

VSCS Policy 101: Program Review & Continuous Improvement (PReCIP) Report
Master of Arts, Leadership Studies
SUMMER 2025

INTRODUCTION

This Program Report fulfills the requirements and goals of VSC's Program Review & Continuous Improvement (PReCIP) policy for the Master of Arts in Leadership Studies program. After an extensive design and review phase, the program began accepting students in Fall 2019 for a pilot year. Upon the performance of the pilot year, the program was fully launched in Fall 2020 and has been operating on a calendar year schedule for five years. The study period for this review spans FA19 through SU25.

The design phase included development of a complete assessment system with alignment of program outcomes, course learning objectives, key assignments, advanced academic study content, asynchronous design methods, in-process and yearly reviews, an enrollment management plan with a robust database, marketing, admissions, and student material, etc. As such, the program has been informed by the assessment system for routine continuous improvement work since launch.

The program team invites comments, feedback, and questions regarding this Report and the program.

SUMMARY

- Of the 105 students who began the program, 90% were working professionals (Group B) and 10% were undergraduates or recent graduates who have not yet entered a professional position (Group A). The success rate—defined as achieving one's educational goal—was 78% for Group B and 45% for Group A.
- Program completion among students intending to earn the degree was 65%. The remaining students have either paused or exited; some may still complete within the 5-year limit.
- The program's continuous improvement process, which spans the range of the study period, focuses on three areas: Curriculum Refinement; Instructor Development; Success and Completion. The Report includes information on the outcomes from initiatives in each focus area. The program team has identified topics for attention during the upcoming review cycle.
 - Curriculum Refinement:
 - Inquiry Projects in LDR-6025, LDR-6045, & LDR-6950
 - Student Self-Assessment assignment
 - Curriculum review for LDR-6005, LDR-6015, & LDR-6035
 - Schedule change: 15-week summer courses
 - Instructor Development:
 - Continuation of review meetings
 - Record-keeping for individual and program goals
 - Team retreat
 - Collective scholarly endeavor
 - Success and Completion: First-Semester Group B Students:
 - Additional data metrics on first semester noncompleters for Group B
 - Comparative investigation of peer institutions
 - Pre-emptive communication about managing unexpected course interruptions
 - In-Course Enrollment Management: Information about enrollment adjustment options

I. STUDENT SUCCESS AND RETENTION DATA REVIEW

The four tables in this section provide data and analyses related to the MA Leadership Studies (LDR) program from the pilot year (Fall 2019-Summer 2020) through the fifth year of regular operation (Fall 2020-Summer 2025).

Findings regarding program enrollment (Table 2), course enrollment and retention (Table 3), and success in course and program completion (Table 4) are posted below the tables.

Table 1: Data Dashboard Program Counts: Pilot through Year 4

1	2	3	4
YR	AY	Program Enrlmt Count	Program FTE
Pilot	FA19	6	5
	SP20	8	7
	SU20		
YR 1	FA20	13	12
	SP21	18	16
	SU21		
YR 2	FA21	17	15
	SP22	18	16
	SU22		
YR 3	FA22	21	19
	SP23	17	15
	SU23		
YR 4	FA23	16	14
	SP24	14	12
	SU24		
	Total	148	129

The Data Dashboard provides a time-bound snapshot of program-related quantities. As such, the information reflects select metrics at a specific point in time without complete coverage. Additionally, the data contributing to the reported quantities is not readily available to the program team for disaggregated review and analysis.

To enable more robust and dynamic analysis, the program team maintains a comprehensive Enrollment Management Plan (EMP) database for use in continuous improvement efforts. Information drawn from the EMP database is depicted in Tables 2 through 4.

Table 2 provides an overview of cumulative program data including headcount data by population segments. Segment definitions are included in the table. Tracking segments allows for trend analysis. These trends are explored further through course-level data in Table 3.

Table 2: Program Headcount

PROGRAM ENROLLMENT HEADCOUNT by SEGMENT: PILOT (FA19) THROUGH YEAR 5 (SU25)†				
1	STARTER	105	100%	The headcount of students who started coursework in the program Fall 2019 through Summer 2025. This headcount includes students who matriculated in the LDR program, students matriculated in other programs taking an LDR course as an elective, and nonmatriculated students.
2	ACTIVE	18	17%	The headcount of Active students as of Summer 2025 where “Active” indicates students who are making progress toward their goals (matriculated and non-matriculated) even if not currently enrolled. [Successful]
3	COURSE ONLY	18	17%	The headcount of Starters who successfully completed one or more courses in the program without completing the full program. This segment includes (a) students who satisfied their goals by completing one or more LDR courses for electives, continuing education, professional development, program trial, or other interests [Successful], and (b) students who intended to complete the program but have exited or stopped completing courses (Program DNF) [Not Successful]. An analysis of this segment is provided in the Success and Completion Study (Table 4) of this PReCIP Report.
4	FIRST SEMESTER DNF	24	23%	The headcount of Starters who Did Not Finish (DNF) their first semester course(s) (matriculated and non-matriculated). An analysis of this segment is provided in the Success and Completion Study (Table 4) of this PReCIP Report. [Not Successful]
5	PROGRAM COMPLETER	45	43%	The headcount of Starters who completed the program and earned the degree. [Successful]

†: All numbers subject to revision.

Findings: Program Enrollment Headcount

The LDR program--designed to maximize access and flexibility for working professionals--attracts a diverse student population to enhance sustainability, including nonmatriculated professionals, students from other programs seeking electives, and prospective students exploring graduate study. These “Course Only” students (17% of Starters) often meet their academic goals with one or two courses. The Course Only segment also includes LDR-matriculated students who succeed in their first semester but do not complete the program (Program DNF).

A critical retention metric involves students (matriculated and nonmatriculated) who do not successfully complete their first semester course (23% of Starters)—referred to as “First Semester Did Not Finish (DNF).” Monitoring this segment has led to targeted innovations, which are described in Section III of this Report.

