

CURRICULUM AND INSTRUCTION, PH.D.

The PhD program in the Department of Curriculum & Instruction was designed to develop the epistemological, ontological, axiological, and methodological expertise required of burgeoning scholars to independently conduct educational research related to teaching, learning, and curriculum in a wide range of settings.

Please contact Dr. Karen Spector (kspector@ua.edu), Director of Curriculum & Instruction Ph.D. Programs, with all questions (except those related to the Music Education focal area). All questions related to the Music Education focal area should be directed to the Graduate Coordinator and Chair of Music Education, Dr. Carl Hancock (chancock@ua.edu).

Admissions

The Ph.D. program accepts applications for fall semester entry *only*. In the fall, admitted students will begin a 4-course sequenced core curriculum with their cohort.

Application Deadline

Priority application deadline for Fall 2026 entry: November 7, 2025. Applicants who submit their materials by this deadline will receive priority consideration for graduate assistantships and other forms of funding. Submission by the priority deadline enables us to inform the most qualified applicants of our decision to accept them into the program in January 2026, thereby allowing newly admitted PhD students more time to plan for moving to Tuscaloosa, Alabama. This extra time is often needed for international students seeking student visas.

Regular application deadline for Fall 2026 entry: January 6, 2026.

Regardless of which application deadline you choose, all applicants will receive an admission decision with funding offers, if applicable, before or by March 1, 2026.

Music Education students should contact the Music Education Graduate Coordinator for deadline information.

Application Requirements

In addition to the minimum Graduate School admission requirements, to be considered for regular admission an application must include:

- Curriculum Vitae (CV)/Resume**
- Statement of Purpose** with the following parts:
 - Describe the specific focused area within our program that aligns with your research interests.
 - Identify a research question or problem within this area that you're passionate about investigating. Explain its importance and relevance to current issues in the field.
 - Briefly outline your academic and professional experiences that have led you to pursue this research interest.
 - Describe your long-term career aspirations and how our PhD program will help you achieve these goals. Discuss how you hope your research will contribute to the advancement of knowledge in your chosen area.

Remember, while your research interests may evolve during the program, demonstrating a clear, focused, and well-informed research direction at this stage is crucial for a strong application.

- Three (3) letters of recommendation**, including at least one from a professor who can write about the applicant's potential as a scholar.
- Scholarly Paper**: Submit **one** piece of your academic writing, such as a course paper, thesis, or published article. If the paper has multiple authors, please indicate your approximate percentage of contribution on the title page or in the header of the document.
- Video Introduction**: Create a video **up to 3 minutes long** answering the following prompts: a) Introduce yourself, b) State which **one** of the nine focal areas you would like to pursue; c) Why do you want to be part of this PhD program?; d) What are your career goals after completing your PhD?; e) Share one thing about yourself that is not covered in your other application materials. The video can be recorded with a cell phone. We would like to be able to see you and hear you, but beyond that, we are evaluating the content of the video and not the production quality.

Preferred qualifications are a master's degree and at least two years of experience in related professions, curriculum design, or instructing learners at any level, in the U.S. or abroad. Not everyone who meets minimal and preferred qualifications will be admitted to the program. For example, Music Education prefers a minimum of three years of successful contractual teaching as a certified teacher and at least one degree in music education (master's or bachelor's).

See the Admission Criteria section of this catalog for more information.

Curriculum Requirements

NOTE: No student shall register for classes before meeting with their Major Professor for guidance. Music Education students should meet with the MUE Graduate Program Coordinator.

Code and Title	Hours
Sequenced core doctoral courses in Curriculum and Instruction (minimum of 12 credit hours)	12
CIE 601 Concept Frameworks in C&I Res	
CIE 602 Research in Learning in C&I	
CIE 603 Research on Teaching in C&I	
CIE 604 Critical Research in C&I	
Note: These courses shall not be used to meet Research Methods requirements.	
Focal Area of Study within Curriculum and Instruction	18
Students will choose from 9 focal areas:	
1) Early Elementary and Social Emotional Learning	
2) Elementary Education	
3) Literacies and Languages (prek-16 and adult)	
4) Social Studies Education (prek-16 and adult)	
5) Mathematics Education (prek-16 and adult)	
6) Science Education (prek-16 and adult)	
7) STEM Education (prek-16 and adult)	
8) Transformative Education (prek-16 and adult)	
9) Music Education	
Research Methods	12
(e.g., courses with BER prefix as approved by your Major Professor or MUE Graduate Coordinator for music education students)	
Foundations of Education	6

