



In an effort to better understand the NC ECE higher education landscape during the pandemic and learn more about the NC ECE programs in higher ed. and the faculty that teach within these programs, the NC Institute for Child Development Professionals partnered with the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) to conduct a survey of early childhood education faculty in higher ed. institutions in NC between Apr. 9 and May 3, 2021. In all, 43 faculty members responded from associate degree, bachelor, and master's degree programs in NC.

Early childhood higher education programs are the primary pipeline in preparing an effective ECE workforce, but challenges exist for the programs when preparing graduates for a low-wage, high-skill profession. Programs are also vulnerable because of the effects of the pandemic on the field. Programs reported struggles of not having access to field sites for their students, students having to leave their college courses due to illness, and experiencing pandemic-fueled employment, housing, food, and financial insecurities. As a result of these and other challenges, low enrollment in many colleges' higher education programs has been exacerbated and highly stressful environments were reported from many faculty.

Overview of Respondent Characteristics

At the time of the survey, approximately 32 of the 43 faculty respondents reported being from associate degree institutions, 8 faculty from bachelor's degree programs and 3 from master's degree ECE programs. The majority of faculty reported they were full time (19), while an additional 20 more were program chairs and 4 faculty members reported being part time.

Among those answering the survey, the majority reported working in public institutions (28) and that they were in an urban/suburban location (13). Six (6) faculty indicated they were from a rural institution, 3 faculty reported being from a Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCU), and 12 faculty came from multi-campus institutions.

Effects of the COVID-19 Pandemic on Budget, Staffing, Enrollment and Graduation

In the semester prior to the pandemic (Fall 2019), 60% of respondents indicated their ECE program's delivery modality was a mixture of in-person and online course offerings (with the majority being in-person), while 10% had mostly in-person course offerings with some online; the remaining 30% of respondents offered a mixture of in-person and online with the majority being online. For the Spring 2021 semester, 50% of responding institutions provided a mixture of in-person and online courses; 50% solely online; 50% of the responding organizations had planned to resume to normal operations during Fall 2021. Anecdotally, we are aware though that many institutions were not able to return to normal operations as anticipated for Fall 2021.

Enrollment Changes

- 70% of responding institutions have experienced a decline in enrollment in one or more of their ECE degree programs
- 10% experienced an increase in enrollment
- 20% indicated that enrollment was close to the same as prior to the pandemic

Budget Changes

- 15% of responding institutions indicated a decrease in budget. Of those programs experiencing budget reductions:
 - 5% indicated an increase
 - 55% indicated no impact on the budget
 - 25% of respondents were unsure of the budgetary impact

Staffing Changes

- 15% of responding institutions have had to eliminate one or more positions
- 85% indicate there has been no impact on staffing

Graduation

- 50% of responding institutions indicated the number of students graduating decreased
- 5% reported an increase in graduation
- 30% indicated no significant change
- 15% of respondents were unsure

Uncertainty of Future of Program

- 95% of respondents were not concerned that the ECE program may be in danger of closing
- 5% were unsure

Estimate the total number of students currently enrolled in your ECE program(s).	N	%
Between 11-25	2	10
Between 26-50	4	20
Between 51-100	5	25
Between 101-200	4	20
Between 201-400	4	20
More than 400	1	5
TOTAL	20	100
How has the pandemic impacted enrollment in your ECE program(s)	N	%
Overall, enrollment is close to the same as it was prior to the pandemic (March 2020)	4	20
Overall, enrollment has decreased since Fall 2019	14	70
Overall, enrollment has increased since Fall 2019	2	10
TOTAL	20	100

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	N	%
How has the pandemic impacted enrollment in your ECE program(s)		
Enrollment has declined between 26-50%	3	19
Enrollment has declined by 25% or less	11	69
Enrollment has stayed the same or increased	1	6
Unsure	1	6
TOTAL	16	100

Effects of the COVID-19 Pandemic on Teaching and Faculty Well-Being in NC ECE Higher Education

