



Early Childhood and Family Policy Student Handbook

Last Updated June 2024

The IDEA Early Childhood & Family Policy (ECFP) graduate certificate program aims to equip individuals committed to working on behalf of diverse children and families in pedagogical and non-pedagogical contexts to evaluate, inform, create, and advocate for quality policies. The mission of the ECFP graduate certificate program is to advance the knowledge, skills, and competencies of those working on behalf of children and families, but perhaps not directly with them.

This student handbook is a supplement to the [IDEA Student Handbook](#). We encourage you to familiarize yourself with that online student handbook as well as this one.

Six participating universities operate as one cohesive program to offer a graduate certificate in ECFP.

Participating Universities and Certificate Name

University	Certificate Title
Iowa State University	Early Childhood and Family Policy
Michigan State University	Early Childhood and Family Policy
Texas Tech University	Early Childhood and Family Policy
University of Mississippi	Early Childhood and Family Policy
University of Missouri	Early Childhood and Family Policy
University of Nebraska-Lincoln	Early Childhood and Family Policy

The core program learning outcomes are:

- Evaluate equity and effectiveness of early childhood and family policy using theory and a variety of tools.
- Propose and advocate for equitable and effective early childhood and family policy.
- Communicate with a wide range of stakeholders (e.g., policymakers, researchers, educators, and advocates) using varied formats (e.g., multimedia presentations, written reports, and oral presentations).

Your Home University

Your first step is to determine which institution to choose as your home institution and then apply to that institution for admission. While courses are offered among the participating universities, students will choose one institution as their “home university”. In terms of curriculum and fees, it does not matter which institution you choose as all share a flat-rate common price. [Learn more about the tuition and cost](#) on the IDEA website.



At the home university, students will:

- Be matched with a faculty member who serves as their advisor,
- Register for courses with the assistance of the home university's IDEA campus coordinator,
- Be billed for tuition regardless of which IDEA partnering institution is teaching the course(s) they take, and
- Complete the program requirements to ultimately receive their certificate. The certificate is issued from the home university, not IDEA. Program requirements may vary slightly across institutions, and students are expected to follow all policies and procedures as set by their home university.

Program Requirements

The graduate certificate in Early Childhood and Family Policy is a 12-credit hour post-baccalaureate program of study designed for students who want coursework to further their knowledge and skills for developing and evaluating policy impact on children and their families. To complete the ECFP graduate certificate program, students must successfully complete each of the four 8-week courses.

To qualify for the graduate certificate, students must:

1. Hold a bachelor's degree and/or meet the requirements of the home university for graduate students
2. Be admitted to the certificate program at a participating university
3. Complete the four 8-week courses

Course Titles and Sequence

Course I - ECFP: History, Child Development, and Equity (Fall, 1st 8 weeks)

Child development theory and research have had a profound influence on early childhood education and care (ECEC) policies, programs, and services in the United States and internationally. In eight weeks (three hours/week), this course provides an overview of the research on young children (birth to age five), demographics of this population, critical domains of development, the significance of early brain development, and issues of inequality and disproportionality that deeply shape child outcomes. It attempts to explore what develops in the first years of life, why this period is so critical, what have been the central questions that have driven both research and policy, whether policies and research have helped to reduce inequality and advance equity, and what critical issues are still unanswered (or even unasked). The course familiarizes students with the cultural ideas, beliefs, values, and social purposes that have shaped and continue to influence children and families in the United States. Further, the course presents research from a range of disciplines (e.g., psychology, sociology, education, neuroscience, economics) to help students understand the complexity of developmental factors relevant to ECEC policy development and program design. The goals of the course are to help students understand the importance of early development, the critical need to develop ECEC policies grounded in research and practice, and the effectiveness and



limitations of ECEC policies to address fundamental issues of inequality. Finally, the course is intended to enable students to place their own professional interests and concerns in a broader historical and educational context.

