Preparation and Retention of Early Intervention and Early Childhood Special Education Personnel: Preparing for Evidence-Based Practice in High Need Early Childhood Settings (Project Prepare): Revised Narrative for the University of Florida

A. Significance of the Project

The purpose of Project Prepare is to increase the number of highly qualified, licensed personnel available to work with infants and young children with disabilities and their families in high-need settings. Sixty scholars will successfully obtain their initial teaching license and endorsement in Early Childhood Special Education by the end of the project. With support to facilitate the transfer of learning from pre-service into practice, it is expected that scholars will be employed as ECSE teachers upon completion of the program and will remain in these teaching positions for three years or longer. The proposed project is designed to prepare teachers through the implementation of a systematic strategy for knowledge utilization that facilitates the transfer of knowledge and skills into practice. Coursework and field experiences are designed to produce teachers who engage in evidence-based practice defined as an active decision-making process combining the best available evidence, clinical expertise and family values. Students will gain skills through an interdisciplinary learning community during pre-service to facilitate the transfer of knowledge and skills into practice. The project will implement a knowledge-utilization approach applied to the newly completed Division for Early Childhood (DEC) Recommended Practices in Early Intervention/Early Childhood Special Education. In addition, the project will implement an evaluation process that will address both formative and summative evaluation of program processes and outcomes and will also evaluate the quality of services provided by program graduates during the year of induction as measured by child progress, family satisfaction and administrator satisfaction. Project objectives include:

- Embed information about the DEC Recommended Practices and their evidence-base into selected courses.
- Implement a knowledge utilization strategy, the 5 Step Learning Cycle (Buysee, Winton, Rous, Epstein and Lim, 2012) during the student teaching (Internship) experience to guide students in applying knowledge to practice.
- Facilitate the transfer of learning into practice during the year of induction through peer group support and mentoring.
• Establish a system of evaluation to address both formative and summative evaluation of program processes and outcomes and to evaluate the quality of services provided by program completers during their first year of teaching.

Addressing Teacher Shortages in ECSE (pp. 2-3)

The need for ECSE teachers is clearly demonstrated for the state of Florida:

• According to the Teacher Shortage Areas Nationwide Listing report from the U.S. Department of Education, Office of Postsecondary Education, March, 2014, (http://www2.ed.gov/about/offices/list/ope/pol/tsa.doc), the state of Florida had shortages in the area of “Pre-kindergarten Handicapped” for 2012-13, 2013-14, and projected shortages in all areas of Exceptional Student Education for 2014-15.

• The Florida State Board of Education identified all areas of special education as critical teacher shortage areas for 2013-14 http://www.fldoe.org/board/meetings/2013_02_18/critical.pdf

Magnitude of Results or Outcomes Expected from the Project (pp. 3-5)

The project at UF will address improving the quality of teacher preparation and increasing the number of teachers who are fully licensed to serve high-need infants, toddlers and preschoolers with disabilities. Project Prepare will support 60 scholars (12 each year) who will have acquired licensure in early childhood special education by the end of the project.

Competencies (pp. 7-8)

There are many similarities between the programs at UWM and UF. Both programs have identified competencies for students who are working toward licensure in early childhood special education. The program at UWM is based on competencies aligned with the Wisconsin Teacher Standards and the DEC professional standards. The program at UF is based on competencies aligned with the Florida state approved program and NCATE accreditation. Both programs focus on post-baccalaureate education and lead to teacher certification/endorsement in early childhood special education (ECSE). The targeted
program at UWM was the “fifth year” post-baccalaureate, teacher certification program. At UF, the proposal will be implemented in the final, post baccalaureate, year of a five year program. In addition:

• Both programs are closely connected to early childhood education (ECE) programs. The UWM program offers a fifth year program in special education that follows completion of an undergraduate program in ECE. The UF program is a blended five year program in ECE and ECSE.

• Both programs offer the option of also completing a Master’s degree.

• Both programs have at least two program options:

  At UWM, students with a prior license (typically ECE) work toward the ECSE license which usually requires 27 credits – 15 of these credits can count toward the completion of a Master’s degree;
  
  students without a prior license can work toward the ECSE license through a program that requires 48 credits - 15 of these credits can be applied toward a Master’s degree.

  At UF, students who have completed the blended undergraduate degree program with coursework in ECE and ECSE (the Unified Early Childhood Education program), then do a fifth year that leads to initial dual licensure and the Master’s Degree;
  
  students may choose the option of a non-degree fifth year instead that does not result in the Master’s degree but does lead to dual licensure.

• Both programs focus on the age range of birth through grade 3. The content of coursework in both programs is birth through grade three for typically developing children and children with disabilities (See Table 1).

• Licensure in the two states is not exactly the same. One license from the Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction covers the birth through grade 3 age range for teaching children with disabilities. Licensure for teaching preschool children with disabilities in Florida is through the Florida Department of Education and is separate from licensure for early intervention (0-3 years) which is issued through the Florida Department of Health. UF students receive the preschool special education endorsement as a result of completion of the fifth year of the program but need to do additional online modules through the Department of Health Early Steps Program to obtain the early intervention license.
A comparison of the coursework requirements for the UWM post-baccalaureate program for students without prior certification and the coursework required at UF is provided in Table 1. All of the content required in the UWM program is also required in the UF program.