, becoming, overcoming, sharing, and contributing? Who says so? Who *should* say so? Why is it worthwhile? Where, when, and how should it be pursued? Who benefits from the pursuit? Who does not? How can greater social justice be afforded for those who do not benefit, for those that are hurt by answers given to such questions, and for those who are not represented in responding to the questions?

### **Is the focus of this study centered on a certain level of schooling, e.g., elementary, secondary, higher education, preschool?**

It is relevant to all of these areas and many outside of school realms of education, as well. Curriculum Studies embraces large cultural and social questions that pertain to substantive and methodological dimensions of learning and teaching in many different institutions and non-institutionalized realms of life. In all of these realms there exist intended curricula, along with hidden, null, taught, tested, learned, embodied, clandestine, and exile curricula. All of these are saturated with potential for inquiry.

**What do you mean by non-institutionalized realms of life?**

We advocate study of curricula that occur in and outside of formal educational institutions. Non-institutional realms might include any kinds of relationships that pertain to formation of identities and social commitments, i.e., how human beings compose their lives and outlooks; thus, they are within the range of exploration in Curriculum Studies. For instance we might look at this process through lenses of history, geography, race, class, gender, theology, culture, appearance, language, ethnicity, religion, and ecology or we might focus on what is learned in diverse domains of outside curricula such as friendships, families, peer groups, informal organizations, sports, gangs, artistic experiences, communities, mass media, and much more. Within more formal forms of curriculum we could focus on school experience, such as subject matter areas, teacher education, professional development, classroom milieu, extracurricular activities, and so on. Both institutional and non-institutional curriculum contribute to the persons we are and to the societies we create. Thus, the non-institutional are curricular, and worth studying in Curriculum Studies as much as the institutional. Sometimes non-institutional relationships are sources for imagining possibilities that more established institutions could not perceive.

**Does this not necessitate interdisciplinary study?**

Most certainly it does. As noted above, Curriculum Studies is an interdisciplinary area of study. Understanding curriculum as lived experience through life journeys benefits from inquiry in history, anthropology, sociology, economics, political science, geography, philosophy, psychology, mathematics, language, literature, art, music, and a range of natural sciences, as well as other interdisciplinary studies such as African American studies, women's studies, and many other professional studies, such as medicine, business, social work, public health, architecture, and engineering.

**Since the Ph.D. is a research degree, what research orientations are acceptable?**

Given the interdisciplinary character of Curriculum Studies, research orientations should be selected that illuminate questions, problems, or phenomena that one wants to investigate. Thus, one might do research, more broadly *inquiry*, that draws upon philosophical analysis or speculation, historiography, ethnography, biography, autobiography, literary criticism, literary portrayal, narrative inquiry, phenomenological hermeneutics, postmodern interpretation, critical theory or critical race theory, queer theory, aesthetic inquiries, scientific comparative studies, surveys, and more. There virtually countless variations within each and there is much potential for combining orientations into mixed method studies, or creating original variations that fit unique topics of study. Strengths and limitations of diverse epistemological orientations (experience, empiricism, authority, revelation, intuition, induction and hypothetical deduction, dialectics, dialogue, democratic deliberation, artistic expression, meditation) are explored intensively. Insights are derived from many ways of knowing.

**May one focus on a specialized area of study within Curriculum Studies?**

Yes. Some students choose to focus on urban education curriculum, mathematics education, bilingual education, teacher education, science education, school reform, social justice education, as well as curriculum studies more generally (and some specialize in curriculum history, critical cultural studies, curriculum theory, curriculum development, and sub-divisions). Essentially, students collaborate with faculty to fashion a program within the large and variegated domain of curriculum studies most suited to their needs and interests. As students learn more, it is expected that they continuously reconstruct their line of work. Faculty members and advisors help facilitate this process as part of the overall educational process.

### **What does someone do with a Ph.D. in Curriculum Studies?**

About 70% of our graduates have gone into college and university faculty and research positions; others go into leadership in schools or community colleges, educational agencies, publishing, community organizations, professional associations, or independent scholarship.

### **What can you tell about the faculty?**

Check our web site for biographical information, publications, service, positions held, grants procured, awards received, and scholarly interests. Our faculty members are among the top national leaders in curriculum studies (theory, history, context, and development), urban education, school reform, math education, bilingual education, critical theory and critical race theory, literacy, science education, teacher education, and relationships between curriculum and teaching. A central focus of such studies is often on matters of social justice. The faculty has been ranked by Academic Analytics (see their website) as consistently in the top ten in Curriculum and Instruction in the nation, first in the nation, recently rated fifth, first, and third in productivity – based on awards, grants, publications, leadership roles, citations of work, invited addresses and colloquia, and other indicators of prominence.

### **How long is the program?**

It is a minimum of 64 hours if you have a Master's Degree and 96 hours if you have a Bachelor's Degree.

