

Embedding Diverse Field Experiences in a Child Development and Family Studies Program

Introduction: The Child Development and Family Studies (CDFS) program is housed in the Department of Family and Consumer Sciences and includes an immersion in the disciplines of child development, early education, childcare administration, youth development, parent-child relations, family life education, and family studies. The 120 credit hours curriculum is focused on **theoretical, ecological, and intercultural** work with children within a broad context of families, socio-cultural networks, communities, and society influences. Specifically, the CDFS program offers two concentrations that focus on young children (birth – 5 years old), youth, families, and the community. The two concentrations are: **Child Development and Family Relations (CDFR) and Early Education and Family Studies (Birth-Kindergarten Licensure) (B-K)**. Both concentrations are **nationally accredited**.

While the CDFS program includes the CDFR and B-K concentrations, students majoring in either concentration complete common core coursework, as well as concentration-specific coursework. The common core coursework constructs students' foundational content knowledge, skills knowledge, and dispositions with an emphasis on lifespan development, family systems, cultural relevancy, and professional development. The CDFR concentration provides an opportunity for students to develop content, skills, and dispositions specifically focused on child development, well-being, services, and supports of diverse children/youth, families, and community partners. The B-K concentration provides an opportunity for students to develop content, skills, and dispositions specifically focused on the early care and education of young children (with and without disabilities) aged birth to five and families from diverse cultural, ethnic, and linguistic backgrounds. The names and a brief content description for each of the CDFS common core courses, as well as the courses in the CDFR and B-K concentrations are provided below in Table 1.

The CDFS program includes an *embedded field experience component* that is an essential part of this program as coursework alone is not enough to prepare students to be successful in “real-world” child-, youth-, and family-centered settings. This Teaching Tip/Note identifies strategies for creating a comprehensive model of developing and evaluating students' knowledge, skills, and dispositions through diverse field experiences in community early settings.

Diverse Field Experiences Overview: The overall goal of field experiences is to provide sequentially planned field experiences in which students are required to spend a substantial amount of time in “real-world” child-, youth-, and family-centered settings

to develop into professionals who are equipped with practice-based knowledge, skills, and dispositions to become catalysts for children/youth learning and supporters for families and communities. These diverse field experiences contribute significantly to each student's developmental growth and learning.

Through intentionally planned field experiences students participate in significant role-taking opportunities through a series of experiences in, but not limited to public and private childcare centers, after-school programs, youth centers, cooperative extension programs, and family service/community agencies that lead into a capstone experience. Furthermore, the program's field experiences provide exposure to the various types, methods, strategies, and techniques employed in a variety of center/school/agency/community settings to educate, serve, and support culturally, ethnically, and linguistically diverse children, youth, families, and communities.

Embedded Diverse Field Experiences using a Multi-Level, Hierarchy of Learning Model:

In planning field experiences, programs must first intentionally embed the experiences throughout the curriculum. It is not enough to incorporate field experiences during the last semester of students' curriculum. A hierarchy of learning should occur throughout the various field experiences over time. Throughout the curriculum, CDFS students from freshman through the senior years engage in field experiences which lead them through the hierarchy of learning. The curriculum is designed to give students the opportunities to apply knowledge and skills, as well as practice dispositions. As part of the hierarchy of learning, field experiences will provide students with opportunities to do the following: (1) observe, (2) monitor, (3) tutor, (4) guide, (5) diagnose, (6) plan, (7) implement, (8) evaluate, (9) create, and (10) reflect critical behaviors and professional practices that enhance the intensity or quality of care, education, service, and support to diverse children, youth, families, and communities.

To scaffold students' learning and move them through the hierarchy of learning, the CDFS program's field experience is divided into **three levels** with each having a primary purpose for participation. The primary purpose of the **Level 1** experience is **observation**, **Level 2** is **engagement**, and **Level 3** is **application**. Specific information regarding the requirements of each experience across the three levels is explained by instructors of courses in the CDFS program. As an ongoing practice, students reflect on their field experiences through methods such as journals, narrative commentaries, and in-class and virtual discussions and exercises. The following graphic provides the embeddedness of the field experience across the three levels from freshman through senior years.

Graphic 1. CDFS Field Experience Component

<p>Level 1 OBSERVATION</p> <p>Students complete a minimum of 10-20 hours of field activities in each of the following courses:</p> <p>FCS 221 FCS 321 FCS 331</p> <p>(Freshman & Sophomore Years)</p>	<p>Level 2 ENGAGEMENT</p> <p>Students complete a minimum of 30-40 hours of field activities in each of the following courses:</p> <p>FCS 339 FCS 430</p> <p>(Junior Year)</p>	<p>Level 3 APPLICATION</p> <p>Students complete a minimum of 45hours of field activities in each of the following courses:</p> <p>FCS 435 FCS 437</p> <p>(Senior Year)</p>
<p>Internship/Clinical Experience FCS 429 (CDPR) or EDPR 489 (B-K)</p> <p>Students complete 240 - 480 hours <i>“practicing the real job”</i> and assuming <i>“real-world”</i> roles and responsibilities as part of the personnel staff or team at the internship/clinical site. (Senior Year- Graduating Semester)</p>		

Assessment and Conclusion of Students’ Performance in Diverse Field

Experience: Related to student learning, students’ performance is evaluated by community personnel partners in each field experience. These partners assess students’ knowledge, skills, and dispositions in the community settings on a scale of 1 to 3 (i.e., 1 = poor, 2 = fair, and 3 = good) across a total of 13 items. Sample items assessed are the following: demonstrated use of child development knowledge in engaging with children and families; implemented culturally appropriate practices in engaging with children; engaged in appropriate interactions with children and families; engaged in appropriate interactions with diverse personnel; and displayed professionalism with a positive attitude. A review of assessment data from community partners revealed that the CDFS program’s expected target rate of 80% met or exceeded expectations regarding students’ performance in the assessment items listed above. Assessment data is utilized to support students’ learning and growth in their field experiences year after year. It is concluded students are better prepared to work with diverse children, youth, families, and communities as a direct relation and result of exposure of field experiences in “real-life” settings.

