

Lehman College
The City University of New York

**Master of Science in
Organizational Leadership**

Action Research Project Handbook
(August 2025)

**“Management is doing things right; leadership is doing the right things.”
--Peter F. Drucker--**

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Overview of Lehman College's Master of Science in Organizational Leadership Program (MSOL) Graduate Programs

The 30-credit MSOL Program prepares candidates to assume leadership positions within a variety of fields, such as higher education, not-for-profit, community-based agencies, corporate, healthcare and government, and is not focused on Pre-K-12 leadership.

The MSOL is interdisciplinary in design and draws content from a variety of fields to help candidates navigate the universal leadership challenges that often plague organizations. Unlike a traditional master of business administration, which often prepares candidates to manage existing organizational structures and processes, Lehman's MSOL program will help individuals gain the necessary tools to grow an organization, break through existing leadership barriers and effect change – at all types of organizations.

The courses emphasize self assessment and reflection, critical thinking, decision making and problem solving, with extensive field-based experiences as a central component. The MSOL program provides knowledge of leadership roles and emphasizes interpersonal skills in order to accomplish its purpose of developing leaders capable of developing and sustaining successful, thriving organizations. This program offers practical tools to students, which immediately can be applicable in their respective places of work, and cultivates graduates who are knowledgeable and flexible to embrace a variety of leadership roles, communicate effectively, motivate staff, align individuals in cooperative efforts to meet organizational goals and lead across the ever-evolving diversity landscape of the 21st century. The MSOL Program is based, in part, on the School of Education's Lehman Urban Transformative Education conceptual framework, whose mission is to facilitate the development of competent, caring and qualified leaders.

Lehman Urban Transformative Education (LUTE) Conceptual Framework

The LUTE represents the School of Education's vision for educators and leaders who are or will be responsible for stimulating and supporting the development of knowledge, skills, practices, and dispositions that enrich individuals and, in turn, communities where they live and work. Our vision is rooted in and extends from the missions of both The City University of New York and Lehman College. We seek to facilitate individuals' access to postsecondary education and occupational opportunities. We also seek to increase personal and social competencies for every PreK-18 student. In all of our work, we strive to close achievement, opportunity, and attainment gaps. The LUTE focuses on four themes: 1) Empower Our Community of Educators and Learners; 2) Educate and Advocate for Social Action and Equity; 3) Realize Potential; and 4) Affirm Our Diverse Ethnic and Cultural Contexts. The entire LUTE conceptual framework is available at <http://www.lehman.cuny.edu/academics/education/introduction.php>

Goals and Overview of the Action Research Project

The MSOL action research project will demonstrate a comprehensive assessment of students' achievement by providing the challenge of applying much of the knowledge, skills and dispositions acquired throughout their coursework to developing a solution to an actual problem

in their organization. Students will be supported through this process, from the first semester they enroll throughout the final semester, through both group seminars and individual conferences. Students will work with a Faculty Mentor to choose an appropriate problem to research and propose a solution, based on their authentic work setting.

The first goal of the Action Research Project is designed to immerse candidates in “real-life” leadership experiences that afford students the opportunity to apply theory and knowledge from courses taken in the program. This project is intended to blend practical experience with classroom knowledge and theory. The second goal of the Action Research Project is to provide a service to the organizations where our students are employed by having students research existing problems and propose feasible and practical solutions. The final goal of the Action Research project is to assess the MSOL student’s ability and skills to perform effectively the responsibilities associated with organizational leadership and help identify and strengthen areas where the student still needs development.

Process for Topic Approval

Over the course of the first semester, students will be refining their selection of a topic for continued focus, with the support of their Faculty Mentor. Prior to proceeding with the Action Research Plan, the student must meet with the Faculty Mentor, in person or via web-conference, to discuss revisions, if necessary, and to be given final approval. The student must submit a one-page written proposal via email or in person (at the Faculty Mentor’s discretion).

The one-page proposal should provide an overview of the proposed area of focus for their Action Research Plan, and should include:

- a description of the problem/issue being addressed in the project
- a general context for where the problem exists
- the impact the problem/issue has on the organization, supported by evidence
- a justification of why this is an important focus for the project

Outline for Action Research Plan

There are three parts of the Action Research Assignment, which will be completed over the course of three semesters in the Leadership Seminars (EDL 808, 809, 810). Each part of the project will have specific *Areas of Focus*, which will build towards the final, completed Action Research Plan. In addition to reviewing the guidelines for the project, students should also **review the rubrics for each part of the assignment.**

Action Research Assignment – Part One

Areas of Focus:

Overview & History of the Organization

This section should provide an overview (in your own words) of the role and function of your organization. You should also provide a general overview of the history of the organization to provide context for this project.

