



# *Clemson University*

College of Education

Department of Educational and Organizational  
Leadership Development

Doctor of Education (EdD) in  
Education Systems Improvement Science

Program Handbook

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## Preface

Your successful experience in Clemson University's College of Education (COE) is important to us. As a student in the Doctor of Education (EdD) in Education Systems Improvement Science (The Program), this handbook is a tool to ensure you maintain academic progress according to COE and Clemson University Graduate School policies and procedures. Please take the necessary time to read this handbook. In addition to this handbook, doctoral students should refer to the [Graduate School Policies and Procedures Website](#) and the [Graduate School Policies and Procedures Handbook](#). Please also refer to the [Program](#) website.

## Program Purpose

The EdD is an applied professional doctoral degree designed for certified PK-12 practitioners who have previously completed an Education Specialist (EdS) degree or equivalent. In the Program, students develop the theoretical and practical knowledge base and research skills needed to be effective educational leaders who design innovative solutions that positively impact local students, families, and communities in South Carolina and beyond. Students complete a Dissertation in Practice (DiP) focused on systemic, contextual challenges facing educators related to race, rurality, and poverty in which they identify systems-level opportunities to apply improvement science for change and innovation. Accessing an educational setting(s) (e.g., PK-12 school/district) to conduct research for the DiP is necessary for successful completion of the Program.

This degree is offered in partnership with The Citadel, Coastal Carolina University, and Winthrop University. Clemson is also a member of the [Carnegie Project on the Education Doctorate](#) (CPED), a consortium of more than 100 colleges and schools of education in the United States and Canada. Clemson's Program is based on the [CPED Framework](#)®, which includes guiding principles and a defined set of design concepts for the professional doctorate in education.

Designed for working professionals, the Program helps students become scholarly practitioners while building a strong background in leadership, ethics, diversity, research, and educational improvement science. Improvement Science is a method of inquiry that helps scholarly practitioners define complex problems, implement changes, and determine whether the changes result in improvement. The Program includes field embedded research with the goal of moving theory into practice to improve educational systems and outcomes.

## Program Delivery

The Program is delivered in a cohort format with online courses (a blend of synchronous and asynchronous) and face-to-face, in-person opportunities which include orientation and an annual summer summit as well as degree milestones (e.g., Comprehensive Qualifying Exam, Dissertation Proposal Defense, and Dissertation Defense). The degree consists of a minimum of 42 credit hours, and the typical time-to-degree span is approximately 3 years.

### EdD in Education Systems Improvement Science Curriculum Overview

Core (6 credits)		Cognate (9 credits)		Research (12 credits) & Dissertation (18 credits)	
	Credit Hours		Credit Hours		Credit Hours
EDIS 9100 Models for Whole School Reform	3	EDIS 9300 Rural Education	3	EDL 9800 Practical Systems Improvement Science Investigations I	3
EDIS 9200 Systemic Educational Reform	3	EDL 8850 Diversity and School Communities	3	EDL 9800 Practical Systems Improvement Science Investigations II	3
		ED 8540 International Perspectives on Poverty and the Schools	3	EDIS 9360 Advanced Program Evaluation	3
				EDIS 9890 Advanced Doctoral Seminar	3
				EDIS 9910 Dissertation	18
				<b>Total Credit Hours</b>	<b>45</b>

## Admission

Application for admission to the program requires applicants to hold an EdS degree or equivalent prior to admission. In addition to this requirement, the formal admission process begins with an online application (found at the [Clemson Graduate School's website](#)). All application materials must be sent to the Graduate School at Clemson University. Application materials sent electronically or via ground mail to any faculty or department member at Clemson University will not be accepted.

### Deadline for Admission

Applications for the program are accepted for the Summer term only. Admission decisions are made following the deadlines below:

- January 15th – Priority Deadline
  - Completed applications will be reviewed for early decision.
- March 1st – Traditional Deadline
  - Completed applications should be submitted for full consideration.

