

Youth Development Graduate Program Student Handbook



The Great Plains IDEA youth development program has its roots in [Positive Youth Development](#). Rather than focusing solely on corrective measures, a Positive Youth Development approach equips young people in the second decade of life with the skills and opportunities necessary for successful transition into adulthood. This approach promotes positive outcomes for all youth by recognizing their strengths, fostering positive relationships, and providing youth with opportunities to learn, lead, connect and serve.

Participating Universities

There are seven Great Plains IDEA institutions participating in the Youth Development (YD) program. Degree titles vary by institution.

- Iowa State University – Master of Science in Family and Consumer Sciences
- Kansas State University* – Master of Science in Family Studies and Human Services
- Michigan State University – Master of Arts in Youth Development
- University of Missouri – Master of Arts in Human Development and Family Science
- North Dakota State University – Master of Science in Human Development and Family Science: Youth Development
- Texas Tech University – Master of Science in Human Development and Family Studies
- University of Nebraska, Lincoln – Master of Science **in Child, Youth and Family Studies**

Course descriptions, a course planner, and contacts for participating universities can be found on the Youth Development webpage: <https://www.gpidea.org/program/youth-development>

	Master’s Degree	YD Specialist Certificate	Youth Program Management & Evaluation Certificate
Iowa State University	X	X	X
Kansas State University*	X	X	
Michigan State University	X	X	X
University of Missouri	X	X	X
University of Nebraska-Lincoln	X	X	X
North Dakota State University	X	X	X
Texas Tech University	X	X	X

***Kansas State University is no longer accepting new students into their program.**

Program Requirements

The master’s degree in youth development requires a 36-credit hour post-baccalaureate program of study. Each graduate certificate (Youth Development Specialist and Youth Program Management & Evaluation) requires a 12-credit hour post-baccalaureate program of study.

To qualify for the master’s degree and certificate programs, students must:

1. Be admitted to the program at a participating university
2. Complete the necessary coursework
3. Meet the master’s degree requirements of their admitting/degree granting university



To be admitted to either the certificate or master's program students must submit an application to one of the participating universities. Each university follows its own admissions requirements, although most are very similar to each other.

In this program you will learn:

1. To interact effectively and positively with youth to promote supportive relationships, youth engagement, and youth leadership.
2. To navigate the multiple systems (e.g., family, school, community, policy) that influence youths' lives, to appreciate the diversity of these systems, and to engage with these systems to promote positive youth development.
3. To design, manage, implement and evaluate programs to enhance and support positive outcomes for youth.
4. To understand theory, research and policy about youth and youth programming and to use this research-based knowledge in a variety of ways (e.g., funding proposals, program design, policy/advocacy efforts, etc.).

Each course in the program is designed to help you learn to use more effective practices and feel more confident about your work, all of which will benefit youth. When youth professionals take part in higher education and ongoing learning, research shows that youth program quality improves.

Course Requirements for Master's Degree Program

The online master's degree program requires completion of 36-credit hours of coursework and successful completion of a culminating experience which varies by institution. All courses are designed to be asynchronous which means you can complete coursework when it's convenient for you. See when courses are offered using our interactive [Course Planner](#). Courses start and end based on the academic calendar of the university teaching the course.

To ensure that your learning encompasses the breadth of the field, the Youth Development faculty have organized the curriculum into four blocks of courses, an arrangement effective beginning with the fall 2021 semester. The Foundational Skills block consists of three courses (9 credits) that are all required and should be taken in the first one or two semesters. Each of the remaining blocks consists of two required courses plus a small number of electives. Thus, there are 9 total required courses (27 credits) across the four blocks, and students fill the remaining 9 credits with electives and a culminating (capstone) experience. The three other blocks are Relational Dynamics & PYD, Youth Practice & Policy, and Youth Agency Management and Administration. Generally, courses can be taken in any order with the exception of the Foundations of Youth Development course; otherwise, no course is a pre-requisite for any other course. Nevertheless, the faculty have developed a set of recommendations regarding the timing of certain courses:

- The Foundations of Youth Development course must be taken in a student's first semester.
- The other two courses in the Foundational Skills block (Youth Development and Consumers of Research) must be taken within a student's first or second semester.
- The Youth Policy course should be taken only after the student has earned at least 16 credits.
- Elective classes are not recommended until the student has completed at least 12 credits of core courses.

Master's degree culminating experiences vary by institution.

- Iowa State University – Creative project or internship, both with paper and oral defense
- Kansas State University – Report or project portfolio, both with oral defense
- North Dakota State University – Practicum with project, or master's paper or thesis with defense



- University of Nebraska, Lincoln – Thesis, project, internship, or written final exam
- Michigan State University – Literature review paper, story board, or written exam, all with oral exam
- University of Missouri – Internship or comprehensive exam, both with paper and oral defense
- Texas Tech University – Portfolio with practicum, thesis, or elective course

Course Requirements for Certificate Programs

The online certificate programs require completion of 12 credit hours of coursework. Each certificate requires two or three core courses plus one or two additional courses from the course blocks relevant to that certificate. All courses are taught asynchronously and course start and end dates are determined by the university teaching the course. See the list of courses for each certificate:

- Youth Development [Specialist Course Planner](#)
- Youth Program [Management & Evaluation Course Planner](#)

Succeeding in an Online Program

The Great Plains IDEA website has a “[Student Success Center](#)” with a wealth of resources to help you succeed in this program. One particular aspect of the program to be aware of is that you will encounter three different learning management systems, the online platforms we use to deliver your courses. The success center provides information on these three platforms as well as a handy log to keep track of your login, password, and access point for each system.

Who to Contact for Help

Academic Advisor

Your academic advisor is the faculty member who will help you as you make your academic decisions and as you progress through the program. When you receive notice from an institution that you have been admitted to the program, you will also be assigned to an academic advisor. You should consult your academic advisor for assistance with the following:

- Course planning and selection (including elective approval)
- Transfer credit questions
- Plan your culminating experience
- Help with research interests

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. Coordinators serve as a first point of reference for general questions and the following information:

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



A list of campus coordinators can be found on the [Youth Development webpage](#) in the right sidebar titled “University Contacts.”