The Success and Completion Study (Table 4) presents findings from a multi-year investigation of trends and interventions related to both Course Only and First Semester DNF students.

Table 3 provides actual enrollment by course, semester, and year. Key metrics are included throughout.

Table 3: Course Enrollment

COURSE ENROLLMENT and RETENTION: PILOT THROUGH YEAR 5†												
Includes part-time enrollment (1 course) and full-time enrollment (2 courses)												
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12
	YR	Aca. Year	Sem	LDR-6005	LDR-6035	LDR-6045	LDR-6025	LDR-6015	LDR-6950	Enrlmt per Semester	Academic Credits	% of Capacity
2	P	FA19	1	10						10	50	83%
3		SP20	1		11					11	55	92%
4		SU20	1			13				13	65	108%
5	YR 1	FA20	1	13			10			23	115	96%
6		SP21	1		13			14		27	135	113%
7		SU21	1			10			14	24	120	100%
8	YR 2	FA21	1	12			11			23	115	96%
9		SP22	1		12			11		23	115	96%
10		SU22	1			14			10	24	120	100%
11	YR 3	FA22	1	12			14			26	130	108%
12		SP23	1		10			12		22	110	92%
13		SU23	1			9			15	24	120	100%
14	YR 4	FA23	1	8			10			18	90	75%
15		SP24	1		8			10		18	90	75%
16		SU24	1			8			10	18	90	75%
17	YR 5	FA24	1	12			12			24	120	100%
18		SP25	1		12			12		24	120	100%
19		SU25	1			10			9	19	95	79%
20	Totals		18	67	66	64	57	59	58	371	1855	-----
21	Ave per Crs			11	11	11	11	12	12	11.27	56.36	94%
22	Sem-to-Sem Retention			78%	89%	95%	91%	93%	98%*			
23	Average per Semester: YR1-YR5									22.47	112.33	94%
24	Average per Year: YR1-YR5									67.40	337.00	94%

†: All numbers subject to revision.; *Anticipated per SU25 completions.

Findings: Course Enrollment

The enrollment target for LDR courses is 12, with a regular cap of 14. This target aligns with the rpk Group's recommendation for graduate courses for the Optimization Project. At the target enrollment, each 5-credit course generates 60 academic credits—comparable to 20 students in a 3-credit course. LDR courses have operated at 94% capacity, producing 19 more credits per section than a similarly enrolled 3-credit graduate course. This represents a 46% increase in credit production per section compared to a standard 3-credit model. Over the review period, the LDR program has generated 1,855 academic credits—742 more than a similarly enrolled program using a 3-credit course model. This operational efficiency supports institutional goals for resource optimization.

The VTSU merger introduced challenges for attracting nonmatriculated and elective-seeking students. Reduced and erroneous website content and a revised tuition model that increased costs for nonmatriculated out-of-state students corresponded with a dip in enrollment during Year 4. Although a targeted marketing campaign helped boost matriculated enrollment in Year 5, nonmatriculated and elective enrollment has not yet recovered. Rebuilding these pipelines remains a priority.

The course sequence displayed in Columns 4 to 9—LDR-6005 through LDR-6950—represents a typical student progression. The retention rate between the first two courses is 78%, aligning with the 23% first-semester attrition rate noted in the Success and Completion analysis (Table 4). This juncture in the course sequence continues to be a primary point of attrition and a focus for retention interventions, as described in Section III of this Report.

Table 4 provides an overview of success, nonsuccess, and completion disaggregated by two primary population groups: (A) undergraduate students enrolling in LDR courses as electives and recent undergraduate degree completers who are not yet employed in a professional position (UGRAD); (B) working professionals in early, mid, or senior employment positions (PRO). A third analysis (C) considers the experience of Starters with the goal to complete the program.

Table 4: Success & Completion Study

SUCCESS AND COMPLETION STUDY: PILOT (FA19) THROUGH YEAR 5 (SU25)†				
1	TOTAL STARTERS (P-YR5)	105		100%
2	Analysis 1: Participant Group A			
3	UGRAD OR RECENT UGRAD w/o PROFESSIONAL JOB	11		10% of Starters
4	First Semester Completion	5		45% of Group
5	1+ (i.e., one or more courses only, e.g., electives)	2	Success	18% of Group
6	Program Completer	1	Success	9% of Group
7	Active, Current	0	Success	
8	Program Change	0	Success	
9	Active, Pause	2	Success	18% of Group
10	Program DNF	0	NonSuccess	
11	First Semester DNF (Workload)	6	NonSuccess	55% of Group
12	UGRAD Group Success	5		45% of Group
13	UGRAD Group NonSuccess	6		55% of Group
14	Analysis 1: Participant Group B			
15	WORKING PROFESSIONALS	94		90% of Starters
16	First Semester Completion	76		81% of Group
17	1+ (One or more courses only, e.g., CE, PD, elective)	12	Success	13% of Group
18	Program Completer	44	Success	47% of Group
19	Active, Current	15	Success	16% of Group
20	Program Change	1	Success	1% of Group
21	Active, Pause	1	Success	1% of Group
22	Program DNF	3	NonSuccess	3% of Group
23	First Semester DNF	18		19% of Group
24	Program Change	2	NonSuccess	2% of Group
25	Work Obligations	8	NonSuccess Yet	9% of Group
26	Job Change	7	NonSuccess Yet	7% of Group
27	Life Events	1	NonSuccess Yet	1% of Group
28	PRO Group Success	73		78% of Group
29	PRO Group NonSuccess	21		22% of Group
30	TOTAL: SUCCESS (Completers, Current, 1+, Change)	78		74% of Starters
31	TOTAL: NONSUCCESS	27		26% of Starters
32	Analysis 2: Program Completion by Goal			
33	PARTICIPANTS w/ GOAL TO COMPLETE	69		66% of Starters
34	Program Completers	45		65% of Group
35	Program Noncompleters, Yet	24		35% of Group

†: All numbers subject to revision.

