

Department of Child, Youth and Family Studies



Procedural Guide for Master's Students

Child Development/Early Childhood Education Specialization

Fall 2025

Child Development/Early Childhood Education Master of Science (MS) Handbook/Procedures

The central focus of the child development master's program is promoting child development in various contexts including families, schools, childcare, and early intervention programs.

Students in this program will have opportunities to:

- Study child development in context
- Learn to implement, evaluate, and improve family-centered programs
- Gain experience in providing developmentally appropriate, inclusive experiences for young children
- Work with leading researchers in the field
- Learn about emergent curriculum, teacher observation/documentation, and environments that support young children as scientists, naturalists, and artists
- Take courses in applied fields of developmental psychology, special education, teacher education, and family sciences
- Develop professionally through conference presentations, networking, analyzing data, interning with agency and state policy makers, and publishing papers

Degree Requirements

Course Requirements

Prerequisite Course: Educational Psychology 859 or equivalent undergraduate or graduate statistics course is required. The student's advisor, in consultation with their master's committee, determines equivalency.

Required Courses:

- CYAF 865 Research Design & Methods¹
- Applied Experience in the Field (CYAF 897A, 897D, 898, 800A/801A)
- CYAF 972 Theories of Human Development and Family Relations
- EDPS 860 Applications of Selected Advanced Statistics or equivalent
- CYAF 899 Master's Thesis or CYAF 996 Scholarly Practice and Discovery

Content Area Courses: Students choose at least 12 credits from the following content courses. With the advisor's consent, additional courses from the Department or outside the Department may be added to the 3 elective credits. Students wishing to add a specialization to their master's degree could consider adding a minor.

- CYAF 831* ECFP: History, Development, and Equity in Shaping Early Childhood Policy
- CYAF 832* ECFP: Using a Policy Framework to Examine Early Childhood Services
- CYAF 874 Assessment in Early Childhood
- CYAF 876 Cognitive Processes in Children/EDPS 961 Cognitive Development
- CYAF 888 Child and Family Policy
- CYAF 890A Workshop Seminar: Early Childhood

¹ CYAF Research for Practitioners may also be an option determined in consultation with adviser and contingent upon Master's Option selection.

- CYAF 893 Special Topics in Contemporary Family Issues
- CYAF 906* ECFP: Policy Research in Early Childhood
- CYAF 907* ECFP: Policy Leadership and Advocacy in Early Childhood
- CYAF 961 Seminar in Parent/Child Relations
- CYAF 970 Advanced Early Childhood Education
- CYAF 973 Social Processes in Children
- CYAF 974 Seminar in Infant and Early Childhood Mental Health

Note: *Application to the Early Childhood and Family Policy graduate certificate program is required.

Completion Requirements

Students will complete one of the master's options in consultation with their adviser. Below is guidance for understanding the purpose of the options. See <https://catalog.unl.edu/graduate-professional/policies/academic-program-requirements/#masters> for more information.

Option A is intended for those who are preparing for careers in research and scholarly work or additional academic pursuits beyond the master's degree. Under Option A, a student must earn a minimum of 30 semesters of credit and present a master's thesis equivalent to 6 to 10 semester hours. At least 8 credit hours, in addition to the thesis, must be earned in courses open exclusively to graduate students (900 level or 800 level without 400 or lower counterparts). See guidance regarding master's thesis in the doctoral graduate student handbook.

Option B permits the substitution of more intensive work in advanced courses for the thesis or minor with the addition of a scholarly project. Under Option B, at least 18 credit hours must be earned in courses open exclusively to graduate students (900 level or 800 level without 400 or lower counterparts). Per the Office of Graduate Studies and CYAF department guidelines, the following parameters apply to Option B:

- The student must complete a Scholarly Practice and Discovery project: CYAF 996 Scholarly Practice and Discovery (minimum 3; maximum 6 hours).
- Guidance for completing a scholarly project:
 - The student selects a committee of three in consultation with their major advisor.
 - The student should work with their major advisor to develop a project topic and format. The major advisor, in consultation with the student and their committee, determines the appropriateness of the scholarly project.
 - The student proposes their project idea to the committee. The committee must approve the idea before the student moves forward with developing the project. The committee should provide guidance on the project's topic, format, and evaluation metrics.
 - The student's project must include a focused review of literature, incorporate a theoretical framework for the work encompassed in the project, and provide practical and research-based guidance or implications for the field of child development/early childhood education.
 - The student presents the project in writing and orally to the committee. The committee evaluates and approves the completed project, making recommendations for required revisions as appropriate.
- Example projects include:
 - Research-based online resources to support early childhood educators

- Research-based early childhood Extension curriculum
- Research-based guidebook to enhance early childhood educators' capacity to work with specific populations of children (e.g., children who have disabilities)
- Coaching portfolio
- **Appendix A** includes criteria and indicators that the committee uses to evaluate the final product of the scholarly project (CYAF 996 Scholarly Practice and Discovery).