Organizational Chart

Create an organizational chart of your organization that identifies the central individuals and/or groups who are relevant to your study.

Problem/Issue Identification

Describe the problem/issue that your organization is facing in detail. You must provide evidence that this problem does exist and that it should be further studied. Collaborate with others to gather and analyze data from multiple sources (e.g. loss of revenue, employee turnover rates, customer service surveys, etc.) in order to justify your focus on this issue.

Action Research Assignment – Part Two

Areas of Focus:

Potential Causes of Problem/Issue

Examine the possible causes of the problem/issue. Remember, often there are multiple causes. For example, individuals, procedures, attitudes, and resources can all contribute to problems. (These are some causes and are not meant to be an all-inclusive list.) How does theory inform your understanding and interpretation of the causes of the problem/issue?

Major Barriers to Change

Discuss major barriers preventing this organization is facing that can hinder change or improvement. Identify strategies for removing these barriers. How can you overcome the “history” of the organization and past politics? How does organizational theory and research inform your understanding of the barriers to change?

Proposed solution

Describe the proposed solution to the issue/problem you have identified. Discuss how your proposed solution address causes of the problem, as well as major barriers to change. How is your proposal supported by organizational theory and research?

Reference List

This section should be written using APA format (the most recent version) and should include all sources (theory, research articles, organizational data, etc.) of information that you cited in Parts One and Two of your project.

Action Research Assignment – Part Three: Prior & Final Sections

Note: When submitting Part Three of the Action Research Project, you must submit all prior parts (from EDL 808 and EDL 809) along with these final sections. Final submission guidelines are described in the next section.

Areas of Focus:

Action Steps and Timeline (table with bulleted notes)

Develop a specific action plan and timeline for implementing your proposed solution. Consider the following questions: What steps must you take? How long will it realistically take from concept to actual implementation? How will you promote collaborative decision making during this process? How will you involve all organizational stakeholders? How will you lead this change fairly and ethically? How will you monitor and assess your plan to ensure course correction as needed?

Budget (table with bulleted notes)

How will you fund your proposed solution/plan? Create a budget that shows your projected expenses to implement this plan, as well as sources of funding for the necessary expenses.

Reflection

Reflect on lessons learned during your action research project. What insights have you gained about your organization? About the change process? What are your thoughts about its feasibility and its potential to be implemented by your organization? What are the strengths of your plan? What are the areas that still need to be thought out more clearly or effectively? Lastly, reflect on your process of developing this plan and the activities/tasks you had to complete to develop this plan.

Reference List (final)

This section should be written using APA format (the most recent version) and should include all sources (theory, research articles, organizational data, etc.) of information that you cited throughout all parts of your action research project in previous seminars

Final Document Submission

The final Action Research Project must be submitted to the *Leadership Seminar* Faculty Mentor by early/mid-June. (Please confirm the exact submission date with your Faculty Mentor.) As noted above, the two prior parts must be combined with Part Three, and the full project should reflect revisions made based on mentor feedback. The entire document (approximately 15-20 pages, but you should discuss specific length issues with your Faculty Mentor) should be stapled or bound in some way (or, if submitted electronically, should be combined into one file). The final document should be organized according to the order in which the focus areas were assigned in each course and must include the following headings:

- **Overview & History of the Organization**
- **Organizational Chart**
- **Problem/Issue Identification**
- **Potential Causes of Problem/Issue**
- **Major Barriers to Change**
- **Proposed solution**
- **Action Steps & Timeline** (table with bulleted notes)
- **Budget** (table with bulleted notes)
- **Reflection**
- **Reference List** (should be a compilation of all of the references used in all three parts)

Writing, Research and APA Resources

This is a graduate-level program, and work should reflect advanced writing and research skills. Therefore, students are encouraged to take full advantage of the resources available at Lehman College. Below is a partial list of links and contact information for valuable resources.

The Academic Center for Excellence (ACE) and the Science Learning Center (SLC):

The Academic Center for Excellence (ACE) and the Science Learning Center (SLC) are two of the tutoring centers on campus. The ACE provides appointment based and drop-in tutoring in the humanities, social sciences, and writing, as well as general writing and academic skills workshops. The SLC provides drop-in tutoring for natural and computer science courses. To obtain more information about the ACE and the SLC, please visit their website at <http://www.lehman.edu/issp>, or please call the ACE at 718.960.8175 and the SLC at 718.960.7707.

