Introduction
The Curriculum Committee of the PhD Program in Urban Education decided that for the 2014-15 assessment cycle that it would review the goals for the dissertation development and defense. The Curriculum Committee is made up of three faculty, three students, and the Executive Officer.

The stated goals of the dissertation development and defense are:

A. Students will initiate and sustain a dialogue concerning a written proposal for dissertation project research that they will present to their committee in partial fulfillment of the requirements for receiving the doctoral degree in urban education.

B. Students will be required to complete a dissertation research project in written form to their committee and to participate with their committee in an oral dialogue about their research in partial fulfillment of the requirements for receiving the doctoral degree in urban education.

To conduct this assessment, data on graduates from the program were collected and a survey sent to a sample of recent graduates who would still have a recollection of the dissertation activity. The decision to survey recent graduates was also made because there have been revisions to the program especially with regard to the advisement system that was implemented in 2010.

Findings
Since its inception in 2001, the Ph.D. Program has had 99 students successfully defend their dissertations and graduate. Of these, all but three are gainfully employed; sixty-five hold academic positions in colleges and universities throughout the country and around the world (Canada, South Africa, Luxembourg); thirty-one hold non-academic, professional positions in education-related organizations. Of the sixty-five holding academic positions, fifteen are on tenure-track lines at CUNY. Of the thirty-one holding non-academic, professional positions, three are in senior management titles at CUNY. The employment of our graduates at CUNY is particularly noted because the administrators and faculty who comprise search committees know a good deal about our program and have the confidence to offer positions to our graduates.

As part of our assessment, one of our Urban Education students, Kylah Torre, conducted a survey of recent graduates. Twenty-three graduates responded (see attached report). A summary of the findings are as follows:

On the whole, alumni had positive responses to their experience with advisement, both with their advisors/committee chairs and their dissertation committees as a whole. All who answered (100 percent) either strongly agreed or
agreed that the chair of their dissertation committee clearly explained what was expected throughout the process, that they felt supported by their committee throughout the process, that their committee members pushed their scholarship to higher levels, and that the working relationships of their committee members were positive. The vast majority of respondents agreed that the chair of their dissertation committee was a strong mentor (95.7 percent). Most also agreed that taking into consideration the differing perspectives of their committee members benefitted their process (95.7 percent). In the words of one respondent, “I could not have been more supported, challenged, or mentored as I was by my committee.” Another said that, “my doctoral experience was amazing, thanks mostly to an incredibly support [sic] and knowledgeable mentor.” One respondent cited the diversity of their committee as a key asset.

There was some minor disagreement about the accessibility of college-based faculty. A few respondents (13 percent) disagreed that there were opportunities for students to meet college-based faculty members. There was only one comment from a respondent as to why that might be the case. They said that the list of college-based faculty provided by the program was outdated and they had to “go above and beyond” to find a suitable committee member with an expertise in arts education.

Respondents had a few suggestions for strengthening the advisement aspect of the process. One respondent said that they could have benefited from more training in research methods and data analysis. Another would have liked more feedback on their writing. One respondent said that, “there could be more consistency of expectations for students and dissertation work across strands throughout the program.” However, overall the respondents seemed to be pleased with the advisement they received.

The Committee discussed and concurred with these findings. The minor issues that were raised in the report specifically research methods preparation, publication assistance, and access to college-based faculty were further discussed at a meeting of the Curriculum Committee on February 18, 2015.

1. Major curriculum changes were implemented in Fall 2011 that increased the number of research methods courses required for the program. In addition, the first course in the core (first year) requirements is an introduction to research methods course.
2. To provide opportunities to become more familiar with publication of scholarly work, in 2011, the program under the direction of faculty Jean Anyon and Steve Brier launched Theory, Research, and Action in Urban Education (TRAUE), an open-access, peer-reviewed online journal published by doctoral students and recent graduates of the Ph.D. Program in Urban Education here at the Graduate Center. Urban Education students interested in publication can learn a good deal about the fine points of submitting manuscripts, the peer review process, and publication of scholarly work by participating in TRAUE activities. It was also determined that the program should offer additional workshops on the finer points of scholarly publication.
3. The website for the program was redesigned and updated in 2013. The issue of access to college-based faculty has been alleviated. However, it is recognized that the large majority of dissertations are chaired by central line faculty more so than college-based faculty. This will be discussed with other appropriate committees.

In summary, the Curriculum Committee concludes that the dissertation development and defense is accomplishing the Program’s assessment goals and objectives. However, attempts will be made to fine-tune the dissertation experience in several areas as mentioned above.