Findings: Success & Completion Study

Of the 105 students who began the LDR program over the study period, 90% were working professionals (Group B) and 10% were undergraduates or recent graduates who have not yet entered a professional position (Group A). The success rate—defined as achieving one’s educational goal—was 78% for Group B and 45% for Group A. Each student identifies their educational goals at entry; these typically include program completion, individual course completion for professional development or elective credit, or specific applied learning outcomes.

Program completion among students intending to earn the degree was 65%, with 45 of 69 achieving the credential. The remaining 24 students have either paused or exited; some may still complete within the 5-year limit.

The program team has used this data to inform targeted improvements, particularly in response to high nonsuccess rates among UGRAD starters. These interventions, detailed in Section III, reflect the program’s commitment to continuous improvement and tailored student support.

Narrative, Section I: Student Success and Retention

- 1) Directions: Identify and interpret challenges and improvements resulting from the merger and optimization.

Enrollment and Success issues identified across the study period of this Report.

- a) **Current and Recent Undergraduate Student Group (UGRAD)**
 - i) As identified in the Success & Completion Study, the program team has been investigating challenges with enrollment of undergraduate and recent undergraduate students. This project and resulting improvements are described in Section III of this Report.
- b) **First Semester DNF among Professional Student Group (PRO)**
 - i) The detailed trends identified in the Success & Completion Study enable the program team to target interventions to students in the Professional Group to address First Semester DNFs. This project and anticipated improvements are described in Section III of this Report.

Operational challenges and improvements resulting from VTSU merger and optimization processes.

- c) **Challenge: Program Unfamiliarity:** During the merger, shifting internal perceptions introduced additional challenges. For example, VTSU’s modality definitions avoid common terminology such as *synchronous* and *asynchronous*, instead using “online” to designate both modalities. This approach complicates discussions with inquirers.
 - d) **Challenge: Time Requirements:** Managing the merger and associated operational protocols required significant time across all units and endeavors.
 - e) **Improvements:** The program team has remained attentive to the program’s vision and goals and benefitted from the high collaborative spirit of many colleagues throughout the merger.
- 2) Directions: Describe (a) specific strategies identified during merger and optimization to improve student academic success, retention, and on-time completion, and (b) an improvement plan including timeframe, specific individuals to be involved, and the intended goal(s) to be achieved via these strategies.

The strategies outlined below have been in place throughout the study period of this Report prior to and through the merger and optimization. They will continue to drive the improvement process.

Curricular Refinement

- a) See Section III, 1: Curriculum
- b) See Appendix C: Program Outcomes Assessment Matrix

Instructor Development

- a) See Section III, 2: Instructor Development

Course Success and Completion Analysis

- a) See Section III, 3(a, b, c): UGRAD Group
- b) See Section III, 3(d, e, f): PRO Group

II. STUDENT OUTCOMES AND ASSESSMENT ATTACHMENTS

- Appendix A. Degree Program Map and Milestones
- Appendix B. Curriculum and Learning Outcomes Crosswalk
- Appendix C. Program Outcomes Assessment Matrix
- Appendix D. E-Series Form

III. PROGRAM REVIEW

Narrative, Section III, Program Review

Directions: Describe the program's most recent cycle of program review and improvement efforts, including constituents and external perspectives included in the process.

This PReCIP Report provides a review of the LDR program's pilot year and first five years of regular operation, which constitutes the most recent comprehensive review cycle. This first phase of implementation was built upon a comprehensive two-year design phase. The program's design team included several external partners such as specialists in asynchronous teaching and learning and course design, content areas such as leadership studies and liberal arts areas, adult program design and marketing, and target audience groups. This preparatory phase enabled the program team to maintain a regular continuous improvement process through the first phase of implementation.

The continuous improvement process over the span of the study period attended to the three areas described in the sections below: Curricular Refinement; Instructor Development; Success and Completion

Section III, 1: Curricular Refinement

- a) *Topic: Curriculum.* The LDR curriculum operates as a complex system interlocking several key elements that require concurrent attention:
 - i) **open access** design with no course prerequisites, no concentrations, any-semester entry, and full-time, part-time, and intermittent enrollment; courses can be taken in any order within the boundaries of a fixed schedule
 - ii) **recurrent design** instead of a conventional linear structure: four common tasks for each course; each course addresses the six program outcome goals
 - iii) **adult, professional epistemology**: past-present-future orientation; pragmatic material and assignments; evidence-based workplace applications; lifelong learning; self-assessment; novelty, creativity, risk
 - iv) **6000-level courses** for full immersion in advanced academic study: robust reading, informal and formal writing, planned speaking (e.g., presentations), and digital skills tasks toward inquiry-based analysis, critique, and self-assessment
 - v) **integrative interdisciplinary** content with specific attention to melding various liberal arts areas with professional development and personal growth
 - vi) **self-determined learning** with peer collaboration to build community: students tailor assignments to their occupation, life history and goals, and challenge areas while establishing mentoring connections with fellow students and instructors
 - vii) **portfolio** of course work products (aka, artifacts: Inquiry Projects; Choice Reading Presentations; Self-Assessments) as lifelong self-review of strength and continuous learning areas.
- b) *Strategy: Semester-by-Semester Review.*
 The program is designed to cultivate participants' capacity across **six interconnected facets** of leadership practice—personal, relational, institutional, societal, contextual, and temporal. Each Program Outcome tracks one facet. The program employs **four methods** for the investigation and improvement of one's

practice: targeted academic study, self-designed applied inquiry, purposeful idea development, and authentic self-assessment.

In parallel, the program's assessment system is **processual**: considering how students engage, explore, adapt, and apply content, methods, and frameworks within the complexities of their own practice. For example, rather than measuring whether students achieve competency in *innovation*, we examine, over time and through various projects, how they study academic material about organizational operations, analyze a particular setting within its social context, consider ethical and systemic implications, introduce inquiry, and pilot practices intended to open colleagues' awareness of, and willingness to embrace unconventional ideas. (Learning Outcome #1)

Instead of summative exams, standardized competencies, or skill benchmarks, metrics consider how students engage with content, peers, feedback, assignments, and applications to identify and adapt their leadership practices regarding practical issues in a specific setting. The recurrent design supports this processual approach.

