

# Change Leadership PhD Advisory Committee

## Meeting Minutes

May 19, 2026

**Welcome:** Dr. Alicia Cotabish

**Introduction of Members:** Dr. Ashley Cooksey, Dr. Andrew Sherrill, Dr. LaShannon Spencer, Dr. Lisa Belisle, (Dr.) Carl Frizell, Dr. Clevelon Lasker, and Dr. Larry Teague

### Summary

The Change Leadership PhD Advisory Committee at the University of Central Arkansas (UCA) convened to connect faculty, scholars, and alumni into an innovative academic and professional think tank. Hosted by Alicia Cotabish, the meeting served as a forum to introduce the advisory board's inaugural members, establish the committee's purpose, review sweeping programmatic expansions, and highlight upcoming institutional innovations such as the Global Scholars distinction.

### Committee Purpose Statement

The committee reviewed and established a foundational core purpose statement designed to align academic output with industry evolution:

"The Change Leadership PhD Advisory Committee exists to bridge the gap between academic theory and the evolving demands of organizational leadership. By fostering a collaborative partnership between faculty, current scholars, and alumni, we aim to ensure that the program remains a catalyst for social innovation and a laboratory for cutting-edge leadership practice, preparing the next generation of agents of change to address complex global challenges."

### Program Status & Academic Updates

Alicia Cotabish delivered a status update highlighting how the program has matured, expanded, and increased its rigor:

- **Concentration Growth & Refinement:** The program has officially expanded from three to five specialized concentrations.
  1. *K-12 Leadership:* Tightened its focus exclusively on district-level leadership and the superintendency.
  2. *Digital Age Curriculum and Instruction:* Expanded into a comprehensive K-20 track to accommodate educators looking to teach in higher education spaces alongside K-12 systems.
  3. *Community Leadership/ No Change.*
  4. *Higher Education Leadership:* Added to satisfy explicit institutional leadership track demands.
  5. *Literacy Leadership:* A highly sought-after, K-12-focused online track that fills a significant national void, as competing programs are rarely offered in fully online formats.

- **Admissions & Selectivity Metrics:** The program boasts a robust enrollment of 179 active PhD students. However, it maintains a competitive acceptance rate. The review committee has implemented deeper transcript verification protocols—scrutinizing past academic struggles or challenging semesters through proactive applicant engagement to ensure selected candidates possess long-term persistence.
- **Retention Tracking:** Faculty are auditing attrition patterns to deeply evaluate why individuals exit the program. The program is actively tracking demographic metrics (such as gender and ethnicity) to engineer optimized support systems for all populations, including international students and students with disabilities.
- **Faculty Framework:** Infrastructure has scaled up significantly to feature 5 designated concentration leaders dedicated entirely to advising, backed by 17 full-time UCA faculty members instructing across courses.

### **Strategic Innovation: The Global Scholars Distinction**

Launching in the upcoming academic term, the program is debuting a highly unique **Global Scholars distinction**. Positioned as a distinct alternative path within graduate education, it allows students to redirect 6 of their traditional 21 concentration credit hours into back-to-back specialized "Global Scholars" topics semesters.

**Operational Execution:** UCA selects under-resourced international non-governmental organizations (NGOs). During the first semester, the NGO connects via live video conferencing with the class to present systemic local challenges regarding education or healthcare. Students collaborate in research cohorts to analyze the data and propose empirical solutions.

- **Dual-Publication Output:** In the subsequent semester, students do not write a dissertation segment; instead, they focus on generating two professional publications:
  1. *An empirical report* to help leverage resources and boost data transparency for the NGO.
  2. *A practitioner-focused practical article* to directly assist the NGO with localized fundraising and community visibility.
- This initiative operates entirely independently of the student's core dissertation, providing global research credentials for future career placement.

### **Advisory Review & Group Dialogue**

Following the presentation of the draft purpose statement and the programmatic updates, Alicia paused to solicit active feedback and evaluations from the board, asking:

"What else should we be thinking about?"

#### **Member Feedback**

- **Dr. Larry Teague** immediately endorsed the drafted language, responding: "I'm excited about it. I mean, I don't know if it's missing something, because we just started, but I'm excited about what's there right now."

- The general consensus of the committee was universally positive. Alicia noted that because members have real-time editing access to the operational document, the purpose statement can remain a dynamic framework that they can continually alter, append to, or fine-tune as the advisory board matures over time.

### **Strategic Suggestions & Future Initiatives**

The board outlined a series of actionable steps to expand communication and preserve the identity of the program moving forward:

1. **Launch a Scholar-Practitioner Spotlight Series:** Design and distribute a structured series highlighting the real-world operational impacts, academic publishing milestones, and corporate successes of current program scholars and alumni.
2. **Establish Dedicated Digital Collaboration Spaces:** Create a private LinkedIn group or a specialized digital board to serve as a resource-sharing network, preventing communication gaps between biannual sessions.
3. **Preserve Programmatic Institutional Memory:** Proactively utilize the committee to protect the legacy and historical lessons of the program's evolution (leveraging members like Andrew Sherrill who experienced the historic transition from face-to-face to online systems) to inform future online pedagogical changes.
4. **Targeted Interest Auditing:** Alicia will distribute an interest sheet and a scheduling poll to define task-oriented project sub-groups before convening the next formal session.