



University of Connecticut

## NEWS RELEASE

### **Novel Program Now Offered at UConn as Part of Nationwide Effort To Prepare New Generation of School Leaders**

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STORRS, Conn. – The Connecticut Department of Higher Education has given its stamp of approval to an innovative doctoral program designed to prepare a new generation of effective leaders in Connecticut’s school districts, a critical component in improving student achievement.

The Education Doctorate in Educational Leadership, offered by the University of Connecticut’s Neag School of Education, was developed as part of a national initiative led by the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching. The goal of the five-year program is to position the Ed.D. as a doctorate of practice, similar to the professional degree programs in fields such as medicine, law, and engineering.

The project was inspired, in part, by research that has shown strong school leadership has a strong relationship to gains in student achievement. With that in mind, the Neag School and 22 other schools of education were selected to participate in the Carnegie Project on the Education Doctorate (CPED) to help transform the advanced preparation of school administrators. Barry Sheckley, head of the Department of Educational Leadership, has been involved in the project since it began two years ago.

“The Neag School’s revised doctorate of practice is designed to prepare a select group of educators who will lead the next generation of systemic instruction reform in the state,” Sheckley says, and he points to “three distinct innovations that set the Neag School program apart from others in the U.S.”

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The first is its “problem focus.” In contrast to the theoretical focus of many other doctoral programs, the Neag Ed.D. focuses on helping school leaders develop the skills necessary to inquire into complex problems related to student achievement, and then craft solutions that address these problems by improving learning, achievement and life outcomes for Connecticut students.

The second is the method used. The Neag Ed.D. is framed around Sheckley’s extensive research on adult learning. It moves away from the traditional lecture-discussion format found in many doctoral programs and, instead, is based on candidates using theory and research to guide in-depth exploration of problems of practice. Students in the program, for example, explore problems such as decreasing student absentee rates or improving student math achievement.

Sheckley, the Neag Professor of Adult Learning, believes that experienced professionals learn best when they use “perspectives gained from theory and research to explore problems of practice they deem authentic.” Such problems, he explains, typically occur within their own school districts.

“By using this approach, a learner’s own school district becomes a laboratory of practice where the learner tests out how conceptual ideas actually play out in practice,” he says.

The third innovation is the outcome. The most effective practitioners, according to Sheckley, have a well-developed ability to think deeply about issues—to make “mental leaps” that result in creative solutions to difficult problems. Individuals with this capability, he says, are not only leaders within their own districts, but they also have a wide sphere of influence within their profession. Typically, their broader influence comes about through writing about their successes and disseminating their innovations through papers presented at legislative hearings, conferences, or in journal articles.

For that reason, the Capstone Project in the Neag program is a document in which the doctoral candidate offers a detailed analysis of a problem of practice, a conceptual framework that can be used to address it, a set of specific recommendations based on research and theory as well as the candidate’s own inquiry, and perspectives on how to implement the recommendations.

“Our goal has been to develop one of the very best Ed.D. programs in the country,” says Sheckley, “and I’m confident that some of the top educational leaders in Connecticut will be graduating from this program in the near future.”

*For details on the Ed.D. in Educational Leadership, call: (860) 486-4812 or check out:*  
[www.education.uconn.edu/departments/edlr/](http://www.education.uconn.edu/departments/edlr/)

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