### Application Components

To be considered for the program, applicants must:

- Have completed a baccalaureate degree from a regionally accredited college or university with a minimum GPA of 3.0 on a 4.0 scale or a recognized international university with a baccalaureate degree equivalent to a US bachelor's.
- Have an Educational Specialist (EdS) degree or equivalent with a minimum GPA of 3.0 on a 4.0 scale.
- Complete any missing prerequisite requirements following a review of EdS transcript, if from a non-partner institution.
- Submit an [Online Graduate Application](#) which requires:
  - Unofficial transcripts (Official transcripts will be required if accepted into the program.)
  - Competitive, official GRE (Graduate Record Exam)- taken within the last 5 years OR one of the following:
    - Equivalent academic admissions exam (e.g., GMAT, LSAT, MCAT) – taken within the past 5 years
    - A GPA of at least 3.0 in the most recent graduate degree
    - At least 5 years of classroom experience AND at least 2 years in a leadership position (e.g., building or district level)
  - A current resume

- Three letters of recommendation. Two can be professional recommendations but at least one should be from someone who can speak on academic achievement. This can be from a partner institution (The Citadel, Coastal Carolina University, or Winthrop University) or other accredited institution.
- A statement of research interest/problem of practice to be examined in the program.
- Official TOEFL/IELTS scores for international students

Additional information on admissions can be found on the [Graduate School website](#).

## Admissions Committee

The Admissions Committee is composed of full-time, tenured/tenure-track faculty members who teach courses and/or advise students in the Program. The Admissions Committee meets, to the extent possible, to allow adequate time for the Graduate School and College of Education offices to process applications and before new student registration is opened by Clemson's Registrar's Office.

## Plan of Study

A Plan of Study (Clemson Graduate School's [GS2 Form](#)) is established upon entry to the program as the program is cohort based. Classes are offered sequentially each semester. At the beginning of each semester, faculty within the program review student's performance and progress to advise and support on the remaining coursework, based on the learning and developmental needs of the student. Students falling short of departmental, college, or university expectations may be placed on probation or dismissed from the program. Given students' academic backgrounds, goals, and interests, some coursework may exceed minimum requirements. Students must earn at least 21 credits and pass all courses before taking the Comprehensive Qualifying Exam (CQE) and moving to candidacy. More information can be found in the [Graduate School Policies and Procedures](#).

## Time-to-Degree, Continuous Enrollment, and Leave of Absence

All requirements for the doctoral degree must be completed within eight (8) years from matriculation into the doctoral program. Students are required to be enrolled each summer, fall, and spring semester following initial matriculation. If students anticipate not being continuously enrolled, they must complete a [GS-LoA – Request for Leave of Absence](#). More information on continuous enrollment and leaves of absence can be



found in the [Graduate School Policies and Procedures](#). Leaves of absence do not stop the time-to-degree clock.

## Doctoral Advising Committee

According to Clemson's Graduate School, the Doctoral Advising Committee (DAC) holds the ultimate responsibility for program design and supervision of students and candidates for the degree. Students are responsible for obtaining faculty members' consent to serve on their DAC. Per Graduate School policy, all members of the four-person DAC must be members of the graduate faculty, and the majority of the advising committee, including the major advisor, must be full-time Clemson University Regular or Administrative faculty. Per consortium agreement, the fourth member may come from a consortium member institution.

The DAC is typically comprised of three full-time, tenured/tenure-track faculty members primarily from the EdD program; however, individuals from other disciplines or with areas of expertise relevant to the student's dissertation topic, theory, or methods may also serve, AND one external member (e.g., from a partner institution). In cases in which external, non-Clemson committee members are included on the DAC, such members are subject to Clemson's peer review process for adjunct faculty. Tenured faculty within the [Department of Educational and Organizational Leadership Development \(EOLD\)](#) have the final jurisdiction in determining a non-Clemson committee member's suitability to serve on any DAC.

Any full-time, tenured/tenure-track faculty member in the Department of EOLD may serve as a chair of a student's DAC. The terms, Chair and Major Advisor, are used interchangeably. Some Clemson policies also include the term Dissertation Director.

Because Clemson is a research university and the EdD is a professional, scholarly degree, the major advisor should be a person with expertise in the student's research topic. The EdD is designed to support faculty and student productivity in terms of conference presentations and publications related to improvement science and field-embedded research. Therefore, the major advisor, other DAC members, and students should write, present, and publish together when possible. Students need to consider this expectation in selecting their advisors and choose the faculty members whose expertise is most closely aligned with their research interests.