(e.g., courses with AEL, BEF, and BEP prefixes, as approved by your Major Professor or MUE Graduate Coordinator for music education students)

Dissertation Hours	18
CEE 699, CIE 699, CSE 699, or MUE 699 for Music Education students	
Total Hours	66

Transfer Credit

At the discretion of the Major Professor or MUE Graduate Coordinator, it may be possible to transfer up to 24 credit hours from a relevant master's or EdS program.

Graduate School information on Transfer Credit.

Doctoral Plan of Study

Within 20 hours or less, students will submit a Plan of Study, which will be agreed upon with a program of study committee (and, for those with a focal area of study in Music Education, based on results of the MUE Diagnostic Exam*).

The Plan of Study committee includes the Major Professor and a minimum of four additional faculty, one of whom must be external to the department and at least three of whom must hold faculty lines within Curriculum & Instruction. At least three of the committee members must have Full Graduate Faculty status. For music education students, the committee includes all MUE graduate faculty with the Graduate Coordinator serving as chair.

**For those with a focused area of study in Music Education, the MUE Diagnostic Examination will be taken no later than the second semester in residence. The student must register for MUE 631 Doctor of Philosophy Diagnostic/Admission Exam, a zero credit-hour course, to show successful completion of the examination.*

Yearly Plan and Review

Each year PhD students will participate in a Yearly Plan and Review (YP&R), except for Year 1, for which students shall complete only the Yearly Plan. The YP&R is due at the beginning of each academic year to create a plan for the new year and to review the prior year.

Graduate School information on the Doctoral Plan of Study can be found here.

Comprehensive Exam

The goals of the comprehensive examination are (a) to give students an opportunity to reflect on and integrate the knowledge and skills they have developed in their doctoral studies, and (b) to give faculty members the opportunity to evaluate whether students show sufficient breadth and depth of knowledge and skills in their particular fields.

Students are eligible to take the examination when they have 6-9 credit hours of coursework remaining in their program. There are now three options (A-C) for comprehensive exams, as noted below.

Option A: Traditional Comps

The student's program of study must be on file in the program office, and a Doctoral Committee Advisory form must be completed and on file in the program office. It is the student's responsibility to complete the Application for Comprehensive Exams (available from the Curriculum & Instruction Department office—Autherine Lucy Hall 204). The student must submit the request to take the comprehensive examination at least

3 weeks in advance of the time in which the exam will be taken. This request form must be signed by the program planning committee chair.

Option A Procedures

Students will be provided with three (3) questions relative to their expertise and research interests that are to be completed independently. The Plan of Study Committee Chair contacts the program committee members who will write questions for the examination. The date will be determined by the student in conjunction with the Chair of the student's Doctoral Program Advisory Committee. The questions will be delivered electronically to the student with receipt required by the C&I program assistant. The completed exam must be returned electronically to the C&I program assistant within 10 calendar days.

Each question will include appropriate subsections to ensure that all areas identified are assessed. Faculty members from the student's advisory committee will write the questions and may assist students by clarifying any details about the questions. No additional assistance may be obtained from the faculty members or any other individuals. Students are required to give numerous and appropriate references to the sources they use and to include a reference section in their examinations. Plagiarism on the exam will be considered academic misconduct, resulting in automatic failure of the examination and possible termination from the program. Students who are unclear on what constitutes plagiarism or the improper paraphrasing of others' work are advised to ask for guidelines from department faculty members. Students wishing additional clarification on a question can approach the faculty member who wrote the question.

The electronically submitted responses for each question should be comprehensive. Each response should be approximately 20 double-spaced pages with one-inch margins. The written comprehensive exam is considered *passed* when all questions are passed. (2 of 3 assessors must pass the student on each question.) The committee has the option of requiring an oral defense of the comprehensive exam, in which case a student passes the exam only when they pass both the written and oral portions. The Option A comprehensive exam will be assessed using rubrics available on the C&I PhD website.

