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### C&I 496.00: Independent Study / Early Childhood Learning Environments

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C&I 496 or 596 for GPP students  
Independent Study  
EARLY CHILDHOOD LEARNING ENVIRONMENTS  
FALL Semester 2007

## REQUIRED TEXTS:

Greenman, J. (2005). *Caring Spaces, Learning Places: Children's Environments that Work*. Redman, WA: Exchange Press **Please make sure that you order the 2005 edition**

Carter, M. & Curtis, D. (1996) *Reflecting Children 's Lives* . St. Paul, MN: Redleaf Press

Bloom, P.J. (1997) *A Great Place To Work: Improving Conditions for Staff in Young Children's Programs (Rev.ed.)*. Washington, DC: National Association for the Education of Young Children

NAEYC (2005) *Early Childhood Program Standards and Accreditation Criteria*. Washington, DC: National Association for the Education of Young Children

## ONGOING TEXTS: (The texts listed below are required texts for other GPP courses)

Bredekamp, S & Copple, C. (Eds) (1997) *Developmentally Appropriate Practice in Early Childhood Programs*. Washington, DC: National Association for the Education of Young Children

Harms, T., Clifford, R. & Cryer, D. (2005) *Early Childhood Environment Rating Scale, Revised*. New York: Teachers College Press

Montana Early Care and Education Knowledge Base booklet (2004)

[http://www.montana.edu/wwwecp/pdfs/Knowledge\\_Base\\_Dec\\_2004.pdf](http://www.montana.edu/wwwecp/pdfs/Knowledge_Base_Dec_2004.pdf)

## OTHER READINGS AS ASSIGNED

INSTRUCTOR: Susan Harper-Whalen  
212 B  
(406) 243-5581  
susan.harper-whalen@ruralinstitute.umt.edu

OFFICE HOURS: By appointment

## ACCOMMODATIONS:

Please contact the instructor by the second Friday of the semester to arrange the teaching/learning accommodations you require.

## ACADEMIC HONESTY

All students must practice academic honesty. Academic misconduct is subject to an academic penalty by the course instructor and/or a disciplinary sanction by the University. All students need to be familiar with the Student Conduct Code. The code is available for review online at <http://www.umt.edu/SA/VPSA/index.cfm/page/1321> .

## E-MAIL POLICY

The University of Montana has a new policy (effective July 1, 2007) regarding E-mail communication. It requires that "*instructors use ONLY UM assigned student email accounts for all email exchanges with students, since such communication typically involves private student information.*" Please only use your UM account to contact me as I am now required to reply only to a UM address. Also, routinely check your UM account during this session. If you want more information about using your UM account, you can access the Information Technology web page on the UM web site for instructions. <http://www.umt.edu/Resources/Technology>

## OVERVIEW:

### Course Description

This course guide outlines the Self-study Schedule for Early Childhood Learning Environments (C&I 495). This distance-based course has been specifically developed for students enrolled in the Department of Curriculum and Instruction's *Graduate Preparation Project: Supporting personnel preparation in early childhood special education* at The University of Montana. Course objectives and activities have been thoughtfully designed to support students in developing appropriate knowledge, resources, dispositions, and skills that will encourage lifelong learning—an essential practice for successful education professionals.

### Primary Learning Goal

Through the self-study model, application of practices in current early childhood settings, and participation in meetings with the sponsoring faculty member, students will explore the developmentally appropriate environment and its effects on children's development in all domains. Students will gain knowledge in and evaluate scheduling, transitions, environmental changes, lesson planning, promoting children's safety and health, and developing projects. In addition, students will investigate factors that determine a quality working environment for early childhood professionals. An important component of this course is the application of core principles and strategies to current teaching practices. Students will participate in weekly lab work in their early childhood program.

## COURSE FORMAT

### Assignments

Course assignments will include reviewing and responding to material in course texts and other readings as assigned, writing professional papers, conducting field work in their early childhood program, creating and critiquing peer teaching materials, and ongoing self-assessment and reflection. Weekly plans outlining course assignments will be e-mailed to students on Mondays for completion during the week.

-Independent Study Packets will have due dates for several week sof work. Students will e-mail completed assignments to the Instructor c/o [susan.harper-whalen@ruralinstitute.umt.edu](mailto:susan.harper-whalen@ruralinstitute.umt.edu).

-When assignments are completed using paper/pencil format, please mail to:

Susan Harper-Whalen  
Child Care plus+  
634 Eddy Avenue The University of Montana  
Missoula, MT 59812-6696

\*Attention: Environments Course Assignments

-When mailing a paper/pencil assignment, *make a copy of the completed assignment to keep as reference for ongoing assignments as well as to guard against loss due to postal error.*

**Lab Requirements**

An important component of this course is the application of core principles and strategies to the current teaching environment. Students enrolled in the GPP must currently be working 20 hours weekly in an early childhood program and are required participate in lab work as assigned. Through field-based experiences, students will:

- ✗ Critique the environment in their current lab setting to enhance learning centers that invite active exploration, interaction, direct experience, and child choice.
- ✗ Adapt existing learning centers to meet a specific child’s strengths, interests, and needs.
- ✗ Critique the program schedule and revise as needed to reflect best practice.