According to Clemson's Institutional Review Board (IRB) policies, the major advisor serves as the principal investigator (PI) of the student's dissertation research project, not the student. That fact places the major advisor and student in a mutual, high-stakes relationship requiring the student's careful attention to research protocols.

Major advisors are responsible for directing students toward appropriate literature and methods, providing feedback on progress to degree, and assuring that the student is

aware of deadlines and institutional requirements for progress toward degree. Students must willingly take such degree progress feedback and research advice. Students are ultimately responsible for meeting requirements at both program and institutional levels.

Students who would like to request a change in their major advisor can discuss the rationale for change with the current advisor, secure a new advisor, and submit an updated [GS2](#).

## Comprehensive Qualifying Exam (CQE) and Candidacy

The Comprehensive Qualifying Examination (CQE) is taken by doctoral students at the successful completion of their academic coursework. However, based on the DAC's recommendation, it could be taken prior to, or simultaneously with EDIS 9890: Advanced Doctoral Seminar. The CQE provides students the opportunity to synthesize knowledge at an advanced academic level and to demonstrate the following:

1. An understanding of basic concepts beyond the final assignments completed in specified courses;
2. Formation and articulation of scholarly arguments and concepts in areas of study;
3. Use of methods of argument, presentation, conclusion, implication, application, and organization to synthesize knowledge from the student's studies;
4. An ability to integrate concepts from multiple disciplines; and
5. Sufficient practitioner and scholarly grounding for proceeding to a guided-independent research project (DiP).

Procedures for the CQE are as follows:

- Beginning at the end of the third semester, there will be a designated period for completing the CQE. The exam is comprised of both written and oral components.
- All students taking the CQE respond to the same questions, which reflect the content of previously-completed coursework. The exam assesses students' abilities to understand, comprehend, and synthesize degree concepts, grounded in improvement science, to generate a coherent pathway to degree completion.
- The format, expectations, and deadline for submission of responses to CQE questions will be specified.
- Faculty will be available to consult with students about matters of process regarding the CQE, but they will not discuss the substance of students' responses with them until after the written responses have been submitted.
- To pass the CQE, students are expected to complete written answers that are coherently argued and articulated while also demonstrating an appropriate familiarity with relevant theory and empirical evidence related to the questions. In essence, the student should demonstrate the ability to construct a convincing argument, marshaling appropriate evidence to support that argument.



- Students whose responses to any of the questions are deemed unsatisfactory by the faculty will have a one-time opportunity to retake an unsatisfactory CQE.
- Once the student has successfully completed the CQE, the committee will forward a signed GS-5D form to Clemson's Graduate School requesting that the student be admitted to candidacy.

## Dissertation in Practice (DiP)

Candidates in the EdD Program will complete a Dissertation in Practice (DiP). According to CPED, the DiP is a scholarly endeavor in which candidates must demonstrate the ability to conduct independent inquiry, apply theory to practice, and examine a contemporary educational problem. DiPs should be innovative in nature and seek to address a complex problem of practice that persistently plagues the education system in South Carolina and beyond. DiPs should be grounded in the principles of improvement science. Candidates should produce scholarly work that can inform the work of educators elsewhere and positively impact education overall. The DiP may be conducted by an individual or in collaboration with other candidates.

The dissertation research and writing process is a highly-intensive experience (18 credit hours minimum) that requires close association between the candidate and the major advisor. Particularly concerning IRB requirements, both are ultimately responsible for fidelity in the research protocols. Furthermore, both are also accountable for meeting all of Clemson's requirements as well as the professional demands for ethics and knowledge development in the field of educational leadership.

It is expected that candidates adhere to the scholarly conventions of academic writing and expectations of Clemson's Graduate School. In particular, students should attend to matters of spelling, grammar, and ethics as detailed in the latest edition of the [\*American Psychological Association's Publication Manual\*](#) (also known as the APA Manual).