Students are allowed two attempts to pass comprehensive exams, as stated in The University of Alabama Graduate Catalog.

1. If a student fails the first attempt at comprehensive exams, a remediation plan will be established with the student and Program of Study chair. Additional faculty members may be included in the remediation plan as deemed appropriate by the Program of Study chair. The remediation plan will be submitted in writing to the department chair for approval.
2. Students are not allowed to attempt the comprehensive exams twice within the same semester.
3. Upon successful completion of remediation, as determined by the Program of Study chair, the student will be allowed a second attempt to pass comprehensive exams.
 - Questions for the second attempt at comprehensive exams are to be written by the same faculty members who wrote questions for the first attempt, if possible. Program of Study faculty members may use the same questions for both attempts, as deemed appropriate by the Program of Study Chair.
 - Faculty members who grade responses from the first attempt at comprehensive exams are to grade the responses from second attempt, when appropriate and/or feasible.

A student who fails the second attempt at comprehensive exams, Option A, will be dismissed from the degree program and from the Graduate School (Graduate Catalog Policies 4.11.1, 4.11.2, 4.11.3)

Option B: Publishable Paper

Overview

The outcome of this option will be one high-quality research manuscript written by the student and evaluated by committee members. The manuscript does not have to be accepted for publication to be deemed acceptable by committee members. IRB approval for research involving human subjects is required.

Committee Structure

The student's Major Professor (hereafter *chair*) and two other Plan of Study Committee Members will comprise the Option B Comps committee. This committee will review the concept paper and final manuscript. The three committee members will be referred to as *the committee* throughout the remainder of this document.

The recommended steps in the process are outlined below.

Concept Paper Packet

Students will complete a Concept Paper Packet describing the proposed study as early as possible in their program. For full-time students this packet would typically be completed in the second semester of the first year or first semester of the second year, or the summer between these two semesters (see suggested timeline below).

The Concept Paper Packet will include:

1. A Cover Sheet that declares this option as the student's requested choice.
2. An identified chair, with their signature on the cover sheet;
3. A 5-10 page literature review (reviewing substantive, peer-reviewed literature including landmark research; may be a systematic literature review or other approved option);
4. A specific research question or hypothesis that follows from the literature reviewed;
5. An identified dataset or original data collection plan that will be utilized for analyses to answer the research question;
6. A brief description of the dataset's sampling approach, data collection procedures, dates of data collection, primary variables, etc.;
7. A data analysis plan with sufficient level of detail for the committee to give input;
8. A list of at least 3 target journals that will be potentially used for the submission, including their impact factor and author guidelines;
9. Status of an IRB protocol approving the use of human subjects.

The chair will actively advise the student choosing this option. Early steps may include providing materials such as sample IRB protocols, journal articles, journal requirements, sample journal feedback, journal review criteria, and other materials deemed appropriate by the chair.

The chair will work closely with the student on all aspects of Option B. As one of the first steps, the chair will work with the student to develop the concept paper which describes the research idea and plan in enough detail for the additional two committee members to provide meaningful input.

Once the chair approves the concept paper packet (outlined above), they will pass on the packet to the committee for input and approval. The Committee Review Form will be used by the committee to provide

feedback to the student, via the chair. Once all approvals are obtained, the student may proceed with the research.

The committee will give feedback to the student (via the chair) regarding the concept and approach, and the chair will take primary responsibility to work with the student to incorporate any needed changes.

Suggested Timeline

The following are general guidelines and a timeline based on three years of full-time coursework, but the student and chair should discuss a realistic and specific timeline.

Fall, 1st Year: Students will be introduced to the Research Publication Option in the student orientation and in the first course in the sequenced curriculum.

Spring, 1st Year: Students will take the second course in sequenced curriculum and work with the chair in developing a concept paper.

Summer After 1st Year: Students will begin working closely with the chair and put together their Concept Paper Packet. Once the chair is satisfied with the Concept Paper Packet, they will submit the packet to the committee.