**Learner Responsibilities**

Students are expected to take responsibility for their individual learning through self-assessment, thoughtful completion of required readings and activities, active reflection on existing skills and beliefs, questioning, pursuit of additional knowledge to follow individual interests and needs, and a willingness to apply new knowledge, practices and beliefs in the early childhood setting. Student inquiries regarding recommended practice, rationale for assignments, or comments regarding course delivery and evaluation are welcome and essential to this teaching/learning journey. The content of the course may be revised by the instructor in response to student interests and needs.

Teaching does not make learning—  
learners make learning.  
-John Holt

**STUDENT LEARNING OUTCOMES, DOCUMENTATION, AND CRITERIA**

Student learning in each outcome area will be demonstrated and evaluated as follows.

<b>OUTCOME Through participation in this course, students will be able to:</b>	<b>DOCUMENTATION</b>	<b>CRITERIA</b>
Conduct self-evaluation of current knowledge and skills to develop goals and support ongoing learning.	Montana Early Care and Education Knowledge Base (Health, Safety, and Nutrition & Environmental Design)	Pre/post
		Goal Setting
	Two Conference calls with Instructor	Completion
Implement basic practices that promote physical, nutritional, dental, and mental health including activities that assist children in developing personal health and safety skills.	ECERS Personal Care Routines	Score of 5 or higher on each item
	Lab Activity- ECERS Change	Completion

<b>OUTCOME Through participation in this course, students will be able to:</b>	<b>DOCUMENTATION</b>	<b>CRITERIA</b>
Create and modify child-centered environments and experiences to meet the individual needs of all children including children with disabilities and/or developmental delays.	Weekly written assignments	100% Described Below
	Lab Activity - Characteristics & Dimensions Assessment and Action Plan	Completion
	Child Observation and Individualized Learning Center Plans	Described Below
Manage a learning environment that emphasizes direct experience, active manipulation of concrete materials, child choice and decision-making, exploration of the environment and interaction with others	Weekly written assignments	100% Described Below
	ECERS Evaluation: Activities Section and Furnishings (Items 7 and 8)	Completion
Demonstrate an understanding of the influence of the physical setting, schedule, routines and transitions on children and use these experiences to promote children's development and learning as well as positive behavior.	Weekly written assignments	100% Described Below
	Exemplary Environments research presentation	Completion as described below
	Environmental Arrangement Self-Assessment	Completion
Describe and apply dimensions of the early childhood program that support adult learning and career satisfaction—promoting collegiality, professional growth, and innovation	Organizational Climate	

**COURSE GUIDELINES**

**Competency-based Grading**

Criteria for grading in this class will be explained in each of the following core assignment descriptions. This information is provided to support student autonomy in completion of course requirements—diverse perspectives and response formats are encouraged within the framework of established criteria. Students are encouraged to ask for clarification of requirements as needed to take the lead in the learning process. Following review of core assignments (by peers, instructor, and/or self-evaluation), students are encouraged to rewrite and expand upon their written work and test responses to demonstrate ongoing learning and growth. Rewrites and corrections will be reviewed and points reassigned when indicated. Learning is not about perfection. Rather, it is about

developing the disposition to be a learner!

### Due Dates

Due to the sequential nature of course content, all written assignments are to be submitted in a timely manner. If a student is unable to meet a deadline, arrangements must be made with the instructor prior to the actual due date.

### Format for Written Work

Evaluation forms and other formatted responses can be hand-written or typed. All other written work must be typed, clearly and concisely written, and fully referenced. Person-first language should be used consistently (If you have questions or need to review the criteria for using respectful, person-first language, see Child Care plus+ *The Language of Inclusion* at <http://www.ccplus.org/BackIssues.html>).

## CORE ASSIGNMENTS AND GRADING CRITERIA

### Weekly Reading/Lab Assignments (65 points/5 points weekly x 13 weeks)

*Complete weekly reading assignments and related written and lab activities:* Completed reading and learning activities outlined on each of 13 weekly plans are worth 5 points/week. Activities (reflection pages, interviews, learning center adaptations, etc.) will be evaluated according to accurate reflection of the reading content and completion. All written work will be reviewed by the instructor and returned for rewrites if necessary. All assignments must be handed in to be awarded any points in this area. Incomplete learning packets will be returned to the student for completion - missing work will lower your final grade by a minimum of one full letter grade.

### ECERS Evaluations (40 points/10 per segment)

*Complete assigned ECERS evaluations in the early childhood program:* Across the semester, sections of the ECERS will be assigned for completion. Each completed segment of the evaluation will include the scoring sheet, a written summary, and an action plan to address areas of enhancement based on results. Sections to be completed include 1) Personal Care Routines (all), 2) Activities (all), 3) Space and Furnishings: Item 7 (Space for Gross Motor Play) and Item 8 (Gross Motor Equipment), and 4) Parents and Staff: Item 39 (Provisions for Personal Needs of Staff), Item 40 (Provisions for Professional Needs of Staff), and Item 41 (Staff Interactions and Cooperation).