Research resources:

The librarians at the Leonard Leif Library have expertise in a variety of fields. There are a number of valuable tools and resources available in Research Guides that are organized by topic. Browse the guides here: <http://libguides.lehman.edu/>

Below is a sampling of journals may be useful in your research:

Journal of Research and Organizational Studies

Journal of Leadership Studies

Journal of Higher Education Management

Journal of Higher Education Policy and Management

Journal for Nonprofit Management

Nonprofit Management and Leadership

Journal of Public and Nonprofit Affairs

International Journal of Business Management and Leadership

Harvard Business Review

APA Citation and Reference Resources:

<http://libguides.lehman.edu/c.php?g=331465&p=2230722>

Academic Integrity and Plagiarism Policy

Academic Dishonesty, which includes plagiarism, is prohibited in The City University of New York and is punishable by penalties, including failing grades, suspension, and expulsion, as provided herein. A full statement and information may be found on the Lehman College website: <http://lehman.smartcatalogiq.com/en/2015-2017/Graduate-Bulletin/Appendix/Board-of-Trustees-Rules-and-Regulations-on-Campus-Conduct/CUNY-Policy-on-Academic-Integrity>

Accommodating Disabilities

Lehman College is committed to providing access to all programs and curricula to all students. Students with disabilities who may need classroom accommodations are encouraged to register with the Office of Student Disability Services. For more information, please contact the Office of Student Disability Services, Shuster Hall, Room 238, phone number, 718.960.8441.

Role of Faculty Mentor

The role of the Faculty Mentor in Lehman College's Master of Science in Organizational Leadership (MSOL) Program transcends the traditional responsibilities of supporting, guiding and instructing students in the development of their Action Research Projects. Faculty Mentors also will help facilitate the student's leadership development, which may include professional and/or educational counseling.

This expanded role derives from the following unique characteristics of Lehman's MSOL Program:

- Cutting-edge leadership concepts and skills stimulate students to question their career paths, their personal/professional goals and their educational needs.
- Tools for self-assessment provoke students to reevaluate their current organizational roles and engage in a process of redefining their values, their effectiveness and their work.
- The cohort model of the MSOL provides students with the opportunity for personal and professional transformation.

At the end of each *Leadership Seminar*, students are required to submit a section of their Action Research Project.

- To ensure consistency and stability for our students, Faculty Mentors are expected to work with students throughout the entire three semester-sequence of the Action Research Project.
- Faculty Mentors are responsible for supporting students through each stage of their Action Research Project.
- Faculty Mentors will review and edit the required sections and return the sections to the students with feedback and direction for continuous development.
- Faculty Mentors will submit grades for each Action Research Project section at the end of each *Leadership Seminar*.
- Faculty Mentors, at the end of the final *Leadership Seminar (EDL 810)*, will review and submit a grade for the completed Action Research Project, taking into consideration the attention students gave to suggested revisions throughout the research process, as well.
- Faculty Mentors are expected to fulfill the contact requirements for a one-credit course each semester (fall, spring, summer). Contact can include, but is not limited to, whole group workshops/sessions; individual meetings; online meetings; tutorial sessions; etc.
- Faculty Mentors will keep in close contact with the MSOL coordinator for support, if needed.

Corresponding Rubrics for Project

Action Research – Part One

	Exemplary	Proficient	Poor	Unacceptable
Description of organization	Highly detailed and comprehensive description of the organization's role and history	Mostly detailed description of the organization's role and history	Limited description of the organization's role and history; unclear	Inadequate or missing description of the organization's role and history
Organizational Chart	Highly detailed and comprehensive organizational chart of necessary and significant individuals	Mostly detailed organizational chart of necessary and significant individuals	Limited organizational chart of necessary individuals; unclear and narrow in scope	Inadequate or missing organizational chart of necessary individuals
Comprehensive Problem Statement	Highly detailed and comprehensive statement of problem/issue based on existing and relevant organizational data	Mostly detailed statement of problem/issue based on existing and relevant organizational data	Statement of problem/issue is limited and inadequately based on relevant organizational data	Statement of problem/issue is not clear and not based on relevant organizational data
Needs Assessment	Demonstrates superior ability to collect and evaluate data to identify goals and assess organizational effectiveness	Demonstrates adequate ability to collect and evaluate data to identify goals and assess organizational effectiveness	Demonstrates limited ability to collect and evaluate data to identify goals and assess organizational effectiveness	Fails to collect and evaluate data to identify goals and assess organizational effectiveness
Collaborate with Relevant Stakeholders	Demonstrates superior ability to collect and analyze pertinent data in collaboration with relevant stakeholders.	Demonstrates adequate ability to collect and analyze pertinent data in collaboration with relevant stakeholders.	Demonstrates limited ability to collect and analyze pertinent data in collaboration with relevant stakeholders.	Demonstrates inadequate ability to collect and analyze pertinent data in collaboration with relevant stakeholders.
Application of Readings	Comprehensive application and incorporation of seminar readings in action research	Adequate application and incorporation of seminar readings in action research project	Surface application and incorporation of seminar readings in action research project	No application or incorporation of seminar readings in action research project

