

Strategic Plan 2013 - 2016

EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION INSTITUTE

The University of Oklahoma-Tulsa



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INTRODUCTION

OU's partnership with Tulsa was founded in 1957 with a commitment to serve the needs



of Tulsa and the surrounding community through education, research and engagement. What sets OU-Tulsa apart is its vision to build a nationally-recognized

center of higher education that emphasizes strong campus-community partnerships. OU-Tulsa serves the surrounding community through the development of interdisciplinary education, research, and service initiatives aimed at improving education, social service, and health networks.

The Early Childhood Education Institute (ECEI) is a primary leader at OU-Tulsa in achieving this vision. The ECEI and OU-Tulsa are committed to helping maximize the potential of the early years, birth to age eight, by improving early childhood education for young children and their families, teachers and caregivers.

Oklahoma is a national leader in early childhood education. When it comes to developing potential in people, early childhood is prime time. Studies that examine children's development over time

show higher quality early care and education is a predictor of improved communication, cognitive and behavioral skills, a child's ability to understand spoken language, and attainment of higher math and language scores (U.S. General Accounting Office, 2002; Vandell, et al., 2010; Yazejian & Bryant, 2010). Despite the growing research base documenting the lasting impacts high quality early environments and programs have on later school and life success, little is known about the active ingredients that make the biggest differences for young children (Camilli, Vargas, Ryan, & Barnett, 2010).

The field of early childhood has recently and repeatedly recognized the absence of quality options in programming and research focused



on children under age four (Zaslow, Tout, Halle, Whitaker, & Lavelle, 2010). Little research-based knowledge informs the professional practice of early childhood teachers (Hyson, Horm, & Winton, 2012). A goal of the ECEI is to fill these gaps by conducting meaningful applied research in partnership with key collaborators.

Two key collaborators are Tulsa Educare, Inc. and Community Action Project of Tulsa County (CAPTC). Tulsa Educare is part of a national network implementing research-based programs for young children birth through age five whose families live in poverty. CAPTC offers Head Start and Early Head Start to over 1,200 young children and their families in Northeastern Oklahoma.

The primary aims of the ECEI are research, evaluation, and dissemination. Faculty, students, and staff conduct applied research that positively impacts outcomes, programs, and policies for young children birth through age eight and their families, caregivers, and teachers.

In the six years since its founding (2006-2012), notable achievements of the ECEI include:

- Developed robust community partnerships to strengthen early childhood education in Tulsa, Oklahoma, and the nation;
- Increased funding and number of community partners dedicated to improving services for young children and their families through meaningful applied research;
- Produced 22 research publications and presentations that have been disseminated nationally and internationally;

- Implemented the Early Childhood Leadership Institute, which each year brings together parents, practitioners and researchers to focus on critical issues in early childhood education through a two-day conference;
- Named as a University Strategic Organization, a prestigious designation by OU's Office of the Vice President for Research to institutes and centers that incubate creative, innovative, and strategic research and action.



ECEI has expertise to become an even more vital service and research center in the Tulsa area and across the nation. Its goals over the past six years focused on building a foundation of excellence in research, evaluation, and dissemination. Now, it embarks on a four-year plan to increase its capacity in order to meet the growing need for early childhood research and application of that research to strengthen services for young children and their families.

PURPOSE OF THE EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION INSTITUTE

Vision

*Advancing Quality in Early Childhood Through
Research, Evaluation, and Community Collaboration*

Mission: The Early Childhood Education Institute (ECEI) at OU-Tulsa strives to advance and support early childhood programming and policies by generating, disseminating, and applying meaningful research.

Core Values: The Early Childhood Education Institute has identified the following core values as the foundation for its work.

Integrity

We are committed to doing what is right. We are honest and sincere in our relationships in order to build trust and foster collaboration. We practice discipline, consistency, and persistence in our work to ensure the quality of our research and associated activities.

Responsibility

We are independent professionals who hold ourselves and each other accountable.

Excellence

We go beyond what is expected, as individuals and as an organization.

Respect

We treat others with fairness, dignity, and compassion. We value the diversity of our team and the strengths of each member. We base our research on respect for children, their families, and the early childhood profession. We approach each person and situation with positive intent.

Learning

We are advocates for the continuous pursuit of knowledge both as contributors to the scientific field and as lifelong learners.

Flexibility

We adapt to the needs of our growing organization, our partners, and our employees.

