

INNOVATION IN ACTION

REACHING THE WORKFORCE

2025 Gateways Higher Education Faculty Forum | Interest Sessions

BUILDING A COMMUNITY OF PRACTICE FOR ASSESSMENT AND COURSE REVISION: INCLUSIVE AND COLLABORATIVE STRATEGIES

Carrie Nepsted and Kate Varey

Oftentimes, program level assessments and course revisions are written and revised by a full-time faculty member who may invite input from others but is the primary point person for the project. The Community of Practice model we will share is more inclusive of diverse stakeholders including adjunct instructors and students. Presenters will share feedback from participants who had historically been left out of decision-making at this level, who expressed gratitude at being invited to participate and have more ownership of the assessments, how they are administered in classes, and how they will be revised in the future.

EQUITY BY DESIGN; FEATURES OF THE OUTCOMES FROM THE UIC EARLY CHILDHOOD ALTERNATIVE LICENSURE PROGRAM

Catherine Main and Natalie Vesga

This presentation will outline the equity-driven features of the UIC Early Childhood Alternative Licensure Program (ALP). Key features discussed will include progressive admissions and articulation policies; robust, structured coaching cycles; content-focused residency experiences; and other key supports designed to remove barriers traditionally faced by the incumbent workforce. Program evaluation data collected over the past five years will be shared. This data includes program demographics, participant retention, completion and additional degree and credential attainment, and communities served. Additional emerging evidence from program research on compensation increases, coaching dosages, and instructional shifts in emotion-focused teaching and early math will also be presented and discussed. Presenters will share strategies to support students. There will also be opportunities to address scalability and sustainability of programs like the UIC ALP, including technical tips for design, need for continued advocacy, and recommendations for resources.

INNOVATIONS AND FRAMEWORKS IN CREDIT FOR PRIOR LEARNING FOR THE ECE WORKFORCE

Leslie Layman and Flor E. Carabez

This session will provide an overview of types of Credit for Prior Learning (CPL), their benefits, requirements for their implementation, and alignments of CPL to Early Childhood Education programs. The presenters will demonstrate examples of CPL that are active at National Louis University and provide rationale and process for how they were designed and how they are being used. There will be time for small group discussion, hands on opportunities to experiment with CPL models and how they may be applied at the participants own institution of higher education, and time for share out and question and answers.

CULTURALLY SUSTAINING PRACTICES & PATHWAYS

Inna Dolzhenko, Kimberly Garrett, and Mary Quest

Faculty panelists from the Early Childhood Education Program at Chicago State University will present program, course, and classroom practice examples that reflect efforts to embody culturally responsive and sustaining approaches to early childhood teacher preparation. Changes in pathways and curriculum were instigated by curriculum redesign initiatives at the university level. Faculty recognizes the specific assets and constraints of early childhood students enrolled in CSU's early childhood programs and at each level have considered innovative approaches to respond to our unique context.

Panelists will present three pathways and practices:

A promising pathway offered to CSU early childhood students is a credit for prior learning option in the Individualized Curriculum Program. Curriculum redesign initiatives included embedding a series of reflective practice seminars throughout the early childhood program. Specific strategies and practices used in coursework to support our students in making connections between course content and classroom practice.

FLEXIBLE STUDENT TEACHING OPTIONS: SUPPORTING AND ADVANCING THE EARLY CHILDHOOD WORKFORCE THROUGH AN ALTERNATIVE BACHELOR'S DEGREE COMPLETION PROGRAM

Linda Ruhe Marsh, Amanda Quesenberry, Elizabeth White and Nicole Offutt

This session will share information about flexible student teaching models to allow students to remain employed and still complete student teaching in a PreK and K-2 setting. Participants will also learn about the online teacher preparation program designed to support bachelor's degree completion and licensure among early childhood professionals in which this model is used.

