



**Early Care and Education for a Mobile Society (ECEMS)  
Practicum Handbook for Cooperating Teachers  
8/8/23**

## Table of Contents

Welcome .....	2
History of Great Plains Interactive Distance Education Alliance .....	3
History of Early Care and Education for a Mobile Society Program .....	3
Terminology to Know from Great Plains IDEA Student Handbook .....	4
University Student Demographics.....	4
University Student Preparation.....	4
Requirements for All University Students in the ECEMS Program Prior to Practicum .....	4
Background Check.....	5
First Aid and CPR Training .....	5
OSHA Bloodborne Pathogen Training.....	5
Practicum Student Responsibilities.....	5
Working with Practicum University Students.....	5
Military Deployment, Military Reassignments that Move Family, and Other Military-Related Hardships.....	7
Practicum Assignments for University Students.....	7

## Welcome

Welcome to the Great Plains Interactive Distance Education Alliance (Great Plains IDEA) program for Early Care and Education for a Mobile Society (ECEMS). We thank you for your partnership with us in the development of exemplary early childhood professionals.

The mission of the ECEMS program is to prepare graduates to work with diverse groups of young children, families, and communities in a global society. Graduates are prepared to engage in sensitive interactions, implement inquiry-focused curriculum, and support development and learning.

This informational handbook answers general questions about the program. We would like you to read this manual and keep it as a reference for questions that arise during your work with university students as you accept them into your classroom. The handbook assists you in becoming familiar with program philosophy and objectives, expectations of practicum students, and course expectations.

Because of the intensity and primacy of the relationship between the practicum student and the Cooperating Teacher, both are urged to create and maintain channels of open and honest communication with each other and with the course instructor. Should you have any questions, please feel free to contact the [practicum instructor](#).

Sincerely,

The ECEMS Faculty

## **History of Great Plains Interactive Distance Education Alliance**

The Great Plains Interactive Distance Education Alliance (Great Plains IDEA) was founded in 1994 capitalizing on the institutional resources of major research universities to sponsor academic programs through distributed learning technologies. The Alliance offers fully online graduate and undergraduate program options in high-demand professional fields. Academic programs are the core of the Alliance. Each member institution awards academic credit and degrees for programs in which they participate. Curricula are developed by inter-institutional faculty teams. Every program meets the requirements of these accredited institutions of higher learning.

## **History of Early Care and Education for a Mobile Society Program**

The U.S. Departments of Agriculture and Defense requested that Great Plains IDEA develop a program in early childhood education to meet the educational needs of military service members and their spouses who want a career working with young children. Because the U.S. military offers excellent childcare services to their personnel and their families, the military has significant need within military installations for well-trained personnel to staff childcare programs. The ECEMS program was developed to address this need.

Representatives of Great Plains IDEA member universities with interest in early childhood education met September 2011 to build a program. The faculty planned an online bachelor's degree completion program. Courses were ready for the first students the fall semester of 2014.

The ECEMS program is the first bachelor's degree program offered by the Great Plains IDEA.

In the ECEMS program, participating institutions include:

- Iowa State University
- University of Missouri
- University of Nebraska—Lincoln
- Oklahoma State University
- South Dakota State University

Each institution has a history of success in online education.

## **Terminology to Know from Great Plains IDEA Student Handbook**

- **Practicum Student** — Students enrolled in the ECEMS program
- **Cooperating Teacher** — Person in charge of the early childhood program; the practicum student works directly with the Cooperating Teacher onsite during the practicum
- **University Instructor** — Individual teaching university Practicum course

## **University Student Demographics**

The majority of the students enrolled in this program fall under the following categories:

- Students completing an online degree through Great Plains IDEA who are already involved in Early Childhood Education in some capacity
- Head Start and Early Head Start educators
- Students who need to obtain credits necessary for graduation
- Military spouses
- Early childhood education providers on military installations

## **University Student Preparation**

### **Requirements for All University Students in the ECEMS Program Prior to Practicum**

1. Have completed at least 30 hours of general education (applicable to graduation requirements of home university) from an accredited institution of higher education.
2. Maintained at least a 2.5 GPA.
3. Were accepted by the Great Plains IDEA ECEMS program.
4. Have successfully completed the necessary prerequisites for the course.

## **Background Check**

Each student in the ECEMS program submits a criminal history record check based on the licensing rules and regulations for each state during the Introduction to ECEMS course. Should your early childhood program have additional requirements, the Practicum Student will adhere to those requirements as well.

## **First Aid and CPR Training**

The practicum student completes First Aid and cardiopulmonary resuscitation (CPR) training as part of the Introduction to ECEMS course. Please recall that practicum students should never be left alone or included in child: staff ratios.

## **OSHA Bloodborne Pathogen Training**

If your early childhood program requires Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) Bloodborne Pathogen training, please assist the practicum student in obtaining this training.