Course II - ECFP: Examining Practices, Policies, and Key Issues (Fall, 2nd 8 weeks)

This course focuses on the practice of ECEC, as well as the role of families and policymakers in altering practices and policies. Beginning with sessions that are designed to provide a rich background, the course offers an analysis of the critical forces that shaped contemporary ECEC. Following this, current services and policies are examined, as are inventive theories about how to organize such services to achieve optimal quality, equity, sustainability, and efficiency. With this background in mind, sessions turn to a more detailed examination of the diverse challenges that characterize the field. Positioned to be both realistic and optimistic, the sessions confront the issues and unveil some of the thinking and efforts to redress them. In so doing, the course focuses on quality and diverse efforts to achieve it; the lack of equity; the need for more effective approaches to the workforce, funding, and governance; and the importance of parental voice. By its conclusion, students will have familiarity with policies governing and shaping ECEC, as well as challenges and potential solutions. Students will be given diverse opportunities to apply their learning through a series of individual and group projects.

Course III - ECFP: Theory, Analysis, and Research (Spring, 1st 8 weeks)

Policy research and analysis are key components in each stage of the policy cycle (agenda setting, policy formulation, policy adoption, policy implementation, policy evaluation, policy termination, and policy change). Theories take a prominent role in this course, as it provides the lens through which to understand the central questions, logic, and values that underpin how policy is understood and supported by analysts and researchers. Throughout the course, theories and policy tools will be applied to real-world examples, providing concrete opportunities to examine differently, sometimes competing, analytic approaches and the contexts in which they are applied.

Course IV - ECFP: Policy, Leadership, and Policy Advocacy (Spring, 2nd 8 weeks)

Divided into four units, this course is designed to provide foundational knowledge of the fundamentals of policy creation, design, and development, with an emphasis on those policies that impact ECEC. The course focuses on how policy is constructed and who and what influences that construction. Especially important, the course addresses the critical roles that communication, advocacy, and ethics play as policy evolves. More specifically, the course will address: (i) the multiple venues and processes for creating public policies; (ii) different types of public ECEC funding; (iii) federal, state, and local policy roles; (iv) considerations of ethics and leadership from public policy and ECEC perspectives; and (v) the development of policy advocacy communications skills. Throughout the course, you will recognize that the policy cycle depends on a network of complex interactions among people within government (i.e., elected officials and bureaucrats) and multiple outside influencers (e.g., advocates, foundations, think tanks, and voters).



Additional [course information](#), [a course planner](#), and contacts for participating universities can be found on the [ECFP program webpage](#).

Who to Contact for Help

Academic Advisor

Your academic advisor is the faculty member/staff person at your home university who helps you as you make your academic decisions and as you progress through the program. You should consult your academic advisor for assistance with the following:

- Course planning and selection
- Help with research interests

Academic advisors are assigned by the home university after acceptance in the program.

Campus Coordinator

Campus coordinators are available to help students navigate their home institution. Campus coordinators are available at every institution to help with questions regarding courses taken from other teaching institutions.

Campus coordinators serve as a first point of reference for general questions and the following information:

- Enrollment processes (contact your academic adviser for course selection)
- General policy information at your home university
- General IDEA information and policies
- Assistance with the Learning Management System

A list of campus coordinators can be found on the [Early Childhood & Family Policy](#) webpage in the section titled “University Contacts.”

Key for Course Titles and Numbers at Each University

Alliance #	Alliance Title	Iowa State Univ.	Michigan State Univ.	Texas Tech Univ.	Univ. of Missouri	Univ. of Mississippi	Univ. of Nebraska - Lincoln
ECFP 600	History, Child Development, and Equity	ECFP 550	ECFP 801	HDFS 5312	HDFS 8415	EDEC 610	CYAF 831
ECFP 601	Examining Practices, Policies, and Key Issues	ECFP 560	ECFP 802	HDFS 5331	HDFS 8720	EDEC 611	CYAF 832
ECFP 602	Theory, Analysis, and Research	ECFP 570	ECFP 803	HDFS 5332	PUB-AFF 7175	EDEC 612	CYAF 906
ECFP 603	Policy, Leadership, and Policy Advocacy	ECFP 580	ECFP 804	HDFS 5333	PUB-AFF 7176	EDEC 613	CYAF 907