Fall, 2nd Year: Students will enroll in the third course in sequenced curriculum and will use this semester to conduct their research, analyze data, and begin writing.

Spring, 2nd Year: Complete a full draft of the manuscript. The chair will review the manuscript and approve/disapprove it. If it is deemed insufficiently developed, the student will continue working on the draft until sufficient progress is made. Once it is approved by the chair, the paper will be submitted to the committee who will have **at least two weeks** to review the manuscript, make suggestions, and approve/disapprove it.

Committee Review of Submitted Publishable Paper

Once the Publishable Paper is approved by the chair, it will be submitted to the committee who will have **at least two weeks** to review the submission, make suggestions, and approve/disapprove it.

Links to the comprehensive exam rubrics can be found on the C&I PhD website page.

Should revisions be necessary before approval, the student will have 30 days to make revisions and resubmit the manuscript to the chair or to the committee, depending upon initial outcome.

A student must receive a rating of "acceptable as is" by at least 2 of 3 committee members to pass this option and move on to an oral defense. Once the written portion is passed, the oral defense will be scheduled. The oral defense will be a 20-minute conference style presentation followed by committee questions. Students must pass both the written and oral portions to pass, if the oral portion is required.

A student may change to the Traditional Comprehensive Exam (Option A) at any time, even after submitting the second draft of the Research Publication Option.

After Approval of the Publishable Paper

To be advanced to candidacy, the student must pass one of the comprehensive exam options and complete all but 6 credit hours of coursework.

Authorship

The student is expected to produce the Publishable Paper with input and direction from faculty, but **without** co-authoring. If the paper is subsequently submitted for publication, the student will be first author. The committee and potentially others (other graduate students, other

faculty, and so forth), may be co-authors of the paper when it is submitted for publication, depending upon the amount of input each gives to the final submission. An authorship agreement should be created by the student and signed by all authors in advance of authorship collaboration.

There is no limitation on a student authoring or co-authoring other papers before, during, or after participating in the Publishable Paper Option for comprehensive exams.

Option C: Creative and Scholarly Activity Projects (Music Education students only)

Overview

This option is an alternative specifically for Music Education students. Minimally, the goal of this option are three (3) music education projects. The projects may comprise work completed in MUE/MUA/MUS graduate courses and may be completed as a combination with or in addition to such courses according to the following stipulations. The projects will be approved by the graduate program coordinator; be deemed by the advisory committee to be exemplary of sufficient quality, substance, and breadth for presentation/publication/performance in a professional forum; and afford the doctoral student an opportunity to develop potential foci for future work of a scholarly, curricular, or creative nature. Documentation for such projects will be decided in advance and must be approved by a majority of the committee. An oral presentation will be given as a 60-minute presentation with committee questions. Students must receive a rating of "acceptable as is" by at least a majority of committee members in order to pass this option.

Committee Structure

The Graduate Program Coordinator and all members of the music education graduate faculty will comprise the committee. This committee will review the three projects and attend the oral presentation of these by the student. A majority of committee members must deem the three projects of sufficient merit to qualify the candidate for candidacy.

Graduate School information on Comprehensive Exams.

Admission to Candidacy

Upon successful completion of the comprehensive examination, the student will be admitted to candidacy and can begin taking dissertation hours in the semester following completion of comps Option A, B, or C. Students may sit for the comprehensive examination in their final semester of coursework.

Graduate School information on Admission to Candidacy.

Continuous Doctoral Research Hours Requirement

Graduate School information on Continuous Doctoral Research Hours Requirement.

Dissertation Requirements

Dissertation Research, Writing, and Defense

The student will identify the doctoral dissertation committee membership, which will follow the same guidelines as did the Plan of Study committee formation. The student will develop the dissertation proposal with input from the committee, present it in writing and orally to the committee for approval, and revise as needed until it is acceptable to the committee.

Once admitted to candidacy, the student will complete and defend the dissertation proposal and the proposed dissertation research under

the supervision of their Major Advisor and dissertation committee.