### **Minimum?**

Yes, this is the least number of hours required to complete the degree. We need to say it this way, because it is necessary for each student to develop the intellectual and research capacity that enables them to do the research needed for the dissertation. Frequently, this necessitates taking more course work, e.g., courses, independent study, dissertation hours.

### **Are some of these hours for dissertation work?**

Yes, if one enters with a Master's Degree, as most do, then one needs 16 hours of Research Core courses, 24 hours in an Area of Specialization, 8 hours in a Research Project, and at least 16 hours for the Dissertation. For those who enter with a Bachelor's Degree, the Area of Specialization is large enough to account for the required total of 96 hours.

### **Can you characterize each of these categories briefly?**

Yes.

### **What is the Research Core?**

This is sixteen hours of research courses that typically consist of an overview of different kinds of research or inquiry orientations and their philosophical assumptions (ED 500), orientations to data interpretation and measurement (ED 501), essential types of and practices within qualitative inquiry (ED 502), essential types of and practices within quantitative inquiry (ED 503). Each of these courses, like most 500-level courses carry four hours of credit. The Research Core courses are shared with several other doctoral programs, as well, though not all programs due to the varied needs of different genres of research done in the variety of sub-fields. Accordingly, we recognize that as one approaches the dissertation topic, expertise in more specialized research must be acquired. Sometimes this can be done independently with professorial guidance, and at other times it requires taking courses in other departments. We are reviewing the desirability of having such courses substitute for ED 501, 502, or 503, or making the courses following ED 500 more flexibly tailored to particular research needs and interests. This illustrates that we are continuously in the process of making our program more relevant to our students. The research core is sometimes recommended by advisors to be taken early in the program; however, decisions

about when to take the research courses depend on the readiness of students to consider the research preparation most suitable to their progress toward the dissertation.

### **What is the Area of Specialization?**

This is 24 hours of opportunity to gain background in one's evolving line(s) of inquiry. It enables the student to first gain knowledge of the myriad realms of curriculum studies literature through a required CI 574 four-credit hour course that surveys the field and involves a great deal of reading – the beginning of the scholarly development of one's library and plans for future study. This course puts one in a position to decide what his or her specialization will be, and then other courses may be taken to bolster that specialization. The balance in the area of specialization is created from CI courses or any other courses in the College of Education, other units on campus, or courses at other universities – providing that such courses are approved by their advisor and are at doctoral level. Courses for this area should be chosen based on particular interests and needs of each student.

### **Is CI 574 the only requirement in the Area of Specialization?**

There is one other: CI 500, Proseminar in Curriculum and Instruction (one credit hour), which is an opportunity to meet the faculty. The course is offered in the hour before regular classes begin, so it does not interfere with the four-hour classes. It runs one night per week, during each semester from 4:00 to 4:50, and each evening is devoted to a different faculty member's autobiographical presentation of research interests, current projects, and endeavors in teaching, scholarship, and service. The Proseminar helps students select faculty members with whom to take courses or independent work, and even to imagine who might make good committee members for the preliminary examination and dissertation committees. It also leads students to relevant reading of the faculty members' publications. It is required once, and may be taken more than once, twice for credit, and the grade is simply S or U (satisfactory or unsatisfactory). If you are present, reflective, and do the two-page paper on what you gained from the experience, it is difficult not to receive an S. In the Proseminar students might also discover opportunities for invaluable experiences: tuition waivers, graduate assistantships, opportunities to work on research projects or grants, fellowships, scholarships, and related activities. The Proseminar may be taken more than once in order to gain more knowledge about faculty members.

### **What is the Ph.D. Research Project?**

This is an opportunity to take a leading role with a faculty member (or simply under the guidance of a faculty member) in a scholarly endeavor. This might be related to a grant; it might be preparation of a paper or presentation for a scholarly conference or a manuscript to submit for publication. One purpose of the Research Project is to gain experience of immersion in the research process, and another purpose resides in the fact that conference presentations and publications on one's *curriculum vitae* (scholarly resume of life's work to date) markedly enhances chances of success in the job market.

### **How does one get involved in activities of the scholarly community?**

Your advisor will help. So will other faculty members, if you strive to get to know them. If you attend conferences, they will literally introduce you to authors on your bookshelf from other universities as well as from UIC. You should check out websites for AERA, AESA, JCP, Bergamo, AAACS, PDK, ASCD, AATC, IAACS, WCCI, as well as more specialized organizations for those interested in different subject matters. Get to know these acronyms, membership benefits, publications, and conference. Instead of spelling out these organizations and giving the web sites, we challenge you to discover what membership entails, learn about their conferences, and read their journals.