The strategy used to manage the LDR curriculum is routine **semester-by-semester review**. Each course is offered once per year (fall, spring, or summer) and, typically, facilitated by a repeat instructor in association with other members of the program team. Typically, before, during, and after each semester the instructor team meets with the program director to plan curricular and instructional goals for the semester, monitor progress on the flow of the courses and the semester-specific goals, conduct real-time lesson studies, and, post course, begin revisions for the next iteration of the course as well as applications for other upcoming courses.

This arrangement supports a dynamic three-level course study conversation:

- **Micro** study by an instructor over the span of a year, which provides extensive time for revision
- **Meso** study with a peer instructor to compare notes on course experiences
- **Macro** study with the program director to track and examine program-level trends

For example, at the meso-level, the program team uses collective pre-course goal setting, mid-course checks, and post-course reviews, holistic assignment rubrics, post hoc re-examinations of course artifacts, and collective lesson study (i.e., improvement pilots) to cultivate a culture of real-time assessment.

Evidence and examples resulting from assessment system are outlined below.

- i) Over the study period (FA19-SU25), the program goals and course learning objectives (LO) have remained stable, though descriptive text for the LOs has been updated for clarity and readability.
- ii) The program team has instructed 6 sections of three courses and 5 sections of the other three for a total of 33 course sections across 18 semesters. Across those 18 semesters the team held approximately 108 one-hour program team meetings (1 pre, 1 post, and 4 within) to discuss curriculum, instruction, asynchronous design, and student success. The program director facilitated each meeting. Additional meetings between individual instructors and the program director were scheduled separately.
- iii) Of the 6 courses in the program, 3 have maintained a *mostly unchanged* curriculum across the study period (6005, 6015, & 6035). The material, prompts, and assignments for these courses have remained mostly unchanged while undergoing regular updates. The other 3 courses have experienced *significant revisions* in material and assignments resulting from ongoing review conversations.
- iv) Each course includes four comparable tasks (Discussion Forum, Inquiry Project, Choice Reading, Self-Assessment) resulting in 33 iterations of each task and 132 total enactments. While all tasks have experienced regular updates, two tasks have experienced significant revisions across the course set: Inquiry Project and Self-Assessment.
 - The Inquiry Project for the 3 mostly unchanged courses have remained stable, while experiencing updates. The Project for the other three courses had 7 significant revisions.

- The Self-Assessment has experienced 5 significant revisions across the course set.
 - Of the 132 task enactments, there have been approximately 12 significant curricular revisions among wholesale routine updates.
 - Here is an example of a significant revision: For two courses in SU23 and SU24, the program team combined the Choice Reading task with the Self-Assessment task into a single assignment to pilot an innovation intended to create a more efficient course experience for the shorter summer schedule (12 weeks instead of 15). While the adjustment reduced workflow for students, post hoc reviews indicated that the resulting artifacts demonstrated noticeable drift from the learning objective for each task. As a result, the tasks returned to independent assignments for SU25.
- c) *Plan for Continuous Improvements: Curriculum*
- i) Program Outcomes 1-6, Course Learning Objective 2: During the early years of the next study period, the program team will monitor the recent adjustments to the **Inquiry Project for 6025, 6045, and 6950**. After several phases of significant revisions, we anticipate stability moving forward with only routine updates.
 - ii) Program Outcomes 1-6, Course Learning Objective 4: Currently, and throughout the next study period, the program team will pilot adjustments to the guidelines, expectations, and schedule for the **Self-Assessment** assignment across all six courses. Regular post hoc re-evaluations of the assignments as a set reveal middling performances (artifacts demonstrate mild reflection more so than critical self-assessment). As we anticipate that the design of the other task areas (each of higher value) is and will remain stable, our attention will shift to the Self-Assessment assignments.
 - iii) Program Outcomes 1-6: Because the curriculum for **6005, 6015, & 6035** has been mostly stable and unchanged during the current study period, the program team will examine the artifacts from these courses early in the next study period to determine strengths and areas for possible revisions.
 - iv) Program Outcomes 1-6, Course Learning Objectives 1-4: As feasible, the program team will investigate the parameters of shifting the LDR spring term to an earlier start date as a means of lengthening the summer term from 12 to 15 weeks for **6045 & 6950**. We anticipate considerable hurdles from such a change due to the operational limitations of VTSU.

Section III, 2: Instructor Development: Leadership Studies; interdisciplinary, applied, asynchronous, and advanced academic methods.

While any new program includes attention to instructors' experience and qualifications, characteristics of the LDR program highlight several qualifications that require purposeful development.

- a) *Topic: Content Studies & Instructional Methods*
 - leadership studies
 - interdisciplinary methods and applied methods
 - asynchronous teaching
 - advanced academic study
- b) *Strategy: Academic Specializations, Credentials, Professional Experience, Apprenticeship.* The program's strategy for managing instructor development involves blending strength areas: academic specialization in leadership studies, a particular liberal arts area, credentials in the fields grounding the program, experiences highlighting applied professional learning, guided and self-directed study, and apprenticeship with the program director and the program team.
 - All members of the program team have primary or secondary **credentials** in a liberal arts or interdisciplinary area through a terminal degree level, four have advanced credentials in Leadership

Studies, three have credentials in asynchronous teaching, learning, and course design, all have professional experience in leadership positions, and all have experience with advanced academic study.