As professionals, candidates assume primary responsibility for establishing and meeting their research and writing deadlines and must accommodate the research, teaching, and service demands of their major advisor and DAC members in setting and meeting those deadlines. For current deadlines, please check the Graduate School [website](#).

## DiP Proposal

In their last semester of coursework, students enroll in EDIS 9890: Advanced Doctoral Seminar, during which a DiP proposal should be prepared. The proposal is developed under the direction of the major advisor and the EDIS 9890 instructor. A DiP proposal is generally comprised on an Introduction, the Problem of Practice (grounded in scholarly literature), and Research Design. The complete proposal is to be submitted to the major

advisor and committee members at least two weeks in advance of the DiP proposal defense.

Candidates submit their [Announcement of Dissertation Proposal](#) to schedule the DiP proposal defense, which is open to the public. With the assistance of the student services program coordinator, a suitable location will be identified in which to hold the proposal defense. Once the date and location of the defense have been determined, the student services program coordinator will circulate a public announcement of the proposal defense.

At the DiP proposal defense, candidates are expected to present and defend their complete DiP proposal. Depending on the presentation, it is likely that further revisions will be suggested by the DAC. Candidates are expected to make timely adjustments based on suggested revisions. Candidates are not allowed to submit an IRB application or to collect data without DAC approval.

The agenda of the proposal defense includes the following items:

1. Candidates provide a brief overview of the research study including an Introduction, the Problem of Practice, and Research Design.
  - a. In addition to a discussion of concepts/theory and prior research, the overview includes a clear statement of the problem with associated research questions, a design appropriate to the research problem, an explicit specification of the research procedures from data generation/collection through analysis with projected formats for presentation of results.
2. The DAC and others attending the proposal defense may ask questions of candidates on any aspect of the proposal.
  - a. Generally, faculty members focus their questions on proposal elements most germane to their areas of expertise.

The outcome of the proposal defense may range from full DAC support to proceed (pending IRB approval) to a request for substantial revision to the proposal and the scheduling of a new defense. Sometimes candidates and their major advisor receive instructions from the DAC to implement minor revisions, circulate the revised proposal, and pending full approval from all of the DAC members, proceed with the study. The next step for proposals approved by the DAC is obtaining Clemson's IRB approval.

## Institutional Review Board (IRB)

Candidates must not seek IRB approval for their dissertation research until successfully defending their proposals. Ultimately, the major advisor serves as the principal investigator (PI) for the candidate's research. The steps in this process are key to

Clemson's procedures for assuring the ethical construction and trustworthiness of research protocols.

The DAC serves as the first step in reviewing the design and methods of candidate's research including, but not limited to, examining the validity of instruments and ethical treatment of participants. Filing an [IRB Application](#) is the second step in this process. The Major Advisor serve as the Principal Investigator and must submit the IRB forms to Clemson's Office of Research Compliance. The Office of Research Compliance communicates through the major advisor, not the candidate. In addition to the prerequisite of a successful proposal defense, the Office of Research Compliance requires candidates and their major advisor to complete research ethics and compliance training.

## DiP Defense and Publication

As is the case with the proposal defense, candidates must file their [Announcement of Dissertation Defense](#). Ideally, throughout the Program and process, the major advisor and DAC members have worked with candidates in increasing knowledge dissemination and productivity, presenting aspects of candidates' research at conferences and forums, and through the preparation of manuscripts. Such activities serve as preparation for the public defense of the dissertation.

All members of the DAC and candidates agree to the defense date. Candidates may not attempt to schedule their defense without permission from their major advisor. Candidates submit a final draft of their DiP to the DAC at least two weeks before the defense date. With the assistance of the student services program coordinator, a suitable location will be identified in which to hold the proposal defense. Once the date and location of the defense have been determined, the dates are communicated within the College of Education and [Clemson's Student Defense Calendar](#).

Generally, the agenda for the dissertation defense follows a similar format as the proposal defense. Candidates provide a brief presentation of their research study including the Introduction, Problem of Practice, Research Design (theoretical contributions through design, data collection, analysis), and Findings with a discussion of implications for research and practice. Members of the DAC as well as others attending the defense may question candidates about any aspect of the study. Candidates who have worked closely with their DAC will find the defense a collegial and rewarding conversation among peers.