THE ECEI STRATEGIC GOALS

The Early Childhood Education Institute (ECEI) has articulated five strategic goals that will guide its decision-making and success over the next four years. The goals align with The University of Oklahoma’s mission statement and OU-Tulsa’s vision statement and core values.

ECEI’s five goals for 2013-2016 are to:

- **Increase Research Enterprise and Excellence**
- **Expand Collaborations**
- **Increase and Diversify Funding**
- **Advance and Promote the ECEI**
- **Provide a Supportive and Innovative Organizational Culture**

The rationale for each goal is outlined below.

I. **Goal: Increase Research Enterprise and Excellence**

The ECEI will increase the generation and dissemination of research related to its mission by expanding research expertise and skills, cultivating internal and external partnerships, and providing additional opportunities for research productivity.

Rationale

ECEI conducts research and evaluation focusing on young children birth through age eight. It specializes in studies related to the youngest children—birth through age five. It is one of few university-based organizations conducting research with this age across the country. However, this field is forecasted to expand quickly, which will provide enormous opportunity for ECEI.

For example, Oklahoma has been recognized as a national leader in early childhood education. This recognition was based in part on the early development and implementation of a rating system that provides consumer information on the quality of childcare provided by programs. Relative to direct services for children, Oklahoma was one of the first states in the nation to offer publically funded PreK to four year olds. Today, Oklahoma’s universal, voluntary PreK program for four year olds is recognized nationally as the largest—serving



74% of the four year olds in 98% of Oklahoma’s public school districts—and one of the best—demonstrating multiple indicators of high quality programming (Barnett, Carolan, Fitzgerald, & Squires, 2011). Oklahoma has also been recognized as one of the premier states in the nation for cutting-edge programs for children under four (Cohen, Gebhard, Kirwan, & Lawrence, 2009).

The ECEI’s goal is to partner with these and other programs to support and strengthen Oklahoma’s history of innovative early childhood programs and services. To effectively maintain our leadership role in early childhood research, ECEI will need to increase its capacity to produce and disseminate research. Capacity building will include expanding the research expertise of its staff, strengthening and expanding partnerships with researchers, and taking advantage of additional opportunities for research productivity.

II. Goal: Expand Collaborations

The ECEI will sustain and expand collaborations with local, state, and national partners by being good stewards of existing funding and partnerships and establishing connections with new partners.

Rationale

A hallmark of the ECEI is its community collaborative approach—in designing and conducting research and evaluation and in designing and delivering professional



development and outreach activities. This partnership approach drives ECEI’s focus on applied research, dedication to usable program evaluations, and commitment to policy-relevant topics.

The ECEI’s partnerships focus on two broad areas—applied research and outreach. The ECEI conducts applied research relevant to improving outcomes, programs, and policies for young children. The ECEI designs and conducts both process and implementation evaluations and outcome research for partners on a broad range of topics related to

young children. Research foci include assessing current programs in Tulsa, exploring program impacts on young children, and examining systems and policy initiatives related to young children and the people who care for them.

The ECEI is committed to preparing leaders who advance early childhood programming and policy initiatives at the classroom, program, and state and national levels. All of this work is done in partnerships with local and state agencies. Major activities include the dissemination of research-based practices to its partners, parents, practitioners, and policy-makers. In addition, the ECEI provides research-based professional development opportunities, including the annual Early Childhood Leadership Institute (ECLI) with multiple community-based collaborators.

Without community partners, the work of the ECEI would not be possible. Sustaining and expanding collaborations is essential to the existence of the Institute and to the advancement of the knowledge in the field.

III. **Goal: Increase and Diversify Funding**

The ECEI will maintain existing funding sources by continuing successful stewardship practices and diversifying its overall financial foundation by seeking additional sources of support, including federal grants, local/regional/state contracts, and university funding earmarked for research.

Rationale

In today's difficult economic times, higher education institutes rely more heavily than ever on national grants, contracts, and local philanthropy to fund programs. Higher Education has seen some of the worst state budget cuts due to the struggling economy and will likely receive more over the next few years (Gardner, 2012). The University of Oklahoma is no exception. Oklahoma ranked 12th in cuts to higher education funding last year, according a list assembled by the Associated Press (StateImpact.npr.org).



Building strong internal and external funding streams is critical to the overall success of the ECEI. The Institute has increased its funding from \$21,703 in 2006 to \$850,000 in 2010-2011.

This increase came largely from foundation and OU sources. To ensure the solvency of the Institute, it is important to diversify its funding streams. The potential for new partners and increased research opportunities rests on the ability of the Institute to grow its capacity.