While teaching during the pandemic has been challenging for NC higher education ECE faculty, they also reported feeling supported during this time. When asked about the level of clarity and communication from their higher education institutions related to teaching expectations during the pandemic, 100% of NC ECE faculty respondents indicated that they felt either extremely supported (53%), or moderately supported (47%). Similarly 91% of faculty reported also feeling at least moderately (40%) or extremely (51%) supported by their institutions with online resources. Additionally, 44% of faculty stated that their institutions already had technology and infrastructure in place to accommodate online learning for both faculty and students; whereas 12% responded that their institutions had to make significant modifications to technology or infrastructure to accommodate faculty and student online learning. Before the start of the COVID-19 pandemic, nearly 91% of NC ECE faculty respondents had taught at least one online class. Additionally, survey respondents indicated they agreed or strongly agreed to:

- having access to the hardware and software they need to teach classes online= 95%
- having reliable access to the internet=95%
- having easy access to campus technology support to help with technological challenges associated with online teaching= nearly 86% (14% disagreed, strongly disagreed or were uncertain)

That said, nearly 51% of respondents indicated that they had to make significant modifications in course content for previously offered face-to-face courses to move them to online learning. Faculty reported that lab courses, practicum experiences, courses with observations, service learning and other hands-on types of experiences were the most challenging experiences to provide in an online environment.

In addition to asking about the ease of transitioning courses to an online format, the survey also asked respondents how difficult certain aspects of working as higher education faculty in the ECE field have become since the COVID-19 pandemic began, both for them personally and in supporting their ECE students. The most difficult aspects indicated were the following:

- maintaining their own emotional and mental health (49% indicated this was difficult or very difficult)
- managing their own home/family responsibilities while fulfilling work obligations (47% responded this was difficult or very difficult)
- supporting their student's emotional and mental health (46% responded this was difficult or very difficult)

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- teaching traditionally face-to-face course content online (40% responded this was difficult or very difficult)

These challenging aspects of teaching, particularly during the pandemic, may result in faculty attrition. 31% of NC ECE higher education faculty indicated plans for either retiring or leaving the field altogether for a new career within the next three years.

From the perspective of faculty, the shift to solely or primarily online learning has been challenging for many ECE students. The biggest indicated concern appeared to be reliable internet access. Approximately 40% of faculty respondents disagreed or strongly disagreed that their students had reliable access to the internet and another 19% were uncertain of their students' internet reliability. On the plus side, most faculty did indicate that their ECE students did seem to have the hardware, software and access to campus supports for online learning.

As briefly mentioned above, COVID-19 has severely impacted on-site field experiences which are considered an integral aspect of ECE higher education programs. With many NC child care facilities and schools closed or operating with restrictions in place, NC ECE faculty have had to strive to create alternative ways to ensure that students have opportunities to observe and interact with young children (fieldwork experiences). Only 6 faculty members that responded indicated that most or all of their students were able to participate in on-site field experiences, and only 9 more reported the same for virtual field experiences; however, 78% did indicate that at least some of their students were able to participate in on-site field experiences and only 8 faculty members responded that none of their students were able to participate in either on-site or virtual field experiences. Faculty completed the survey in spring 2021 and thus at that time, only 40% of faculty anticipated a significant increase in access to on-site field experience sites in Fall 2021, and 58% were unsure of the availability of onsite field experiences in fall 2021, despite widespread access to COVID-19 immunizations for adults.

In Their Own Words: Challenges:

There was a wide variety of challenges for faculty trying to teach and maintain their program integrity during the pandemic. Managing the required program courses and topics was not an easy task for most. The most challenging courses were reported to be the ones that had lab components, clinical experiences, methods and service-learning courses, field experiences, and capstone classes. Several identified courses singled out as particularly challenging included the following (Note: These appear to be community college courses that would have counterparts in the college/university ECE programs of study as well):

- **EDU 144: Child Development I** (because of big project assignments);
- **EDU 151/151A:** Creative Activities and the accompanying lab;
- **EDU 251/251A:** Exploration Activities and the accompanying lab;
- **EDU 216: Foundations of Education** (required classroom observations when few to no classrooms were available for observations);
- **EDU 250:** Teacher Licensure Preparation; and,
- **EDU 284:** Capstone Practicum (similar to student teaching/fieldwork experiences)

Many faculty were dissatisfied with the available virtual options for student observations. Others missed the face-to-face student interactions and were disappointed in virtual options

there, too. One school reported the challenge of a cyber-attack. Alternate assignments, virtual tutoring, and working with students one-on-one were employed to support or strengthen learning experiences. When ZOOM observations were an option, they provided a limited view of the classroom. Adapting courses and online office hours required extra working time for instructors and they reported fatigue and burnout.