- With regular **team meetings** throughout the year and open access to peers and the program director, the team cultivates a continuous learning environment.
- Instructors review course artifacts, student evaluations, and share discussions about post hoc re-evaluations of course artifacts (i.e., re-scoring student submission after completion of a course).
- The team engages in collective problem solving to improve outcomes. For example, to ensure instructional efficiency, the team completed a process to establish a **common course template** using a digital template for each of the LDR courses.

c) *Plan for Continuous Improvements: Instructor Development.*

- Maintain the **current strategy** with regular review meetings for guided study facilitated by the program director, and piloting lesson study projects to address issues and new possibilities.
- Construct a **record-keeping** mechanism to track instructors' initiatives and student performance for trend analysis.
- Consider implementing a team **retreat** to establish annual goals.
- Determine a pathway for initiating and supporting a collective **scholarly endeavor** among the team.

Section III, 3: Success and Completion Analysis

- a) *Topic: Current and Recent Undergraduate Student Group.* As identified in the Success & Completion Study, the program team has been investigating challenges with enrollment of undergraduate and recent undergraduate students.
- b) *Strategy: 1:1 Mentoring.* Over the span of the study period, the program team implemented a **1:1 mentoring** strategy in three phases to improve success of undergraduate and recent undergraduate students. Each phase included multiple components.

First, the team developed a specialized orientation for this population group and offered individualized attention and mentoring through high-access office hours, including weekend and evening and availability. While helpful for some students, the effect was not robust. Unlike the PRO group students, students in the UGRAD group did not readily access the available mentoring. Second, we further tightened the application and orientation process, typically asking applicants to investigate other VTSU graduate programs before committing to the LDR program. Because many VTSU graduate programs are fully constructed with 5000-level courses, the content, methods, and expectations may be more suited to students in the UGRAD group. Indeed, informal communication indicates that this has been, in part, a successful strategy. Concurrently, we asked members of the population who selected the LDR program after investigating other options to commit to regular meetings with the instructor or program director throughout the semester. These steps seemed helpful, though particularly for the highly motivated and capable students.

For the third phase, we found the opportunity to try a new version of this strategy. Because the LDR courses are 5 credits, the original design team included a **1-credit course as a supplement** for participants who needed to enroll full-time (6 credits) but who did not want to enroll for two courses concurrently. A recent undergraduate degree completer accepted this option in each of two semesters, their first and second. For this case, the 1-credit course—a graded course with a focus on study skills, time management, and reading course instructions--involved mandatory weekly meetings with the instructor as a 1:1 mentor. The student successfully completed each semester, crediting the supplemental mentoring. Unfortunately, even while declaring their readiness to pursue further coursework without additional mentoring, the student acquired a professional position and has paused enrollment to launch a new career. Because graduate students' matriculation status remains active for five years, it is feasible this student will return to complete the program.

- c) *Plan for Continuous Improvements: UGRAD Group.* With the success of the third implementation of our 1:1 mentoring strategy, we can further investigate the parameters of serving this population group. Even so, while there are compelling reasons to serve this population, this is an expensive option for students, and it has become clear that the program's intended market (the PRO group) is a better segment for targeted enrollment growth. As such, we will continue to **raise awareness** with our Admissions and Marketing colleagues to direct inquirers and applicants to consider other VTSU programs, consider implementation of additional pre-emptive steps, and refine the 1:1 mentoring strategy.

A point of note on this topic: The university's **Academic Support Offices** are not oriented toward supporting graduate students with advanced academic study needs. The LDR program team will continue to advocate for university-funded academic support for graduate students.

- d) *Topic: First Semester DNF among PRO Group.* Data from the Success & Completion Study demonstrate that First Semester DNF nonsuccess rate among the working-professionals population group (17%) is largely due to **work obligations and job changes**. One student cited life events. The effect of unexpected events on adults in professional positions, many with families, is understandable. Some of these students might return within the 5-year limit, or later, while others might proceed to different opportunities.
- e) *Strategies: As noted below.*
- *Data Collection.* The program's **enrollment management planning (EMP)** database enabled a valid interpretation of the effect--the 17% First Semester DNF nonsuccess rate. Though a time-consuming endeavor, the management operations of the LDR program are otherwise quite efficient, which allows time for the EMP within the current program management allocation. It is unlikely that other less efficient programs would have such time.
 - *Comparative Investigation.* The program team ran a brief benchmarking study of comparable programs. The results appear to indicate that a **17% First Semester DNF rate for graduate programs intended for working professionals is within the range** for similar programs. A summary table is posted below. The courses in the examined programs are, typically, 3-credits or an equivalent.

Table 5: First-Semester Attrition

Program Type	Population	First-Semester Attrition	Notes
Executive MPA (IHE_1)	Working professionals	10–20%	Most due to professional demands
Online MBA (IHE_2)	Mid-career professionals	12–18%	Work-life balance most cited
EdD in Leadership (IHE_3)	Educators & admin staff	~15%	Dropouts occur early, mostly due to life/work changes
MS in Organizational Leadership (IHE_4)	Adult learners	16–20%	Attrition often external, not academic

Table generated by OpenAI's ChatGPT based on publicly available information from university program websites.

The program team will continue to investigate comparative programs specifically seeking suggestions for ameliorative actions.

- *Pre-emptive Communication.* Currently, the program includes five **best-practice elements** for success: (1) the asynchronous modality permits flexibility for each participant's schedule; (2) a program handbook with an explicit outline of academic rigor, worktime expectations, and suggestions for a course work schedule; (3) a required entry interview for applicants; (4) an Online Course Checklist within the application form that addresses worktime; (5) details of enrollment procedures including

managing unexpected mid-courses interruptions: Registration, Drop, Withdraw, Late Drop/Withdraw, Leave of Absence, Exit, and Time Limit policies.

- *In-Course Enrollment Management.* Management of unexpected interruptions within a course involves **communication across three levels: student, program, and university**. The LDR program team has implemented procedures for supporting communication such as
 - easy access to instructors through constant contact: email, phone, Canvas, Self-Service, etc.
 - structured digital office hours
 - occasional informal video conferences open to all students
 - weekly Announcements, email updates, and prompt feedback and grading to establish presence
 - a Course Quiz including workload expectations, a Community Forum discussion board for peer support, and guidelines for managing interruptions within each course
 - monitoring log-in and participation patterns
 - a common digital course template, recurrent curriculum, and simplicity (no prerequisites, no concentrations) to reduce complexity and cognitive load.