IV. Goal: Advance and Promote the ECEI

The ECEI will establish itself as experts in early childhood research by increasing awareness of its mission and work among local, state, and national audiences.

Rationale

According to the Edelman Trust Barometer (2011), academic experts were ranked highest as credible information sources for the general public. ECEI must continue positioning itself as an expert in the field of early childhood education research. By closely working with OU-Tulsa Public Affairs, ECEI can develop a communication plan that targets specific opportunities for branding the Institute as an expert in the field. Consistent and successful brand management by ECEI will allow it to continue being seen as a leader in the field of early childhood education.

Increasing publications and presentations is imperative in furthering the growth of the ECEI's brand and successful track record. As one of the few research-based institutes focused on young children and residing in a state whose leadership in early childhood education is recognized, the ECEI has the opportunity to gain national attention. To take full advantage of this momentum, the ECEI can increase its exposure to both academic and public media outlets by developing a targeted plan highlights the most compelling components of the Institute to the appropriate audience.

V. Goal: Provide a Supportive and Innovative Organizational Culture

ECEI will support a diverse, inclusive, and innovative organizational culture by recruiting and retaining high caliber staff, providing professional development opportunities, and fostering strong leaders within the ECEI.

Rationale

ECEI works with a variety of educational partners who represent children and families from diverse social, economic, and cultural backgrounds. It is important that the Institute attract and retain professionals who enjoy their work and understand current practices, research methodologies, and changing demographics.

Research shows increased employee engagement in the workplace benefits both the organization and employee. As employees become more involved in the workplace, productivity rises. Engaged employees have higher retention rates and fewer absentee days as well as decreased psychological distress and health risks (Lockwood, 2007; Taylor, 2008).

A significant predictor of job satisfaction is the opportunity for meaningful training and development (Stiglbauer, Selenko, Batinic, & Jodlbauer, 2012; Leppel, Brucker, & Cochran, 2012; and Schmidt, 2007). Job training opportunities impact whether people “accept or decline jobs with certain employers and why employees leave one employer for another” (Schmidt, p. 482). Employees value organizations that provide training. Organizations that provide training opportunities have lower turnover rates and higher productivity and increased satisfaction rates across age groups and education levels (Leppel, et al., 2012)



A major challenge in meeting the vision of the ECEI throughout the next four years is maintaining a knowledgeable and satisfied team. Providing opportunities for all ECEI employees to become fully engaged will aid in attaining the Institute’s vision. To foster a supportive and innovative culture, ECEI is committed to providing the best possible working environment for its valuable team.

CONCLUSION

The ECEI's first five years have been characterized by rapid growth and success, but there is still much work to be done. The goals and initiatives outlined in this Strategic Plan will provide us with the means to build upon our successes and realize our vision and mission. Special thanks go to our community partners and sponsors. We look forward to sharing our growth over the next four years.



CONTRIBUTORS

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PURPOSE OF THE UNIVERSITY

Mission: The mission of The University of Oklahoma is to provide the best possible educational experience for our students through excellence in teaching, research and creative activity, and service to the state and society.

OU-Tulsa Vision: The OU-Tulsa vision is to build a nationally-recognized center of higher education excellence in select areas that emphasize strong campus-community partnerships and leverage the unique opportunities and needs in the Tulsa region.

Core Values: OU-Tulsa has identified the following seven core values as the foundation for the development of its strategic goals.

Excellence

OU-Tulsa is committed to excellence in academics, research, and service.

Interdisciplinary Discovery

With all diverse academic programs centralized on the campus, OU-Tulsa is well-suited to foster scholarly discovery through collaboration across disciplines and campuses.

Human Capital

OU-Tulsa's most important resource is its people. Our success depends on their growth, satisfaction, and professional development.

Student Success

OU-Tulsa is committed to providing the richest possible learning environment for students.

Innovation and Intellectual Freedom

OU-Tulsa is a platform for pioneering technologies, pursuing innovative research, and delivering education and community service. Above all, we value and will sustain an intellectually vigorous community that encourages creativity, curiosity, critical thinking, and open debate.

Culture of Diversity and Mutual Respect

We value and will sustain an ethical, caring, and diverse community that is characterized by honesty, integrity, equal opportunity, respect, trust, and civility.

Service to Society

OU-Tulsa is intertwined with the larger Tulsa community, a relationship that shapes the programs and growth of the institution. We are committed to serving the community, especially underserved populations. All academic programs at OU-Tulsa make service an integral part of their mission.

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