	Exemplary	Proficient	Poor	Unacceptable
	project			
Technical Aspects	Grammatically and stylistically superior; sentences/ paragraphs are well developed no spelling and/or grammatical errors	Grammatically and stylistically sound; sentence/paragraph development is present but not perfected; no more than 5 spelling and/or grammatical errors	Grammatically and stylistically poor; information is understandable, but ideas are not organized or developed; more than 5 spelling and/or grammatical errors	Grammatically and stylistically inadequate; information is not conveyed in a way that can be understood; ideas are not organized or developed; more than 5 spelling and/or grammatical errors
APA Style	Correct APA citation and reference format; no errors	Minor errors in APA citation and reference format	Major and multiple errors in APA citation and reference format	Major and multiple errors in APA citation and reference format

Action Research – Part Two

	Exemplary	Proficient	Poor	Unacceptable
Revisions to Part 1 of Project	Comprehensive and thoughtful revisions based on prior feedback	Mostly comprehensive revisions based on prior feedback	Technical issues are revised, but the substance remains largely unchanged	No evidence of revision
Possible Causes	Highly detailed and comprehensive examination of the possible causes of the problem/issue	Mostly detailed examination of the possible causes of the problem/issue	Limited examination of the possible causes of the problem/issue; unclear and narrow in scope	Inadequate or missing examination of the possible causes of the problem/issue
Identification of Barriers	Highly detailed and comprehensive examination of major barriers hindering organization	Mostly detailed examination of major barriers hindering organization	Surface examination of major barriers hindering organization	Examination of major barriers hindering organization is not clear and unsupported
Proposed Solution	Highly detailed and comprehensive overview of the proposed solution to address the causes of the problem & overcome major	Mostly detailed and comprehensive overview of the proposed solution to address the causes of the problem & overcome major	Surface plan for the proposed solution to address the causes of the problem & overcome major barriers	No clear or supported solution to address the causes of the problem & overcoming major barriers

	Exemplary	Proficient	Poor	Unacceptable
	barriers	barriers		
Application of Readings	Comprehensive application of relevant theory in all sections.	Adequate application of relevant theory in all sections.	Surface application of relevant theory in all sections.	Inadequate or no application of relevant theory.
Technical Aspects	Grammatically and stylistically superior; sentences/ paragraphs are well developed no spelling and/or grammatical errors	Grammatically and stylistically sound; sentence/paragraph development is present but not perfected; no more than 5 spelling and/or grammatical errors	Grammatically and stylistically poor; information is understandable, but ideas are not organized or developed; more than 5 spelling and/or grammatical errors	Grammatically and stylistically inadequate; information is not conveyed in a way that can be understood; ideas are not organized or developed; more than 5 spelling and/or grammatical errors
APA Style	Correct APA citation and reference format; no errors	Minor errors in APA citation and reference format	Major and multiple errors in APA citation and reference format	Major and multiple errors in APA citation and reference format

Action Research – Part Three

	Exemplary	Proficient	Poor	Unacceptable
Revisions to Parts 1 and 2 of Paper	Comprehensive and thoughtful revisions based on prior feedback	Mostly comprehensive revisions based on prior feedback	Technical issues are revised, but the substance remains largely unchanged	No evidence of revision
Action Steps & Timeline	Action steps and timeline are highly detailed, comprehensive, and feasible	Action steps and timeline are reasonably detailed, comprehensive, and feasible	Action steps and timeline are somewhat detailed and feasibility is questionable	Action steps and timeline are vague and are not feasible
Budget	Highly detailed and comprehensive budget allocations in alignment with needs assessment	Generally detailed and comprehensive budget allocations in alignment with needs assessment	Budget allocations are somewhat detailed and aligned with needs assessment	Inadequate resource allocation and/or lacks alignment with needs assessment
Reflection	In-depth, insightful and outstanding reflection and	Moderately reflective commentary on the actual improvement	Surface reflection on the actual improvement process and	No reflection on the actual improvement process and potential

	Exemplary	Proficient	Poor	Unacceptable
	commentary on the actual improvement process and potential implementation	process and potential implementation	potential implementation	implementation
Technical Aspects	Grammatically and stylistically superior; sentences/ paragraphs are well developed no spelling and/or grammatical errors	Grammatically and stylistically sound; sentence/paragraph development is present but not perfected; no more than 5 spelling and/or grammatical errors	Grammatically and stylistically poor; information is understandable, but ideas are not organized or developed; more than 5 spelling and/or grammatical errors	Grammatically and stylistically inadequate; information is not conveyed in a way that can be understood; ideas are not organized or developed; more than 5 spelling and/or grammatical errors
APA Style	Correct APA citation and reference format; no errors	Minor errors in APA citation and reference format	Major and multiple errors in APA citation and reference format	Major and multiple errors in APA citation and reference format