Upon successful defense of the DiP, the [GS7D – Doctoral Dissertation Defense and Approval Form](#) must be completed and signed by the DAC. A successful defense leads to graduation and the receipt of the EdD during a hooding ceremony.

The DAC determines the next steps in the event of an unsuccessful defense. At any point in the Program, the DAC has the right to prescribe additional coursework and preparation to aid the student in successfully completing the degree.

Information about the dissertation manuscript submission process is available on the Graduate School's [website](#).

## Graduation

Each semester, Clemson's Graduate School publishes specific deadlines on its [website](#) for students planning to graduate. Students are responsible for being aware of and meeting all university requirements, including the deadlines published by the Graduate School. The Graduate School may charge and collect late fees for missing deadlines.

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**The student assumes full responsibility for meeting all basic requirements for the degree as well as the specific requirements outlined by their program.**

Clemson University, the Graduate School, and the COE all reserve the right to make changes to the policies, procedures, fees, or other information in this handbook without advance notice.

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Acknowledgement: This handbook is modeled after the work of Dr. Natasha N. Croom and follows the format outlined by the Clemson University Graduate School Program Handbook Outline (Rev. 11/2018).



## Appendix A

### EdD Program Process Outline with Timeline

#### Application Process

- Review the following:
  - EdD in Education Systems Improvement Science Program Handbook
  - Clemson University's [Graduate School Policies and Procedures](#), especially related to: Admission, Application Fees and Status, Navigating Courses, Degree Requirements, Nearing Graduation, and Financial Basics for Graduate Study
  - Clemson University's [Tuition and Fees](#) and [Student Financial Aid](#)
- Prepare all required materials before beginning the application process
- Complete the [Graduate School Online Application](#)

