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New Bachelor of Early Childhood Curriculum Studies introduced

Edmonton – MacEwan University's Faculty of Health and Community Studies is launching a new Bachelor of Early Childhood Curriculum Studies (BECCS) program.

Early childhood educators foster our youngest citizens' growing sense of identity and well-being through play-based learning. Students in the BECCS program will learn about the unique curriculum needs of early childhood learning as they develop a deep understanding of *Flight: Alberta's Early Learning and Care Framework*, which guides the work of educators of young children (from birth to age six).

"This degree's focus on curriculum and pedagogy is what makes it unique," says Tricia Lirette, chair of the Department of Human Services and Early Learning. "The university's involvement in researching and building *Flight* has created momentum in the field, and we are seeing new kinds of positions for people who have a firm grounding in the framework and who can support educators who work directly with children."

Students in the new degree program will experience curriculum in action while learning with and from children and educators at the university's on-site early learning and child care centre, and through field placements and a fourth-year internship in the community. Throughout the program, students will also focus on issues of equity and social justice, preparing them to advocate for children and their families.

"Research over the past 40 years tells us that there is a direct connection between well-prepared early childhood educators and the quality of programs that children and their families receive," says Lirette. "If we want higher quality early learning programs, the lever we can most easily move is in preparing educators in ways that allow them to deliver programs that set children up to be successful."

Graduates will fill a range of existing and emerging professional roles in the field of early learning, including positions as curriculum facilitators and leaders in child care centres, preschools, school-age care programs, family support programs and early intervention, pre-kindergarten and kindergarten programs.

"This new degree is crucial," says Nicki Dublenko, vice-chair of the Association of Early Childhood Educators of Alberta. "It not only builds capacity for educators in our province, it will also set the bar for the foundational knowledge we expect early childhood educators in Alberta to have."

Applications for the four-year degree are now open and the first intake of students will be in September 2020. Prospective students are invited to attend the university's Open House on November 2. Details at MacEwan.ca/BECCS.

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For more information, please contact:

David Beharry, Media Relations Advisor

780-497-5586 Cell: 780- 231-5954 Email: beharryd@macewan.ca

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Background

Will there still be the option to complete a diploma rather than a degree?

After the first two years of course work in the Bachelor of Early Childhood Curriculum Studies (BECCS), students meet the requirements for Child Development Supervisor (Level 3) Certification through Alberta Children's Services and have the option to exit the program with a diploma.

What about graduates who already hold an ELCC diploma and are interested in the degree?

MacEwan has offered an Early Learning and Child Care (ELCC) diploma since the institution was founded in 1971. ELCC diploma grads from all post-secondary institutions are eligible to apply to the degree program based on their previous post-secondary grades. Diploma graduates would typically enter the third year of the BECCS program upon completion of a bridging course.

What is the difference between a degree in early childhood curriculum and elementary education?

Early childhood educators work with children from birth to 12 years of age in a variety of settings and organizations. The field of early childhood is a distinct and separate field of academic study.

Why now?

Mounting evidence of the significance of children's early experience has led to profound and ongoing policy changes in the provision of early learning and child care at federal, provincial, and municipal level. There is increasing recognition of the need for degree-prepared professionals who have expertise specific to the pedagogy of early learning. "We've seen increased interest in early learning policy from all levels of government," says Lirette. "The value of increased investment in the early years is clear – providing high-quality, rich and stimulating early learning environments sets children on a positive trajectory."

What is the connection to *Flight: Alberta's Early Learning and Care Framework*?

The framework for early learning and care in the province is based on research conducted by faculty members in MacEwan University's Department of Human Services and Early Learning. The made-in-Alberta framework focuses on four broad, holistic goals for early learning and child care: wellbeing, play and playfulness, communication and literacies, and diversity and social responsibility. Because learners are very young, the curriculum is based on the important role of play. The BECCS program is infused with the principles and pedagogy from *Flight*. "The framework is embedded in the belief that children are really important, unique and full of potential – that they are mighty learners and contributing citizens," says Lirette.

What comes after the degree?

The new degree opens up the possibility for further learning. Until now, a diploma has been the terminal credential in early learning curriculum studies, making it challenging for graduates to pursue advanced education in the field. Introducing a bachelor's degree opens up opportunities for further learning at the graduate level, and creates the potential for early learning experts to contribute to policy discussions and decision making.