Candidate: R. Ben Meador IV
For the degree of: Doctor of Philosophy
Department: Educational Leadership, Research and Technology

Title: Shaping Leadership: Leadership Standards in the Organizational Language of University Programs

Committee: Dr. Nancy Mansberger, Chair
Dr. Jessaca Spybrook
Dr. Paul Farber

Time/Place: Thursday, October 27, 2016
10 a.m. to noon
4402 Sangren Hall

According to institutional theory, organizations in complex fields like K-12 education seek legitimacy by aligning formal descriptions of their activities to institutional ‘rules’ supported by regulators, professional groups and exemplar organizations. To contribute to our understanding of this field, this study measures alignment between the formal descriptions of 321 university-based programs for educational leaders and themes from the Professional Standards for Educational Leaders, a set of institutional rules. Themes include technology, finance, research, and learning. Additionally, this quantitative content analysis measures the influence of forces that support the standards: state licensure policy and professional affiliation in the University Council for Educational Administration (UCEA).

The results of this study are mixed. Many universities explicitly mention the leadership standards and virtually all programs mention the
learning and research themes, signaling the strength of the standards as a set of institutional rules in these areas and the usefulness of institutional theory as an explanatory framework within the field. On the other hand, technology, which is the newest theme in the standards, is mentioned by relatively few programs. Furthermore and counter to the impact anticipated by institutional theory, state policy did not have a significant impact and the members of the UCEA, a group of exemplar organizations that back the standards, mentioned technology less than non-members. These findings raise questions about how and why organizations adopt new, contested topics in the formal descriptions of their activities.