### Transition Evaluation (10 points)

Critique current transitions and implement a variety of transition activities according to course content and developmentally appropriate standards. (Critique - 5 points, Implement 2 new Transition Strategies - 5 points each.)

### Child Observation and Individualized Learning Center Plans (50 points)

(Details to be provided)

### Participate in phone meetings with Instructor (15 points)

Students will participate in several scheduled phone meetings with the Instructor throughout the

semester. If the Instructor is concerned about student participation at any, the student will be advised accordingly.

#### Exemplary Environments Research Presentation (Power Point) (20 points)

*Develop a topical PowerPoint presentation:* Students will choose one topic and complete a thorough investigation of current recommended practice in the topic area which includes both theory/research and strategies for implementation in day-to-day practices. It is expected that students will blend information from assigned course readings with content from a minimum of four additional sources. Your presentation should include appropriate citations and references as well as an annotated resource list that includes 2-4 recommended readings for your colleagues.

The PowerPoint presentation will be developed as advanced professional development for experienced early childhood providers/teachers (child care, Head Start, preschool, primary grade teachers). Students will E-mail their Power Point presentation to peers in the course for review and evaluation. Peer and Instructor review will focus on:

- 1) accuracy and relevance of the information presented;
- 2) discussion of both theory and practice;
- 3) clarity and appropriateness of the content for the intended audience (information presents advanced concepts that enhance the knowledge and skills of experienced practitioners);
- 4) appropriate citations used and useful annotated resource list provided (2-4 resources); and
- 5) quality of the product (free from spelling/grammatical errors and professional style and formatting).

#### GRADING SCALE (200 total points)

The chart below summarizes activity point values and established the final grading criteria. Please note that while the grading scale is rigorous, all assignments will be reviewed by the Instructors and returned to the student for rewrites if indicated. All students desiring competency in course content are capable of earning an "A."

GRADING SCALE	
Range of Points	Letter Grade
190 - 200	A
180 - 189	B
170 - 179	C
160 - 169	D
150 or below	F

## COURSE CALENDAR

Each week, you will have assigned reading and related activities to complete and submit weekly. In addition, you will be working on one long term learning projects as described on pages 5-6. This calendar will help you anticipate topics and track your work. However, please carefully review the weekly assignments you receive by e-mail—these weekly plans include essential details about learning activities related to the readings and additional information about the long-term core assignments.

Week/ Dates	Topic(s)	Core Assignments Due
<b>1</b> <b>8/27</b>	Course Introduction	-Self Assessment
<b>2</b> <b>9/3</b>	Why focus on the learning environment?	-Reaction Paper -Learning/implementation Goals
<b>3</b> <b>9/10</b>	Health and Safety	-Resource Plan - <i>Testing Your Knowledge</i> -Regulation comparison -ECERS items 22-23 & area for improvement
<b>4</b> <b>9/17</b>	The Power of the Environment	-Is This a Good Place for Me? - <i>Chapter Review</i>
<b>5</b> <b>9/24</b>	The Landscape of Childhood	- <i>What's on the Walls?</i> -Carter/Curtis review questions -Implementing Change -Call your instructor
<b>6</b> <b>10/1</b>	Environments: Beyond the Basics	- <i>Characteristics &amp; Dimensions assessment and action plan</i> -Demonstration of reading/processing assigned chapters
<b>7</b> <b>10/8</b>	Environments: Infants and Toddlers	-Analysis and Recommendations Paper
<b>8</b> <b>10/15</b>	Classroom Design; Observation Child Centered Practice	-Changes reflection -Observation Exercise -Initiate Exemplary Environments project
<b>9</b> <b>10/22</b>	Classroom Design; Observation Child Centered Practice	-Demonstration of reading/processing assigned chapters -Complete observations and reflection



Week/ Dates	Topic(s)	Core Assignments Due
<b>10</b> <b>10/29</b>	<b>SPRING BREAK</b>	
<b>11</b> <b>11/5</b>	Transitions	-Transitions Checklist -Transitions Plan
<b>12</b> <b>11/12</b>	Indoor Environments	-Learning Center Plan -ECERS evaluation & summary -call your instructor
<b>13</b> <b>11/19</b>	Work Week	-Focus Week: Exemplary Environments Project
<b>14</b> <b>11/26</b>	Outdoor Environments Adult Environments	- <i>Outdoor Play Reflection</i> -Organizational Climate Assessment
<b>15</b> <b>12/3</b>	Adult Environments	TBA
<b>Finals</b> <b>12/10</b>	Finals Week	-Follow-up self assessment and performance review -Call your Instructor

Please note that this document serves as a guide for course content and student evaluation. Course Instructors welcome student input and reserve the right to be learners as well as facilitators. Thus, the content this guide may be revised as the session proceeds. Any changes will be written and forwarded to participating students in a timely manner.