### **Do you have a few hints about journals to explore?**

Sure. Some are affiliated with associations: *Educational Researcher*, *Review of Educational Research*, *American Educational Research Journal*, *Review of Research in Education* – all of AERA; *Educational Studies* and *Educational Foundations* – both of AESA; *Journal of Curriculum and Supervision* and *Educational Leadership* of ASCD; *Kappan* of PDK; *Journal of Curriculum and Pedagogy* of JCP; *Journal of Curriculum Theorizing* of the Bergamo Conference and the Corporation for Curriculum Research; on-line publishing opportunities of AAACS and IAACS; *The Forum* of WCCI; *Curriculum and Teaching Dialogue* of AATC. There are more independent journals, such as *Curriculum Inquiry*, *Journal of Curriculum Studies*, *Harvard Educational Review*, *Teachers College Record*, *Educational Theory*, *Educational Horizons*, *Educational Forum*, *Journal of Thought*, and many subject matter specific journals.

### **What are the Preliminary Exams?**

The written preliminary exam is a culminating experience to assess insights derived from the doctoral experience prior to the dissertation stage. Questions are framed to the individual student and her or his program of studies and experiences (courses, independent work, and scholarly participation) on major guiding ideas developed, command of research possibilities for a given topic of interest, and substantive interests for a line of inquiry represented in the dissertation. At some universities this exam is called the *comprehensive exam* or the *qualifying exam*; however, these are often exams given to whole groups of students; in contrast, our exams are individually created to fit each student. The oral preliminary exam is a committee examination over and conversation about an elaborate dissertation proposal (or prospectus). Questions for both the written and oral preliminary exams are developed by the advisor and committee members. Your advisor will talk with you about committee members. The written preliminary exam has three members, including the advisor; they should be familiar with the individual student's program of studies. These three may or may not be on the oral preliminary exam committee; this committee has five members, at least one of whom must be from outside the department, i.e., from another unit at UIC or from another university. The advisor is key to formulating the configuration of the committee in the student's best interest.

### **Who is the advisor and how does one get one?**

When admitted to the program, a student is assigned an advisor, based upon review of the application materials, including any indication by the applicant about the faculty members whose work they find interesting. The assignment is not final. It is the best we can do at the time of admission. As the student studies and interacts with faculty members, another advisor may make sense, at which time a form to change advisors may be completed. Preliminary Exam and Dissertation Committee chairs or advisors are often not those initially assigned.

### **What if I have concerns about advisement?**

It is important to find the best advisor-advisee match. If you find someone who fits your needs and interests more fully than the initially assigned advisor, you should work with that advisor, the program coordinator, the director of graduate studies, or department chair to develop the best advising situation for you. Change of advisor forms may be obtained in the Office of Student Services.

### **What is a dissertation?**

It is an original scholarly contribution to knowledge of the field of inquiry, in this case curriculum studies or one of its sub-dimensions. There are many varieties of dissertations and they need not all fit one stencil. Often our students' dissertations have been converted into books, so sometimes it makes sense for the dissertations to be written like books.

### **What are some examples?**

Virginia Jagla, (1994), *Teachers everyday use of intuition and imagination*, Albany, NY: State University of New York Press; Chris Carger, (1996), *Of borders and dreams*, NY: Teachers College Press; Celia Oyler (1996), *Making room for students*, NY: Teachers College Press; Brett Blake, (1997), *Voices on the edge of adolescence*, Albany, NY: State University of New York Press; Ellen Fitzsimmons (2000), *An ethnography of adolescent learning: Teach me: Cultural shopping and student lore in urban America*. Bethesda, MD: International Scholars Publications; Mark Perry (2000), *Walking the color line: The art and practice of anti-racist teaching*. NY: Teachers College Press; NY: Teachers College Press; Falk-Ross, Francine (2002), *Classroom-based language and literacy intervention*. Boston: Allyn & Bacon; Chris Worthman (2002), *“Just playing the part”: Engaging adolescents in drama & literacy*. NY: Teachers College Press; Robert Blake (2002), *An enactment of science*. NY: Peter Lang. Other doctoral students have published books prior to or during doctoral studies, apart from their dissertation work, e.g.: Therese Quinn (1998), (ed. with William Ayers and Jean Ann Hunt), *Teaching for social Justice*. NY: Teachers College Press; Greg Michie (1999), *Holler when you hear me and See you when you get there* (2004), both from NY: Teachers College Press; Michael Klonsky and Gabrielle Lyon (2000) (with William Ayers), *A simple justice: The challenge of small schools*. NY: Teachers College Press; Brian Schultz, (2008), *Spectacular things happen along the way*. NY: Teachers College Press.

### **How do I find what is offered by the College of Education?**

You can pick up a schedule of classes from the [Office of Student Services](#) at the College of Education, or you can look on-line at [the course offerings list](#).

