While districts striving to build citizenries of critical thinkers require leaders who possess and model thinking skills (Sherblom, 2010), popular research in the field has established that even in professionals, skilled critical thinking only develops through deliberate practice and in predictable stages (Elder & Paul, 2010). Therefore, emerging education leaders are expected to hone their critical thinking ability during the coursework and internships provided by modern principal preparation programs. School personnel considering a doctoral program focused on educational leadership often have dual goals: licensure endorsement and graduation with a terminal degree. While many studies have explored the success of doctoral programs (Bair & Haworth, 2005; Council of Graduate Schools, 2004; Jaschik, 2007); a review of the literature revealed that few from the field of education explored the role of critical thinking ability on doctoral student success. Employing the Watson-Glaser Critical Thinking Appraisal Short Form, this ex-post-facto study explored the predictive validity of the critical thinking ability of 66 doctoral students in a K-12 School Leadership program at a private Judeo-Christian university in southeastern Virginia on three benchmarks of success: passing comprehensive exams, achieving administrative licensure endorsement, and graduation. Bivariate logistic regressions failed to establish Watson-Glaser Critical Thinking Appraisal performance as a statistically significant predictor for each of the benchmarks in the study. While no significant predictions emerged, the primary outcome of this study was to provide a suitable model for exploring the predictive value of critical thinking ability for the next generation of educational leaders. The results of this study
offer a platform for inspiring dialogue, developing ideas, and encouraging future research
connected to critical thinking and developing school leaders.