Concurrently, management of the course experience requires attention to university protocols. The VTSU merger shifted the university's orientation toward an undergraduate population in ways that may challenge efficient operations for graduate students.

Specifically, key **enrollment management protocols and forms**--Registration, Drop, Withdraw, Late Drop/Withdraw, Leave of Absence, Exit, Change of Program, and Time Limit—are oriented toward an undergraduate audience. The program team, along with colleagues and staff, are working to revise all relevant communication and forms.

f) *Plan for Continuous Improvements: PRO Group*

- *Data Collection.* The LDR program team will continue to **refine the EMP** with specific interest in the PRO population during their first semester, e.g., a 2-week check-in survey.

It is in the university's interest to support program level enrollment management. The LDR program team will continue to advocate for general access to disaggregated data and the adoption of system-connected enrollment management tools.

- *Comparative Investigation.* The program team will continue to investigate **comparable programs** specifically seeking suggestions for ameliorative actions regarding blocks to first semester completion.
- *Pre-emptive Communication.* The program team will investigate current and additional pre-emptive communication mechanisms, specifically highlighting attention to marketing and admissions materials.
- *In-Course Enrollment Management.*
 - The program team will continue to study current practices for further refinements such as the use of **predictive analytics** to monitor trends in early course nonsuccess.
 - The LDR team will continue to work with the **Office of Graduate Studies** to prompt the refinement of all operations toward better service for graduate students, with a specific focus on enrollment and enrollment adjustment forms.

IV. CONTINUOUS IMPROVEMENT PLAN

Directions:

1. For the next 5-year cycle, describe 1-3 continuous improvement priorities for the program.
2. What program improvement questions are currently salient? What are your preliminary thoughts on how and when you might pursue these questions? For example, what data would you need to help you answer each question?

A. Curricular Refinement

- Q: What ongoing curricular revisions might improve the student learning experience?
- See Section III, 1(c): *Plan for Continuous Improvements: Curriculum*
- See APPENDIX C: Program Outcomes Assessment Matrix
 - Inquiry Projects, 6025, 6045, 6950
 - Self-Assessment
 - Curriculum for 6005, 6015, & 6035
 - Schedule Change: 15-wk summer courses

B. Instructor Development

- Q: How might the team maintain and advance our collective effectiveness?
- See Section III, 2(c): *Plan for Continuous Improvements: Instructor Development*.
 - regular review meetings
 - record-keeping for individual and program goals
 - team retreat
 - collective scholarly endeavor

C. Success and Completion Analysis

- Q1: How might the program and university better serve undergraduate and recent degree completers in graduate programs who encounter challenges in their first semester courses?
- See Section III, 3(c): *Plan for Continuous Improvements: UGRAD Group*
 - 1:1 Mentoring
 - Academic Support for Graduate Studies
- Q2: How might the program and university better serve first semester graduate students in the PRO group who encounter enrollment challenges in their first semester courses?
- See Section III, 3(f): *Plan for Continuous Improvements: First Semester DNF, PRO Group*
 - Additional Data Metrics
 - Comparative Investigation
 - Pre-emptive Communication
 - In-Course Enrollment Management

APPENDICES

APPENDIX A. Degree Program Map and Milestones

- Min. undergraduate GPA for admittance: 2.75
- Participants may begin in any semester: Fall, Spring, or Summer
- The courses can be taken in any order; there are no prerequisites
- Pre-start Orientation Meeting with Program Director required
- Standing: Must maintain a GPA of 3.0. A student with a lower program GPA may be placed on probation.
- At the end of a student's first semester, a student without a program GPA of 2.3 or above may be subject to Early Dismissal from the program and the University.
- Catalog: https://catalog.vermontstate.edu/preview_program.php?catoid=14&poid=3530&returnto=799
- Leadership Studies Handbook: Available for review.

Table A: Example Plan of Study: Part-time enrollment.

Pre-Start	Program Orientation & Welcome Mtg	Any Semester	Min. Grade	Required Tasks†
Semester 1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • LDR-6005, Foundations • Advisement Mtg 	Fall	B-	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Discussion Forum ➤ Inquiry Project ➤ Choice Book Presentation ➤ Self-Assessment
Semester 2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • LDR-6015, Models • Advisement Mtg 	Spring	B-	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Discussion Forum ➤ Inquiry Project ➤ Choice Book Presentation ➤ Self-Assessment
Semester 3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • LDR-6045, Ethics • Advisement Mtg 	Summer	B-	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Discussion Forum ➤ Inquiry Project ➤ Choice Book Presentation ➤ Self-Assessment
Semester 4	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • LDR-6025, Partnerships • Advisement Mtg 	Fall	B-	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Discussion Forum ➤ Inquiry Project ➤ Choice Book Presentation ➤ Self-Assessment
Semester 5	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • LDR-6035, Design • Advisement Mtg • Apply for Graduation 	Spring	B-	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Discussion Forum ➤ Inquiry Project ➤ Choice Book Presentation ➤ Self-Assessment
Semester 6	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • LDR-6950, Inquiry • Advisement Mtg 	Summer	B-	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Discussion Forum ➤ Inquiry Project ➤ Choice Book Presentation ➤ Self-Assessment

†Common course tasks--with specific assignments that vary per course content and Learning Objectives--reduces cognitive load producing a more effective and efficient adult learning environment. This is one element of a recurrent curriculum design.

For full-time enrollment, students complete both Fall courses, then both Spring courses, then both Summer courses.

APPENDIX B, PART I: Curriculum and Learning Outcomes Crosswalk

- Each course includes applied learning.
- Each course includes four processual Learning Objectives (LO) with content and assignments oriented toward a specific Program Learning Outcome.
- The Inquiry Project (IP) in each course is the signature-assignment for each Program Outcome.
- A common rubric is employed to review signature assignments the course set.