## **Practicum Student Responsibilities**

- Complete field experience hours with special attention to attendance, punctuality, and professionalism.
- Provide the Cooperating Teacher with course information, including the handbook, assignment overview, and important dates.
- Dress professionally for the setting.
- Be mindful and stay present when working with children and other colleagues. This includes avoiding cell phone use, engaging in social media, or utilizing other non-program related smart devices.
- Maintain confidentiality at all times.
- Become familiar with the program's emergency procedures.

## **Working with Practicum University Students**

As a cooperating teacher you are one of the most important participants in the Practicum experience. Thank you for guiding and giving direction to activities, methods, and techniques used by the Practicum student in their teaching process. Hopefully, the following tips help you feel at ease and understand your role as a cooperating teacher.

Take time to know the Practicum student as a person. Make the Practicum student feel part of the group by introducing them to the group as a Practicum student. Be honest and say that they will be learning how to become a teacher by watching, listening, and working with the children in the group. Have the Practicum student read a book to the children as an ice

breaker and provide suggestions of favorite authors or activities so that the student can start forming relationships with the children.

The role of the cooperating teacher is to serve as model, guide, and instructor for the Practicum student. While the primary responsibility is always to the children in the group, you want to be aware that the Practicum student is someone who is growing in competence and needing assistance while gradually assuming an increasing amount of responsibility. Though Practicum students will make mistakes and need the benefit of constructive criticism, the cooperating teacher will avoid making the criticism publicly in such a way that impairs the relationship between Practicum student and children in the group.

The cooperating teacher is to

1. Create a schedule that the student will work to complete the desired number of field experience hours.
2. Provide an open environment in which the practicum student is able to make mistakes without fear of judgment.
3. Steer the practicum student gently into more useful practices when mistakes are made.
4. Encourage with positive feedback.
5. Gradually increase the student's roles and responsibilities as the semester progresses.
6. Teach the Practicum student how to incorporate the early childhood standards used in your state.
7. Model for the Practicum student a system of guidance and classroom management.
8. Require the practicum student to try their own classroom and behavior management, as well.
9. Provide pointers for managing preparation work and Include information about organization, curriculum, assessment (progress monitoring and screening), and family involvement and communications.
10. Stress the importance of family involvement and community relations, including the importance of daily communications.
11. Meet regularly with the Practicum student to plan, review, reflect, and provide feedback.
12. Provide emotional support as well as an active mentoring role in the classroom.

The practicum experience is administered under the following conditions:

1. The practicum is supervised by a designated ECEMS University Instructor. The faculty member confers with the student and the Cooperating Teacher in regard to the student's goals and objectives for the practicum.
2. The Cooperating Teacher meets with the Practicum Student to determine appropriate goals and objectives for the practicum experience. The Cooperating Teacher may assign appropriate duties based upon the student's goals and objectives, observing the student on the job and completing a mid-term and final evaluation form. The final evaluation form provided by the ECEMS course

instructor is to be returned within one week following completion of the student's practicum experience.

3. The student meets periodically with the Cooperating Teacher to discuss progress in meeting the stated goals and objectives and the number of practicum hours completed.

## **Military Deployment, Military Reassignments that Move Family, and Other Military-Related Hardships**

Impetus for developing the ECEMS program was to be sensitive to the needs of the military community and their families. The following options are designed to help ease any transition that might occur during the academic semester:

- A student can receive the grade he or she has earned to date in the enrolled class provided that more than 75 percent of the work has been completed and both the faculty and student agree upon this option. The appropriate credits for the course and grade are assigned in the official grading period at the end of the semester.
- A student can ask for an Incomplete (I grade) at the end of the current semester if both the faculty and student agree upon this option. An incomplete grade is assigned at the prerogative of the teaching faculty member and follows the grading policy of the teaching institution. In addition to completing any forms needed at the teaching university regarding incomplete grades, the student works with the instructor to complete the Great Plains IDEA incomplete grade form. The instructor assigning the grade will stipulate conditions under which the grade may be updated. While time limits of the teaching institution for satisfactory completion of coursework will apply, the academic advisor must verify the proposed timeline also fits within the home university requirements. The incomplete grade form is signed by the student, academic advisor, and instructor prior to providing a copy of the agreement to both the teaching university campus coordinator and the home university campus coordinator.
- If the deployment or reassignment notification occurs within the home universities withdraw time frame, the student may withdraw from the course without penalty.
- If 75 percent of the course work has been completed, the student and instructor may agree upon a date on which all course work and final exam can be finished prior to deployment or reassignment and prior to normal end to the semester. The appropriate credits for the course and grade are assigned in the official grading period at the end of the semester.

## **Practicum Assignments for University Students**

The University instructor provides the course outline and the required assignments for the student prior to the start of the semester. As part of the orientation process, the student shall share the syllabus, due dates, and other relevant information with the Cooperating Teacher. There will also be the opportunity to ask questions of the University Instructor during two scheduled Zoom meetings.