### **What if I have some graduate work at previous institutions?**

If the graduate work has not been used for a degree, you may petition to have it count toward your program requirements. The Graduate College has a maximum number of credit hours you can transfer to UIC from a different institution or from U of I. These credit hours must be approved at the program and departmental levels as well as by Graduate College. It is important to gain a great deal of the course work at UIC, because you are working toward a UIC Ph.D.

### **What is a CIC Scholar?**

This is a wonderful opportunity to study at one of the Big Ten universities (Northwestern, Illinois, Minnesota, Wisconsin, Purdue, Indiana, Pennsylvania State, Iowa, Ohio State, Michigan, Michigan State – eleven in all, plus a twelfth, the University of Chicago, which historically was in the Big Ten). So, if you find a scholar whose work you admire from one of these universities you may pursue details with the CIC (Committee on Intercollegiate Cooperation) Office in the Graduate College in University Hall and work with your advisor, director of graduate studies, program coordinator, other professor, or department chair to propose study with the scholar of your choice, while paying tuition at UIC, or still better using your waiver (if you have one) at UIC.

### **Are tuition waivers or other funding plentiful?**

Not as plentiful as we would like, but possible. The Department of Curriculum and Instruction has a limited number of tuition waivers each semester; one applies through the Office of Student Services in the College of Education. The university has a number of campus-wide competitions for fellowships and scholarships. Faculty members who receive government or foundation grants often have research assistantships. Sometimes, teaching assistantships are available to those who are particularly well-qualified. Be sure to check your UIC email to receive updates. In addition, you are encouraged to search the Web for specialized funding for doctoral studies or dissertation research.

**Under what rubrics may I take independent study work?**

You may take independent study (CI 596 or 596 in other Departments) or you may select CI 592 (Apprenticeship in Teaching) or CI 539 (Internship in Curriculum and Instruction). If course, the CI 593 Research Project and the CI 599 Thesis Research are also forms of independent work. These can be done independently with your advisor or another available faculty member whose expertise fits your inquiry of choice.

**How many hours should I take per semester?**

It depends on your work load. Those who are employed full-time usually take one or two courses. Sometimes it is helpful to couple courses and independent work to fit your schedule.

**Is there a residence requirement?**

There is no longer a formal one. However, you should be enrolled each semester after accepted. While it is possible to take one semester off without penalty, you may not take consecutive semesters off without written approval Graduate College permission. After you complete the preliminary exam, you must be continuously registered in Fall and Spring Semesters until your completed dissertation is approved. Continuous registration does not mean that courses must be taken in Summer Sessions. You may, of course, take courses in Summer Sessions if you wish. Moreover, it is advisable to try to have a period of time for full-time doctoral pursuits. Some think it is best to do this during the dissertation while others prefer doing so during course work periods.

**Are the same courses offered every semester?**

No. Research Core courses are offered frequently, but other courses are not. CI 574 is offered once per year and CI 500 is offered Spring and Fall. Key electives are offered either annually or biennially.

**What level of courses should I take?**

They should be 500-level courses, or at least 400 level courses

**Are there cohorts?**

No, although there is ample opportunity to work with other students.

**Are classes taught on Saturday?**

No, not for the Ph.D. in Curriculum Studies. Courses are usually offered one night a week, Monday through Thursday, 5-8 PM.

**Do you offer summer sessions?**

We now offer two different summer sessions. This provides opportunity to do additional course work.

**How do I apply?**

An application package is available from the Office of Student Services in the College of Education, 3145 EPASW. Be sure to note which materials are to be sent to the College of Education and which to the Office of Admissions and Records.

Some of the bases for admission decisions that are taken seriously include:

- Background of experience (Take time to convey it.)
- Undergraduate and graduate GPA (We look at disciplinary majors/minors, places of study, persons with whom one studied, and indicators of scholarly capacity.)

- Letters of Recommendation (Be sure to select writers who know about doctoral work; generally, scholars (especially noted scholars) in the field are most appropriate)
- Statement of goals (Take time with this. It is examined for expression of substantive ideas *and* for writing ability. From this and other sources, we try to determine your commitment and capacity to make original scholarly contributions. We also want to glean a sense of your dedication.)
- GRE Aptitude test. This can give indication of facility with English, math, and reasoning. It is not the end all or be all. It is one indicator.
- Other indicators, such as publications, presentations at scholarly conferences, research interest, dedication to certain issues, involvement in scholarly endeavors, experience that speaks to dedication, and more.

In the final analysis, we have more highly qualified applicants than we can accept, so we accept those who we decide we can help to become outstanding scholars and educators. Much depends on scholarly judgment of our faculty. At the Ph.D. level it is an honor to be accepted to admission; it is not a requirement necessitated by meeting certain minimal standards.

**Again, why is it important to study curriculum studies?**

What is more important than a life of pursuing what is worthwhile as one composes one's life, helps others to engage in this experience, and thus, to contribute to a better society and world?