Table B: Curriculum and Learning Outcomes Crosswalk

	Program Outcome 1	Program Outcome 2	Program Outcome 3	Program Outcome 4	Program Outcome 5	Program Outcome 6
	Participants will learn to advocate for innovation through analysis of the social and cultural forces affecting specific contexts.	Participants will learn to employ their personal strengths to create purposeful goals for themselves, their team, and their organization.	Participants will learn to facilitate collective ethical actions toward sustainable social ends.	Participants will learn to enact strategies to generate inclusive relationships with colleagues, teams, and stakeholders from different backgrounds.	Participants will learn to design and guide meaningful and productive projects for specific organizational environments.	Participants will learn to design and implement leadership research projects in applied settings.
LDR-6005, Foundations	Course LO1, LO2, LO3, LO4 IP: Proficient-to-Advanced					
LDR-6015, Models		Course LO1, LO2, LO3, LO4 IP: Proficient-to-Advanced				
LDR-6045, Ethical			Course LO1, LO2, LO3, LO4 IP: Proficient-to-Advanced			
LDR-6025, Partnerships				Course LO1, LO2, LO3, LO4 IP: Proficient-to-Advanced		
LDR-6035, Design					Course LO1, LO2, LO3, LO4 IP: Proficient-to-Advanced	
LDR-6950, Inquiry						Course LO1, LO2, LO3, LO4 IP: Proficient-to-Advanced

APPENDIX B, PART II: Course Learning Objectives and key assignments are listed in the table below.

Table B1: Course Learning Objectives and Key Assignments

Course	Course-level learning objective(s) relevant to program outcomes	Aligned summative assessments
LDR-6005, Foundations	<p>LO1: Participants will gain advanced academic understanding of theories and research related to philosophies of knowledge and their corresponding conceptions of leadership and use that contextual knowledge to examine pertinent topics, questions, or projects in their professional, social, or personal arena</p> <p>LO2: Participants will acquire strategies for using methods of inquiry to generate original findings regarding the enactment of leadership in formal settings, and use those methods to design applied projects to shape more nuanced approaches</p> <p>LO3: Participants will cultivate a critical perspective about the foundations of leadership, and use that perspective in a deliberate manner to convincingly reframe conventional perceptions among peers</p> <p>LO4: Participants will assess their learning experience in this course and previous courses in the program and use that assessment to rethink the aims for their leadership practice to produce an ever-evolving future vision.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Discussion Forum (40%) ➤ Inquiry Project (30%) ➤ Choice Book Presentation (20%) ➤ Self-Assessment (10%)
LDR-6015, Models	<p>LO1: Participants will gain advanced academic understanding of theories and research related to leadership models through biography, art, and literature, and use that knowledge to examine pertinent topics, issues, or problems in their formal everyday setting.</p> <p>LO2: Participants will acquire advanced strategies for conducting narrative and life history study of leadership models and use those methods to design an applied project investigating their personal biography in formal everyday settings.</p> <p>LO3: Participants will cultivate an advanced critical and cultural perspective about leadership models and use that perspective to reframe conventional perceptions about their practice in formal everyday settings.</p> <p>LO4: Participants will construct a creative vision of a personal leadership model and use that vision to reposition their stance toward shaping future activities in their formal everyday settings.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Discussion Forum (40%) ➤ Inquiry Project (30%) ➤ Choice Book Presentation (20%) ➤ Self-Assessment (10%)
LDR-6045, Ethical	<p>LO1: Participants will develop an advanced academic understanding of theories and research related to the historical, contemporary, and cultural study of morality and ethics and use their understanding to examine pertinent topics, issues, and challenges of leadership practice in their professional, social, or civic setting</p> <p>LO2: Participants will acquire advanced strategies for conducting ethical inquiry and use those methods to design projects that investigate leadership practice in their professional, social, or civic setting</p> <p>LO3: Participants will cultivate an advanced critical perspective about ethical problem solving and use that perspective to convincingly reframe conventional perceptions of leadership practice in their professional, social, or civic setting</p> <p>LO4: Participants will construct an advanced future vision of authentic ethical deliberation and use that vision to rethink their everyday leadership practice as a way to shape their professional, social, or civic setting in alignment with that vision.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Discussion Forum (40%) ➤ Inquiry Project (30%) ➤ Choice Book Presentation (20%) ➤ Self-Assessment (10%)
LDR-6025, Partnerships	<p>LO1: Participants will gain advanced academic understanding of theories and research related to social diversity across local, national, and global settings, and use that contextual knowledge to examine pertinent topics, questions, or projects in their professional, social, or personal arena</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Discussion Forum (40%) ➤ Inquiry Project (30%)

	<p>LO2: Participants will acquire strategies for using methods of inquiry to generate original findings regarding the operations of diverse settings, and use those methods to design applied projects to shape more inclusive, equitable, and rewarding partnerships</p> <p>LO3: Participants will cultivate a critical perspective about leadership for a regenerative diverse and pluralistic society, and use that perspective in a deliberate manner to convincingly reframe conventional perceptions among peers</p> <p>LO4: Participants will assess their learning experience in this course and previous courses in the program and use that assessment to rethink the aims for their leadership practice to produce an ever-evolving future vision.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Choice Book Presentation (20%) ➤ Self-Assessment (10%)
LDR-6035, Design	<p>LO1: Participants will gain advanced academic understanding of theories and research related to ecological and systems theory, design thinking, empathy research, and organizational studies and use that knowledge to examine the social world and formal organizations as complex systems.</p> <p>LO2: Participants will acquire advanced strategies for conducting systems analysis and use those methods to design an applied project investigating a formal everyday setting.</p> <p>LO3: Participants will cultivate an advanced critical and cultural perspective about organizational operations and development and use that perspective to reframe conventional interpretations of organizational life toward a human-centric approach.</p> <p>LO4: Participants will construct a creative vision of themselves as designers and systems thinkers and use that vision to reposition their aims as future organizational change advocates.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Discussion Forum (40%) ➤ Inquiry Project (30%) ➤ Choice Book Presentation (20%) ➤ Self-Assessment (10%)
LDR-6950, Inquiry	<p>LO1: Participants will develop advanced academic understanding of theories and research related to practitioner inquiry and use this understanding to examine conditions within their professional, social, or civic setting</p> <p>LO2: Participants will acquire strategies for conducting practical applied inquiry and use these methods to design and implement a project for improving their leadership practice in their professional, social, or civic setting</p> <p>LO3: Participants will cultivate a critical perspective about inquiry and use that perspective to convincingly reframe conventional perceptions of leadership practice</p> <p>LO4: Participants will construct a personal vision as a facilitator of inquiry and use that vision to rethink their everyday leadership practice toward shaping movements to form the future of their professional, social, or civic setting.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Discussion Forum (40%) ➤ Inquiry Project (30%) ➤ Choice Book Presentation (20%) ➤ Self-Assessment (10%)

