



EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION PRACTICUM FAQS (FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS)

What is a practicum?

A practicum course is a student teaching experience. Students are placed in a licensed childcare center or school setting to learn under the guidance of a cooperating teacher. There are four practicums in the early childhood program. They must be taken in order, and they are scheduled during the daytime (preferably in the mornings). That is the best time to experience and take part in a broad range of activities within early childhood programs. Students must achieve a grade of “C” or higher in the practicum courses to continue in or graduate from this program.

Is there other course work besides spending time at the practicum site?

Yes. Each practicum includes textbook readings, and assignments, like other courses. Students will also prepare each week for their practicum placement by choosing age-appropriate children’s books, planning activities with materials, as well as, completing daily classroom tasks.

When do I take my practicum courses?

Try to follow the program order when you sign up for classes. Practicums are offered during the fall and spring semesters. In the practicum setting, you will be able to directly apply what you are learning in your early childhood courses.

Do I have to take the practicums even if I am already working in a childcare center?

Yes, it is important to learn from others, experience other settings and philosophies, and different age groups. This is how you learn to become the kind of teacher you wish to be.

If you have prior experience working in a licensed childcare center, you may be able to get “credit for prior learning” for Introductory Practicum. See the information below for this process.

What will I do in the practicum courses?

- **Introductory Practicum (3 Credits - 60 Hours of Placement)**
In this 3-credit practicum, you will learn about and apply the course competencies in an actual early childhood setting. You will explore the standards for quality early childhood education, demonstrate professional behaviors, and meet the requirements for training in the Wisconsin Model Early Learning Standards. The focus of this practicum is working with infants and toddlers in a state-licensed childcare center.
- **Intermediate Practicum (3 Credits - 90 Hours of Placement)**
In this 3-credit course you will be implementing regulations and standards for quality early childhood education, applying knowledge of child development and positive guidance, using observation and assessment techniques, and assessing developmentally appropriate environments for children, all with the focus of working with children with special needs.

- **Preschool Practicum (3 Credits - 90 Hours of Placement)**

This course will apply as 1.) the capstone course in The Registry Preschool Credential or 2.) the third practicum in the associate degree program. You will be placed or may be working in an early childhood setting with 3–5-year-old children and create a portfolio that prepares you for The-Registry commission. In this course you will be implementing regulations and standards for quality early childhood education, applying knowledge of child development and positive guidance, using observation and assessment techniques, and assessing developmentally appropriate environments for preschoolers.

- **Advanced Practicum (3 Credits - 90 Hours of Placement)**

In this final 3-credit practicum course you will demonstrate competence in supporting child development through observation, assessment, and implementation of teaching strategies as you work in and learn about and apply the course competencies in an early childhood setting. You will demonstrate a high-level of skill in fostering relationships with children, families, and early childhood professionals, and use skills learned in a lead teacher role to develop a career plan to transition from student to early childhood education professional.

Can I do my practicums in the center where I work?

You may do one of the practicums in your current workplace, if the center meets the requirements for a practicum placement site, and if there is a teacher who is qualified to act as the cooperating teacher (*be a good role model and mentor*) for you.

Can I do two practicums at the same center?

Our policy is to give each student a broad range of experience by placing you in different settings and types of programs in the four practicums. So, in most cases, we will try to place you in a different center or school for each practicum course. There may be some exceptions, check with your instructor.

Do I have to find my own practicum site?

No, the instructor handles placing you in a qualified site for each practicum. We will work with you to find a location that is within your geographic area, meets your preferences for type of setting, driving distance, etc. and that meets the needs of the practicum course. Instructors typically work this out with each student individually.

Does my center qualify as a practicum site?

Perhaps. We follow the NAEYC guidelines for “field experience placements,” to place students in “a variety of settings that provide high quality learning experiences” for our students. Practicum sites will have been in operation for more than 3 years, does not have a history of serious non-compliances, or orders, with licensing codes, have staff with 2- or 4-year degrees in early childhood education or a related field whenever possible (or at least striving to improve staff educational levels – above the minimum requirements for lead teachers). Ideally, students will be placed in YoungStar rated centers with a minimum of 3 stars, NAEYC accredited centers, Head Start, or early childhood programs within a school with highly qualified teachers that can mentor the student as well as offer excellent programs for children.

I work full time. How can I find time to do my practicum hours?

Education always requires some sacrifice or modifications in lifestyle; the reward is worth it. We realize that practicums require a big commitment of time and dedication, but this is vital preparation to becoming an early childhood educator. The “hands-on” experience you will gain during the practicum is an important learning experience. Each practicum is set for 8 weeks (about 2 months), making work modifications easier for those working full time. Many students need to cut down their hours of work during practicum.

Will I get paid for my practicum hours?

Some students may be allowed a practicum in their worksite. When this occurs, a student is also an employee and may be paid. In most cases, as a student in our early childhood program, you are acting as a student learner in the center or school during your practicum hours. This is not a paid internship or cooperative work experience. Most frequently, you are a practicum student, not an employee of the center.

What do I need before I begin my practicum?

The state of Wisconsin and NWTC (Northeast Wisconsin Technical College) policies require students placed in practicum settings to have the following:

- Be accepted into the Early Childhood Education Degree program
- Completed Health Safety Nutrition course (includes licensing and entry level certifications)
- Caregiver Background Check with Fingerprinting
- Health form
- A current CPR (Cardiopulmonary Resuscitation) card
- **Program Shirt** - Students must wear a program shirt to represent NWTC when working at your practicum center.

How can I get credit for prior work experience?

Visit <https://www.nwtc.edu/admissions/transfer-of-credit/credit-for-prior-learning/earn-credit-for-work-life-experience> for instructions on this process.