Conclusions: Scaffolding students’ learning with a multi-level, hierarchy of learning model of field experiences is important to ensure knowledge can be gained through field experience activities, skills can be applied to specific settings, and dispositions can be practiced and refined over time. By organizing field experiences in this model, students can progress through the hierarchy of learning which is paralleled with intentionally matched coursework. Providing opportunities for assessments of students’ performance in their field experiences ensures not only are students better prepared to work in the field, but the diverse field experience model is still relevant to the current societal context. Future research and assessment of the field experiences should be targeted towards the present context, which has been greatly impacted by the pandemic.

Table 1. CDFS Common Core Courses, CDFR Courses, and B-K Courses	
Course Prefix, Number, Title, Description, and Credits	Classification & Semester
CDFS Common Core Coursework	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <u>FCS 260 Introduction to Human Development (3)</u> This course is an introduction to the human development process covering the life span from prenatal, childhood, adolescence, adulthood, and aging through death. The social, psychological, cognitive, physical, and moral characteristics of each stage are studied. 	Sophomore (1 st)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <u>FCS 321 Child Development: Prenatal through Middle Childhood (3)</u> This course is a study of the child's sequential development at different stages from conception through middle childhood. Historical and theoretical approaches to child development for typically and atypically developing children will be discussed. Field experiences are required. 	Sophomore (2 nd)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <u>FCS 331 Family Systems (3)</u> This course provides an ecological overview of diverse family structures and functioning styles, including multigenerational challenges facing the contemporary family. A family mentor experience with sociocultural diverse families is required. 	Sophomore (2 nd)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <u>FCS 334 Foundations of Early Education (3)</u> This course is the study of the historical, sociological, and philosophical background of typical and atypical development in young children. This course also reviews the dynamic of the family and current issues related to the teaching profession. Emphasis will be placed on understanding and applying theories to children and families, the integrated day, and scheduling. 	Junior (1 st)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <u>FCS 430 Assessment and Evaluation of Young Children (3)</u> A study of the principles and practices of observing, recording, and analyzing behavior and development of young children. Attention is focused on naturalistic observations, developmental theories, diagnostic information and an analysis of interpreting play, language, and physical development of young children. Field experiences are included in this course. 	
CDFR Coursework	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <u>FCS 221 Exploring Professional Careers in CDFS (3)</u> This course is designed to provide an overview of career options in the child development, early education, and family studies field using a study tour format. Students will 	Freshman (2 nd)

<p>be provided the opportunity to visit multiple settings and interact with diverse personnel in the field.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <u>FCS 339 Practicum in Interdisciplinary Services (3)</u> This course includes practical field experience in community service agencies concerned with all areas of childcare and family development. Emphasis will be placed on services to young children. • <u>FCS 429 Community of Practice Internship (6 - 9)</u> The internship focuses on the application, evaluation and reflection of content knowledge, skills knowledge, and dispositions in professional practices with children, family families, and community partners. Emphasis is on observation, active participation, and demonstration of high quality, best practices for young children and their families under university and community-based supervision. 	<p>Junior (2nd)</p> <p>Senior (2nd)</p>
<p>B-K Coursework</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <u>FCS 435 Applied Principles of Infant/Toddler Curricula (3)</u> This course is designed to link child development theories, assessments, and culturally responsive practices for infants and toddlers (birth to age three), and their families. An embedded emphasis of health, nutrition, and safety with CPR and First Aid will be included. A field-based experience is required. • <u>FCS 437 Applied Principles of Preschool/Kindergarten Curricula (3)</u> This course involves the study of instructional methods, materials, and evaluation measures for the development and enhancement of children (aged three to five) in the language/communication, social/emotional, cognitive, physical, and perceptual/motor developmental domains. Simulated teaching and field experiences are required. • <u>EDPR 498 Clinical Practice II in P-12 Schools (12)</u> This course provides education candidates with a structured, supervised clinical teaching experience in an appropriate discipline in an approved P-12 school (minimum of 15 consecutive weeks). Emphasis on instructional planning, engaging students in learning, providing feedback to guide learning and using assessment to inform instruction. 	<p>Senior (1st)</p> <p>Senior (1st)</p> <p>Senior (2nd)</p>

Submitted by:

V. J. McMillan¹, J.M. Beasley², M. Williams-Wheeler³, and J. Burwell⁴
North Carolina Agricultural and Technical State University
Greensboro, NC

Valerie Jarvis McMillan¹, Associate Professor of Early Education and Family Studies, 336-285-4859, vmcmilla@ncat.edu; Jennifer Mendoza Beasley², Assistant Professor of Early Education and Family Studies, jmbeasle@ncat.edu; Meeshay Williams-Wheeler³, Associate Professor of Child Development and Family Studies, mwwheele@ncat.edu; Jawan Burwell⁴, Director of Child Development Laboratory, 336-256-2750, jmburwel@ncat.edu. All authors are faculty in the Department of Family and Consumer Sciences, College of Agriculture and Environmental Sciences at North Carolina Agricultural and Technical State University in Greensboro, NC.