Upon completion of the dissertation research, the student will work with their Major Professor in drafting/revising all chapters. When the Major Professor deems the research ready to move forward, the student will schedule a dissertation defense date and share the dissertation with the committee, typically 2 weeks before the scheduled defense date. The student must successfully defend the work via an oral presentation to the committee, which is also open to the public, and therefore must be advertised via the Slate portal. A successful defense may still entail some revision to the written dissertation.

Graduate School information on Dissertation Requirements.

Time Limit for Degree Completion

Graduate School information on Time Limits.

Academic Misconduct

Graduate School information on Academic Misconduct.

Withdrawals and Leave of Absence

Graduate School information on Withdrawals and Leave of Absence.

Academic Grievances

Graduate School information on Academic Grievances.

Grades and Academic Standing

Graduate School information on Grades and Academic Standing.

Graduate School Deadlines

Information on Graduate School Deadlines.

Application for Graduation

Information on the Application for Graduation.

Acquisition of Financial Support:

There are a limited number of Curriculum & Instruction (C&I) PhD program Graduate Assistantships (GAs) funded by the Department. In addition, there are a limited number of highly competitive Graduate School Fellowships available. Furthermore, individual faculty members with grants may choose to use their grant money to support a PhD student they select for admission into the program, but in this case, continued GA funding is dependent upon the faculty member's continuing external grant support.

All GAs earn a monthly stipend, health benefits, and paid tuition and fees. Once granted, financial support is generally guaranteed through the first five years in the program for all C&I program PhD students who meet performance expectations and who do not meet any Conditions for Termination of Financial Support (see below). Students will be informed of impending financial support termination at least one semester prior to the support termination date except in the special cases noted under Conditions for Termination of Financial Support. Students in good standing may petition the Director of the C&I PhD Program for continuing GA support beyond the fifth year on a semesterly basis. Petitions for continuing support must be submitted to the Director of the C&I PhD Program at least three months prior to the start of the final semester of guaranteed support. Students in good standing with GA support beyond the fifth year may continue at their advisor's discretion until GA support is either exhausted or terminated by their advisor.

Fellowship Nominations:

Eligible students who excel in the program may be nominated by the Department for UA fellowships. Nominees are selected by departmental faculty vote based upon prospective nominee research productivity, academic performance, and contributions to the Department. Fellowship recipients are guaranteed paid tuition and fees, a stipend, and benefits at least commensurate with those provided through departmental GA support.

Performance Expectations for Continuing Financial Support:

The student must be in good academic standing in the C&I PhD program. The student must remain clear of all infractions outlined under Conditions for Termination of Financial Support. The student must complete all mandatory annual training and abide by all rules and policies held by The University of Alabama and The College of Education. Graduate teaching assistants must adequately perform all duties assigned to them in a timely manner as defined by the instructor of record or their designee for all courses to which the student is assigned teaching, grading, and/or laboratory preparative responsibilities.

Students who meet one or more of the following criteria will be subject to termination of financial support pending C&I Department administrative review. Depending upon the severity of the infraction or the extent of non-compliance, the Department Chair and PhD Program Director—with input from the PhD Committee—will recommend immediate termination of financial support, termination of financial support at the end of the current semester, or termination of financial support (partial or full) at the end of the following semester.

Dereliction of duty. Dereliction of duty includes but is not limited to: failure to comply with all UA safety and interpersonal conduct policies; absence from scheduled obligations without prior notification to the instructor of record or designee (for teaching assistants) or the research advisor (for research assistants); or failure to satisfactorily complete all activities associated with the funded position as defined by the instructor of record or designee (for teaching assistants) or by the research advisor (for research assistants) and the student's departmental memorandum of appointment.

Resolved finding of Academic Misconduct. Penalties, including potential loss of financial support, will be determined with guidance from the UA Graduate School and/or the UA College of Education.

Loss of good academic standing. Students not in good academic standing have one probationary academic semester after notification of their change in academic status to return to good academic standing—with the non-passing grade exception noted below. Financial support will be terminated if good academic standing is not restored by the end of the probationary academic semester. Students who earn more than two grades of 'C' or at least one grade of 'D' or 'F' in graduate courses will have a compulsory academic performance review by the C&I PhD Committee. This review will determine whether the student should continue to receive financial support and/or be dismissed from the program at the end of the semester in which the non-passing grade is earned or at the end of the following semester. A decision will be rendered prior to the end of the semester in which a third 'C' and/or a 'D' or 'F' grade is reported.