APPENDIX B, PART III: The Advanced Academic Study* expectations for graduate courses are listed below.

Table B2: Advanced Academic Study* Expectations

G1	In Leadership Studies, graduate students cultivate advanced academic understanding of key topics, issues, and challenges within the interdisciplinary field. Students engage deeply with primary academic, professional, and scholarly sources grounded in research and theory, synthesizing this material to generate original ideas and questions. Through observation and dialogue with peers and site-based colleagues, they examine the complexities of everyday experiences, refining their insights through attentive discussions, iterative writing, formal and informal, and purposeful presentations that articulate their evolving understanding, findings, applications, and professional learning.
G2	In Leadership Studies, graduate students design and implementation structured inquiry projects in applied and consequential settings. Students use scholarly literature and established or emergent methodologies to generate, collect, and analyze evidence. These projects yield valid findings, credible insights, impactful determinations, and

	innovative practices or proposals that contribute to their understanding of the field and advance their practice in real-world contexts.
G3	In Leadership Studies, graduate students question conventional practices and prevailing assumptions. Through the development and dissemination of original propositions, advanced critiques, ethical evaluations, creative expressions, and public actions, students explore transformative possibilities. They employ inclusive and appreciative approaches to raise meaningful questions, surface overlooked perspectives, and advocate for constructive change.
G4	In Leadership Studies, graduate students foster the capacity for conscientious self-assessment. Students evaluate their learning, performance, perceptions, and practices to imagine future goals for advanced academic and professional growth. These assessments help broaden personal pathways and support continued improvement of practice, community engagement, and contributions to society.

*A NECHE standard for all graduate courses.

APPENDIX C: Program Outcomes Assessment Matrix

Table C: Program Outcomes Assessment Matrix

	Changes made because of data analysis during the past cycle.	Evidence to be collected in next PReCIP cycle.	Responsible Parties	Assessment Schedule	Plan for Taking Action to “Close the Loop” through the next cycle
Program Outcome 1: Advocate for innovation	1. Significant revisions across material and assignments: 6025, 6045, 6950 2. Significant revisions Inquiry Project: 6025, 6045, 6950 3. Significant revisions to the Self-Assessment: 6025, 6045, 6950 4. All Courses: Choice Readings Updates	1. Monitor: 6025, 6045, 6950; Conduct post hoc reviews of Inquiry Projects 2. Conduct post hoc reviews of Self-Assessment: All courses 3. Regular updates: Choice Readings 4. Conduct comprehensive reviews: 6005, 6015, & 6035 5. Monitor effects of possible schedule change: 6045 & 6950	Program Team	Semester-by-Semester reviews	Program team will conduct >Semester-by-Semester reviews > Schedule post hoc reviews as indicated in the Schedule column Program director will investigate schedule change option in FA25 for SP26-SU26 or SP27-SU27.
Program Outcome 2: Identify personal strengths				Priority 1: SU25, SU26, SU27: Monitor: 6025, 6045, 6950; Conduct post hoc reviews of Inquiry Projects	
Program Outcome 3: Pursue ethical actions				Priority 2: SU25, FA25, SP26, etc.: Conduct post hoc reviews of Self-Assessment: All courses	
Program Outcome 4: Build inclusive relationships				Priority 3: Comprehensive reviews: 6005 (FA25); 6015 (SP26); (SP26) 6035	
Program Outcome 5: Design and guide projects				Priority 4: Assess effects of schedule change: 6045 & 6950 (SU26 or SU27)	
Program Outcome 6: Conduct Leadership inquiry					

APPENDIX D: E-Series Form
**OPTION E1: PART A. INVENTORY OF EDUCATIONAL EFFECTIVENESS INDICATORS
(FOR NON-EXTERNALLY ACCREDITED PROGRAMS)**
Table D: E-Series Form

(1) Where are the learning outcomes for this level/program published? (please specify) Include URLs where appropriate.	(2) Other than GPA, what data/ evidence is used to determine that graduates have achieved the stated outcomes for the degree? (e.g., capstone course, portfolio review, licensure examination)	(3) Who interprets the evidence? What is the process? (e.g. annually by the curriculum committee)	(4) What changes have been made because of using the data/evidence?	(5) Date of the most recent program review. (this will almost always match the date of the newest PRECIP Report)
<p>VTSU Graduate Catalog, available on the website: https://catalog.vermontstate.edu/preview_program.php?catoid=14&poiid=3530</p> <p>Leadership Studies Handbook (attached)</p>	<p>Program Performance Portfolio</p>	<p>Graduate Program Director and Program Team; semester-by-semester checks of signature assignments</p>	<p>1) Refinement of curriculum: materials, prompts, directions, guidelines, assignments, rubrics 2) Refinement of asynchronous learning platform to increase usability and reduce cognitive load</p>	<p>Summer 2025</p>