Course Offering Timeline

Note that these are general patterns and subject to change. Students are encouraged to check with the corresponding department for courses outside of CYAF.

| Course | Typically offered |
|-------------------------|--|
| CYAF 831 | Every Fall (1 st 8 weeks) |
| CYAF 832 | Every Fall (2 nd 8 weeks) |
| CYAF 865 | Every Fall |
| CYAF 897A, 897D, 898 | Every semester |
| CYAF 874 | Fall/Spring |
| CYAF 888 | Fall/Spring |
| CYAF 893/895 | Varies |
| CYAF 899 | Every semester |
| CYAF 906 | Every Spring (1 st 8 weeks) |
| CYAF 907 | Every Spring (2 nd 8 weeks) |
| CYAF 901 | Fall/Spring |
| CYAF 920 | Odd Springs |
| CYAF 942 | Every Fall |
| CYAF 961 | Odd Falls |
| CYAF 970 | Odd Falls |
| CYAF 972 | Even Springs |
| CYAF 973 | Even Falls |
| CYAF 974 | Every Spring |
| CYAF 995 | Every semester |
| CYAF 996 | Every semester |
| <i>Non-CYAF Courses</i> | |
| EDPS 941 | Every Spring |
| EDPS 942 | Every Fall |
| EDPS 961 | Odd Falls |

Guidance for Graduate Practicum at Ruth Staples Child Development Laboratory

Graduate students may pursue a practicum experience at the CDL. This may include the applied experience required for degree completion. The course number used for this experience will vary based on the goals for the practicum.

- The CYAF 897A course number should only be used by graduate students interested in the early childhood curriculum or developing their teaching skills. CDL faculty and the student will co-develop the practicum goals and determine the appropriate number of credit hours to achieve them. CDL faculty will supervise the 897A practicum. Note: Students who have not taken any early childhood curriculum planning course before must

complete CYAF 374/L (as an independent study) or equivalent before enrolling in CYAF 897A.

- For students interested in learning more about early childhood research-related activities (e.g., assessment, observation in classrooms, etc.), these can be achieved through using the CYAF doctoral seminar (CYAF 995) or independent research experience (CYAF 898). Goals for the practicum would be co-developed with a faculty mentor (e.g., adviser, committee member), and the appropriate number of credit hours to achieve the goals will be determined. The faculty mentor will coordinate with the CDL faculty. The faculty mentor will supervise the practicum.

Additional Procedures

Memorandum of Courses

All master's students must complete a memorandum of courses (MOC) (<https://www.unl.edu/gradstudies/current/Masters-Memorandum.pdf>) to be approved by the main adviser, the student's master's committee, and the department graduate chair. If students are seeking a minor, the graduate chair from the minor department also needs to complete the form. Per the Office of Graduate Studies, this ***must be filed prior to completion of over one-half of the required coursework***. Please carefully review the Master's degree milestones set by the Office of Graduate Studies (<https://www.unl.edu/gradstudies/academics/degrees/masters>). Students should complete the MOC with their adviser and get it approved by their committee prior to submitting the form to the graduate chair.

Master's Committees

For both options, a committee of three faculty members (including the student's adviser) must be convened and give approval prior to the start of the thesis or project. Committees should be created in consultation with the adviser and include faculty with expertise relevant to the student's thesis or project.

Conducting Human Subjects Research for Master's Thesis or Project

IRB approval must be given for all research involving new data collection ***prior to participant recruitment and data collection***. Research activities involving human subjects or live vertebrate animals may not be conducted at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln (UNL) unless the research activities have been reviewed and approved by the appropriate board or committee. The Institutional Review Board (IRB) reviews projects involving human subject research, and the Institutional Animal Care and Use Committee (IACUC) reviews the use of animals in research. These reviews are in accordance with federal regulations and UNL assurance documents for the Office for Protection from Research Risks (OPRR). Note that the IRB and IACUC will not review projects already in progress; approval must be secured prior to the initiation of the research.

Appendix A: CYAF 996 Scholarly Practice and Discovery Evaluation Criteria

M.S. in Child, Youth and Family Studies

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Within the scholarly project, students will demonstrate their ability to (1) synthesize research literature, (2) articulate a theoretical framework, and (3) provide practical and research-based guidance or implications for the field of child development/early childhood education (CD/ECE).

The student's master's committee will use the following criteria and indicators to evaluate the final product of the scholarly project and provide qualitative feedback on each aspect. Feedback will be shared before or at the required oral presentation.

| Criteria | Indicators | Comments |
|--|--|----------|
| Significance of the project | The focus of the project is clearly presented. Key constructs are clearly defined. The focus of the project is aligned with a theoretical framework. Significance of the project is clearly identified. | |
| Synthesis of research literature | The selected research studies are well aligned with the focus of the project. Research findings are discussed in ways that thoughtfully address the focus of the project. Research findings are weaved together to create a narrative. | |
| Articulation of theoretical framework | The selected theoretical framework is aligned with the focus of the project. The theoretical framework is accurately described. The theoretical framework is applied in ways that thoughtfully address the focus of the project. | |
| Provision of practical and research-based guidance or implications for the field of CD/ECE | Practical guidance or implications provided are relevant to the focus of the project. Practical guidance or implications are supported by research evidence. A thoughtful discussion is provided of how the project relates to the present scholarship in the field of CD/ECE. | |