#### Course Sequence and Milestones

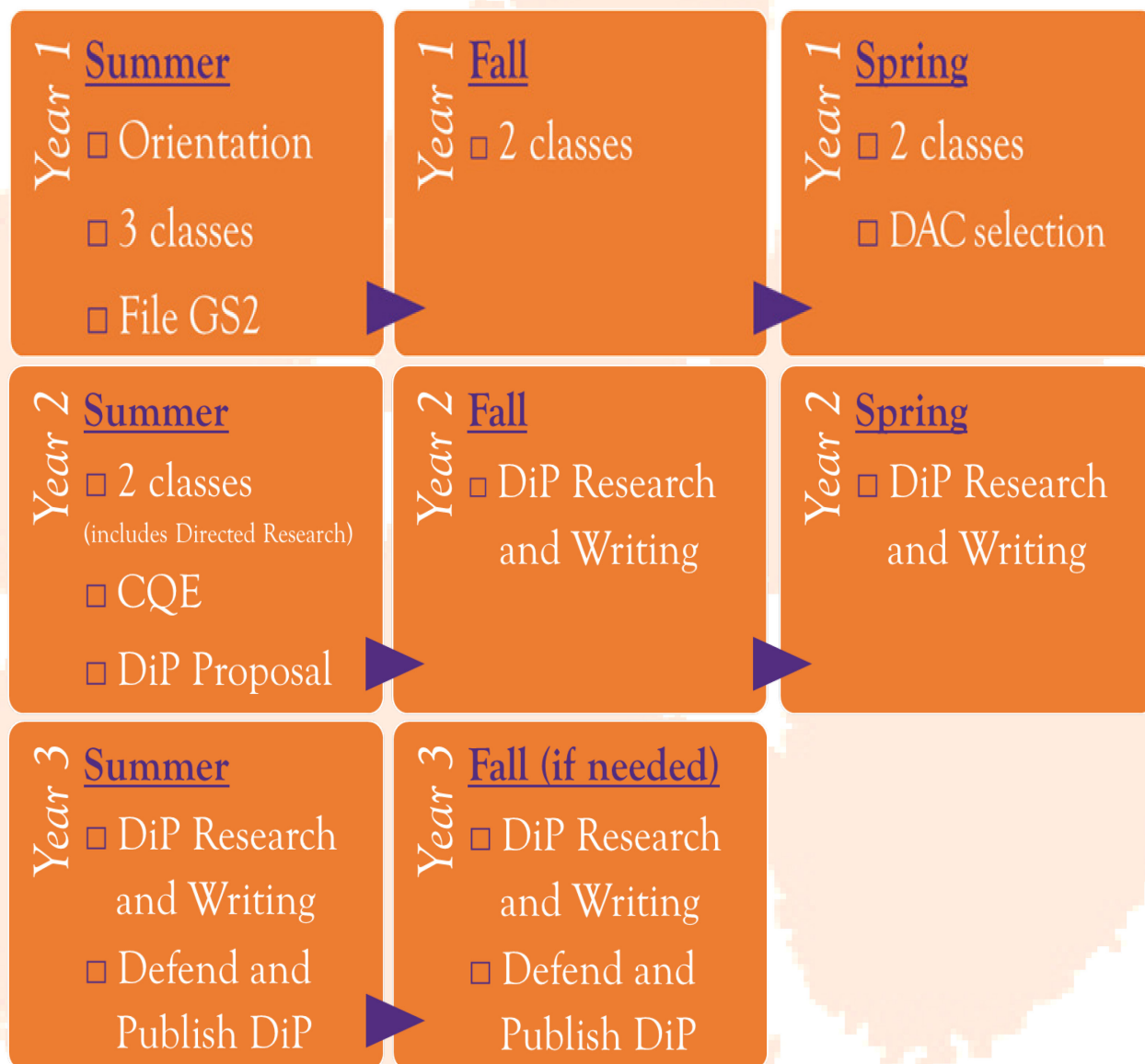
Year 1	Summer	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Program Orientation</li> <li>▪ Three courses (9 credits)</li> </ul>
	Fall	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Two courses (6 credits)</li> </ul>
	Spring	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Two courses (6 credits)</li> <li>▪ Select DAC and file <a href="#">GS2 Committee Selection</a></li> <li>▪ File <a href="#">GS2 Plan of Study</a></li> </ul>
Year 2	Summer	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Two courses, including Directed Research (6 credits)</li> <li>▪ Complete your Comprehensive Qualifying Exam</li> <li>▪ Submit the <a href="#">GS5D – Results of the Doctoral Comprehensive Exam and Candidacy Form</a></li> <li>▪ Submit your <a href="#">Announcement of Dissertation Proposal</a></li> <li>▪ Defend Dissertation in Practice (DiP) Proposal</li> </ul>
	Fall	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ DiP Research and Writing (6 credits)</li> </ul>
	Spring	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ DiP Research and Writing (6 credits)</li> </ul>
Year 3	Summer/ Final Semester	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ DiP Research and Writing (6 credits)</li> <li>▪ Check the <a href="#">Graduation Deadlines</a> and apply for <a href="#">Graduation</a></li> <li>▪ Rent or purchase your <a href="#">Official Clemson University Regalia</a></li> <li>▪ Submit your <a href="#">Announcement of Dissertation Defense</a></li> <li>▪ Defend DiP</li> <li>▪ Submit <a href="#">GS7D – Doctoral Dissertation Defense and Approval Form</a></li> <li>▪ Submit DiP to <a href="#">ProQuest</a> via the Graduate School</li> <li>▪ Attend your <a href="#">Doctoral Hooding Ceremony</a></li> </ul>
Beyond Graduation		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Consider submitting your DiP to be considered for the <a href="#">CPED Dissertation in Practice of the Year Award</a></li> <li>▪ Consider submitting a manuscript that is derived from your DiP for publication in scholarly or practitioner journals</li> <li>▪ Consider presenting your DiP at professional conferences</li> </ul>



## Appendix B

### Clemson University's EdD in Education Systems Improvement Science Student Milestones

For current milestone deadlines, please see the Graduate School [website](#).



## Appendix C

### Dissertation in Practice (DiP) Proposal Process for Students in Clemson University's EdD in Education Systems Improvement Science

Adapted from Hawkins, J., & Hinnant-Crawford, B. (2020, March 24). *Introduction to improvement science* [PowerPoint slides]. <https://www.cpedinitiative.org/>

