

# Early Childhood Specializations Conceptual Framework



## Program Mission

Prepare undergraduate students to be professionals who promote children's development and wellbeing in multiple settings including children's families, schools, child care/early education, home visiting, and early intervention programs. Cornerstones of the program include a strong focus on knowledge of how individual children grow and learn, putting this knowledge into action, and engaging in reflective practice.

## Program Objectives

Successful completion of early childhood specializations in HDFS prepares students to enter the early childhood education workforce or engage in additional higher education needed to engage in their chosen professional role with the following,

- a deep knowledge of child development and observational skills to inform intentional interactions that guide learning and development of individual children through play and supportive learning environments.
- an openness, appreciation and awareness to create positive working partnerships with diverse children and families.
- a emerging professional identity and philosophy to guide future professional pathways and advocacy efforts.
- skills to approach work with reflective and critical thinking – both through daily interactions and to affect growth and continuous improvement of professional practice.

## Program Curriculum

This ECS program curriculum integrates evidence-based adult learning principles with a focus on early childhood education practices, child development, and reflective practice. It emphasizes empowering learners to take ownership of their learning while drawing upon real-world interactions that connect with the learners' professional and personal experience.

Student engagement is fostered through hands-on activities, where learners practice observation techniques and apply curricula in real and simulated early childhood education settings. Critical thinking and practical application are encouraged during seminar and class discussions while also supporting immediate and practical application, embracing "just-in-time" learning through flexible teaching and student emerging needs. Providing various opportunities for students to build a personal, reflective practice through the ECS program meets a critical skill for early childhood professions. By combining self-direction, relevance, active engagement, collaboration, and practical support, the ECS curriculum prepares learners to implement high-quality practices in early childhood professional roles effectively.

## Early Childhood Faculty

The ECS faculty consists of highly skilled professionals with extensive expertise in various aspects of early childhood development and education. The ECS faculty members possess advanced knowledge in research and the practical application of teaching young children. This expertise includes coaching educators, providing early intervention to young children, and utilizing home visiting and parent education methods to foster healthy child development. In addition to teaching competency, many faculty members have substantial experience in the design, implementation, and evaluation of early childhood programs. They bring valuable insights from working with federal government initiatives, contributing to policy development, and ensuring programs meet national standards. This knowledge and experience of the ECS faculty contributes to a strong training program that ensures that future educators and professionals are equipped with the knowledge and tools needed to support children's growth and development in their crucial early years.

# Program Philosophy

The ECS program embraces the core beliefs defining our program philosophy. These core beliefs are woven throughout the course students complete and integrated in all aspects of interaction among students, faculty, and community programs that support ECS students.



## Relationships

Building positive relationships – with children, families and colleagues – is at the core of quality practice.



## Learning through Play

Early childhood is a time of learning through play. Curriculum for children involves creating intentional learning environments and experiences promote children's development. We do this in the way we structure the environment, engage in daily interactions, and create planned but flexible learning opportunities individualized for each child through observation and reflection.



## Reflective Practice

Reflecting on ourselves and others helps us to create intentional and warm environments and responsive relationships. Understanding what we bring to the classroom and how it influences our behavior helps to continually improve our practice.



## Social justice/Diversity, Equity & Inclusion

Fostering a deep respect for cultural differences in child rearing practices and honoring families' diverse languages, values, and strengths promotes collaboration with diverse families as equal partners in supporting child development.



## Uniqueness of Each Child

Children develop in individual ways, affected by caregiving environments, genetic contributions, temperament, and by their own cognitive and physical abilities. Curriculum planning for all children should be individualized. Some children have a developmental delay or a problem needing additional support for development. It is best for children, families and professionals when these children are cared for in inclusive settings that work with all children, those who are typically developing and those with additional support needs.



## Observation and Assessment

Observing behavior and development is the primary source of knowledge about individual children and provides key input into building relationships, guiding behavior, and supporting development.



## Becoming a professional

Professionalism is about finding your voice, knowing who you are as a professional and communicating that within and beyond your professional settings. A sense of professionalism can direct your career, choosing where to work and guiding your efforts to learn and improve over time and can also guide your efforts to improve the larger early childhood field through advocacy.

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