



Identifying Your Research Interests

This five-step activity is designed to help direct your thinking about research topics in higher education. Your goal in this ongoing process is to identify, synthesize, and eventually narrow your research interests. Remember, this is a process, not a product, that often takes time. If it seems that other doctoral students in your cohort have already identified their research topic, that is ok. Most students who come into the Higher Education Administration program with a research topic in mind change as they progress through their coursework. This is a natural part of the learning process.

FIVE STEPS TO IDENTIFY YOUR RESEARCH INTERESTS:

- Create a free-flowing mind map of your interests within higher education.
- Write at least one research question about each of the interests on your map.
- Start reading academic journal articles related to the research questions you wrote and begin to notice possible gaps in the literature.
- Designate a place to keep track of your thoughts and ideas throughout this process over time.
- Repeat this process whenever you feel your interests shifting and changing.

Tips for Success:

- No matter what happens in your day-to-day schedule, always find time to read.
- By the end of your first semester, try to identify a few research interests you want to explore further.
- Do not hesitate to connect with those who have similar research interests. Oftentimes, discussion and collaboration will provide new insights about your topic(s) of interest.
- Use course assignments as opportunities to delve into topics that are of interest to you. This will allow you to explore different topics intentionally, will help you eliminate topics that are no longer of interest or are not in need of further research, and will yield work that can later be used in your dissertation.
- Remember, if the topic is boring to you today, it won't become more exciting later on. You will find it hard to maintain motivation in the dissertation process if you don't enjoy your topic.

Library Tools:

- [University Libraries](#) has an array of services designed specifically for graduate students. You can visit their page [Information for Graduate Students: Library Services & Resources](#) to learn more.
- Graduate Commons (GC) is a library space open to graduate students only. The GC is located in Hodges Library, room 131. Be prepared to swipe your UTK graduate student ID card to gain entry.
- UTK Dissertations: Tennessee Research and Creative Exchange ([TRACE](#))
- Springer Nature [Black Lives Matter Collections](#): A curated collection of open access books, journals articles, and magazine content that amplifies Black voices and issues raised by Black voices, including scholarly research and personal stories.
- [Joel A. Katz Law Library](#): the HeinOnline database is an important resource for doctoral students interested in higher education law or policy. You can access this database using your NetID and password.

Academic Journals:

Below is a list of higher education, peer-reviewed journals. You can access research journals through the University Libraries [website](#).

- American Educational Research Journal
- ASHE Higher Education Report (2005-present)
- ASHE-ERIC Higher Education Reports (2001-2004)
- College Student Affairs Journal
- College Student Journal
- Community College Review
- Educational Evaluation and Policy Analysis
- Educational Policy
- Educational Researcher
- Higher Education
- Higher Education Quarterly
- Innovative Higher Education
- Journal of College and University Student Housing
- Journal of College Student Development
- Journal of Higher Education
- Journal of Hispanic Higher Education
- Journal of Student Affairs Research and Practice (Formerly NASPA Journal)
- NASPA Journal
- Research in Higher Education
- Review of Educational Research
- Review of Higher Education
- Review of Research in Education
- Studies in Higher Education

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