Delinquent Yearly Plan & Review. Students who neglect to complete the required Yearly Plan & Review by the deadline (September of each year) may lose funding, as determined by the C&I PhD Committee.

Insufficient continuous research progress. The dissertation committee determines by majority vote if a student is making adequate research progress commensurate with their time in the program during required annual reviews. If the committee determines the student is not making

adequate research progress, the student will be granted one probationary semester (i.e., academic semester or full summer term) with financial support to remedy productivity deficiencies, as assessed by the dissertation committee. Failure to meet minimum research expectations by the end of the probationary semester will result in immediate termination of financial support.

Funding for Students with a Focal Area of Study of Music Education

Acquisition of Financial Support

Students in good standing in the Music Education Graduate Program may be supported by a graduate teaching assistantship (GTA) funded by the Department or School of Music at the .25 or .5 level. Both assistantship levels provide a stipend and benefits along with paid (partial or full) tuition and fees. Students awarded assistantships receive financial support through the first two years in the program for traditional master's degree students and the first three years for doctoral and EdS students who meet performance expectations and who do not meet any **Conditions for Termination of Financial Support** (see below).

Students will be informed of impending financial support termination at least one semester prior to the support termination date, except in special cases noted under **Conditions for Termination of Financial Support**. Doctoral students in good standing may petition the Music Education Department Chair for continued GTA support beyond the third year on a semesterly basis. Petitions for continuing support must be submitted at least three months prior to the start of the final semester of guaranteed support.

Performance Expectations for Continuing Financial Support

To remain eligible for financial support, students must:

- Maintain good academic standing in the Music Education MA, EdS, EdD or PhD program.
- Adhere to all university, college, and department policies, including those related to ethical conduct and professional behavior.
- Complete all mandatory annual training and abide by all policies held by The University of Alabama, the College of Education, the Department of Music Education, and the School of Music.
- Perform all duties assigned as a graduate teaching assistant in a timely and professional manner, as defined by the Music Education Department Chair.
- For doctoral students, engage in research under the direction of a department-approved advisor beginning in the first semester of the third year, with continuous progress expected as guided by the advisor and dissertation committee.

Conditions for Termination of Financial Support

Students may face termination of financial support under the following conditions, pending administrative review by the Department. Depending on the severity of the infraction, the Department Chair —along with input from the Graduate Committee—may recommend *immediate termination*, *termination at the end of the current semester*, or *termination at the end of the following semester*.

1. **Dereliction of Duty** – Includes, but is not limited to:
 - Failure to comply with all university conduct policies.
 - Unexcused absences from assigned responsibilities.
 - Failure to satisfactorily complete GTA responsibilities as defined by the Music Education Department Chair.
2. **Academic Misconduct** – A resolved finding of academic misconduct may result in loss of financial support, with penalties determined in

consultation with the Graduate School and/or College of Education and/or School of Music.

3. **Failure to Secure a Dissertation Advisor** – Students must secure a department-approved dissertation advisor at the beginning the first semester of their third year in the program. Students who fail to do so may lose financial support, at the discretion of department.
4. **Loss of Good Academic Standing** – Students placed on academic probation have one semester to return to good standing. Financial support will be terminated if good standing is not restored. Additionally, students who receive more than two grades of 'C' or at least one grade of 'D' or 'F' will undergo a faculty review, which may result in termination of financial support or dismissal from the program.
5. **Failure to Complete Annual Self Reviews** – Doctoral students must complete all required annual progress reviews in a timely manner. Failure to meet deadlines may result in probation and, if unresolved, termination of financial support.
6. **Insufficient Research Progress** – A student's dissertation committee evaluates research progress annually. If the committee determines that progress is inadequate, the student will have one probationary semester (fall, spring, or summer) to address deficiencies while maintaining financial support. Failure to meet expectations by the end of the probationary semester will result in immediate termination of financial support.

Graduate School information on Financial Assistance.