The mission of the department is to create, evaluate, exchange, and apply knowledge about leadership, learning, and organizational performance to prepare scholars and scholar practitioners who cultivate equity and educational opportunity in a diverse and changing world.

Many varied educational constituencies need to be able to analyze and to inform debate on educational issues, and to lead and develop learning communities that meet the diverse learning needs of students and society. We believe effective educational leadership in any institution embodies three core values: inquiry, equity, and reflection.

Graduates and recipients of the department’s instruction are expected to reflect the knowledge, skills, and personal qualities that will be successful in promoting, producing, and improving learning and increasing public trust in educational institutions.

The Ph.D. degree in Educational Leadership and Policy Analysis can be pursued through one of its named options (formal sub-majors documented on the transcript):

- Higher Education (research), focused on the effective administration of postsecondary institutions, including higher education leadership, student affairs administration, and athletic administration.
- K–12 Leadership (research), emphasizing the effective administration of primary and secondary institutions.
- Educational Policy Analysis and Evaluation (research), stressing effective formation and analysis of policies governing the administration of all educational institutions.
- Wisconsin Idea Executive (program).

Students in each named option will focus their course work within the emphasis, although students are encouraged to learn about other areas as well.

The department has long held a commitment to diversity and the strength it brings to a program. The department seeks to attract a very diverse student population. As one of its core values, the ELPA learning community celebrates wholeness, while, at the same time, values the richness of differences in life experiences, cultural backgrounds, ways of knowing, and perspectives of its individual members. The department seeks to renew itself continually by attracting faculty and students who contribute to this diversity as well as enhance the larger community.