PUTTING LOOSE PARTS TOGETHER COOPERATIVELY

Tanille Yow Ulm and Sarah Gowler

Have you ever wondered how to incorporate loose parts into early childhood learning experiences? Join this hands-on workshop to explore the power of loose parts and discover practical ways to integrate open-ended materials into your teaching. Bring your creativity and problem-solving skills as we explore, create, and engage with loose parts together. Participants will also have the opportunity to collaborate, share experiences, and gain fresh ideas for using loose parts.

ACTIVE PLAYFUL LEARNING

Debbie Leslie

Active Playful Learning (APL) is an ongoing national project, funded by the LEGO Foundation, that brings an evidence-based, whole-child teaching and learning approach to elementary classrooms and systematically studies the impacts on teachers and students. APL's goal is to help teachers, schools, and districts provide research-informed guided play experiences that prepare children for dynamic futures, and to change collective mindsets about and commitments to the value of active, meaningful, socially interactive, iterative, and joyful learning experiences for all students.

Through carefully-designed workshops and every-other-week classroom coaching, the APL coaching team works alongside Kindergarten through Grade 4 teachers to help them implement a guided play approach in the context of their existing curricula and in ways that are consistent with school and community culture – thus addressing relevant learning standards while infusing playful learning strategies into all aspects of instruction. Project researchers use a variety of data, including classroom observations and data from teachers and coaches, to describe, understand, and evaluate the successes and challenges of the APL approach.

WEAVING A TAPESTRY OF TALENT

Judson Curry, Susan Carrington, Kendra Nenia, and Samantha McDavid

In a post-ECACE world, how do we continue to grow and develop the ECEC workforce? How do we maintain momentum behind growing early childhood education and care as a profession? Early childhood stakeholders in the DeKalb County area have banded together to develop collaborative strategies to expand and support the ECEC workforce through shared recruiting events, professional development, and strategic planning. This session will offer a case study of this developing collaboration and opportunity to develop action plans for networking and collaboration among ECEC stakeholders.

Leaders from Birth to Five Illinois (Region 16), the DeKalb County ROE, 4-C (Community Coordinate Child Care), and Kishwaukee College will share their experiences and strategies for developing effective collaboration on behalf of the ECEC workforce. A unified inter-agency network can more effectively conduct joint recruitment efforts, expand professional development opportunities, develop clear career and credential pathways, and assess and address community needs. Join us to discuss how to strengthen each of our individual efforts by weaving them together into a strong and beautiful tapestry.

EXPLORING FACULTY PERSPECTIVES ON IMPLEMENTING ONLINE COMPETENCY-BASED MODULES FOR ECE PREPARATION

Melissa Clucas Walter and Florensia Surjadi

The session will explore faculty experiences piloting online competency-based education (CBE) modules in early childhood professional preparation programs. Drawing from semi-structured interviews with seven faculty and instructors, including two working with non-degree seeking students, this study used rigorous thematic analysis to identify key themes around faculty attitudes, implementation challenges, strategies and supports, and actionable recommendations. Attendees will learn how institutions can address barriers, foster effective support structures, and maximize the benefits of the CBE modules. These findings aim to advance innovative approaches in early childhood education and address workforce shortages through enhanced professional preparation.

APPRENTICESHIP PARTNERSHIP PERSPECTIVES FROM HIGHER EDUCATION

Karen Yarbrough, Marcy Mendenhall and Joanna Skourletos

Partnerships across Institutions of Higher Education and Early Childhood Programs can be challenging. Partners may have different priorities, experience different systemic pressures and issues, and often use different technical terminology. The Illinois Early Childhood Apprenticeship Pilot (IECAP) is a collaborative effort among state and federal agencies, two- and four-year institutions of higher education, and early childhood employers which serves to simultaneously support attainment of increased qualifications of early educators and increased compensation through implementation of a salary scale based on qualifications. Panel members will share their unique perspectives on participation and describe how they engage with partners to support the early childhood workforce in their career journeys. The session will describe the real world implementation of a multi-site collaborative federally Registered Apprenticeship Program in Illinois. Panel members will represent an institution of higher education, an early childhood program leader, and a federally registered apprenticeship sponsor.