Faculty comments focused on the following specifics:

- Limited quantity of quality video observations. The typical 2–3-minute length of the videos was problematic. Even great videos were viewed as unequal to the authentic experience of being in a classroom with children. Because of this, or other issues, some schools lowered the number of required observation hours for students.
- Students weren't willing/able to make teaching materials (file folder games, puppets), did not have access to books or funds to purchase materials, and sometimes struggled with poor Internet availability/connections. These types of resources are often available to students for free through college campus supports and other community resources (i.e. college program resource rooms/classrooms, college libraries, Smart Start Partnerships, etc.

Additional challenges for instructors included dealing with student internet connections (not able to help students with this), their personal jobs, health and/or mental health issues, and their own family responsibilities.

In Their Own Words: Maintaining Quality

Although resources, supports and opportunities varied from school to school, in their effort to maintain program quality during the pandemic, faculty reported the following efforts:

- Additional trainings;
- Incorporating additional resources;
- Increased team collaborations;
- Increased team contacts as well as with other schools (ACCESS was mentioned);
- Virtual learning opportunities;
- NAEYC Self-Study;
- Professional development;
- Increased contact with students;
- Increased flexibility;
- New technology purchases and resources;
- Financial support for faculty to create online courses;
- ZOOM classes;
- Virtual placements;
- Alternative assignments;
- FT faculty took lead for a course development and shared;
- Helping and supporting each other; and,
- Individual work with students.

Challenges were common from school to school but, depending on location and resources, efforts to meet those challenges varied from school to school (i.e., geographic location and college resources pre-pandemic significantly influenced the reliable technology resources and access available for virtual teaching and was problematic for some schools and students). Schools with a variety of pre-pandemic online courses and widespread campus support/resources fared much better with several of the issues.

Conclusions

On-site field placements, hands-on learning experiences, quality virtual learning resource options (i.e., videos for observations), and stable, reliable access to student internet services were common struggles for faculty across the 43 respondents. When the pandemic hit, the immediate switch from face-to-face learning to virtual learning requires more skill, more time, and more flexibility from faculty. Additionally, faculty and students struggled with meeting/balancing family obligations, employment issues, and health issues for themselves and their families.

Only 40% of faculty respondents were anticipating increased access to on-site field experiences in the Fall semester, 2021, indicating a continuation of the identified problems/issues at the time of the April 2021 Pandemic survey.

Additional Points and Questions of Interest from the 2021 NC Early Childhood Education Higher Ed. Faculty Survey

1. On-Campus Child Care Facilities/Lab Schools (27 respondents)

Question: Does your ECE program have an on-campus child care facility or lab school that is utilized by your ECE students?

Yes= 8

Our campus did have an on-campus child care facility in the past, but the facility has now closed.
=8

Our campus is currently planning/building an on-campus child care facility that our students will utilize. = 0

No, we have never had an on-campus child care facility. =11

2. Service on ECE Advisory Boards (27 respondents)

Question: Currently, do members of other institutions of higher education serve on your ECE program's advisory/community stakeholder committees (ex. four-year university faculty serve on the community college advisory committee. Or community college faculty serve on university ECE advisory boards)?

Yes=18; No=9

3. Curriculum and Continuing Education Offerings in ECE at Higher Ed. Institutions (27 respondents)

Question: Which statement best describes your ECE program in relation to curriculum and continuing education courses (curriculum=degree granting credit; continuing education=CEU non-degree granting credit)?

Our program does not offer continuing education courses related to Early Childhood Education, only curriculum credit courses. =20

The majority of ECE program faculty only teach curriculum courses. A few faculty may also teach an occasional ECE related continuing education course. =7

Most of our ECE program faculty teach both ECE curriculum and continuing education classes regularly. =0

4. Ensuring Diverse Higher Education Faculty that Mirrors the ECE Workforce (27 respondents)

Question: Does your ECE program have a written plan for recruitment of faculty who are culturally, linguistically and ability diverse?

Yes= 7; No= 20

5. ECE Higher Ed. Programs being Offered in Languages other than English (26 respondents)

Question: Does your program offer courses in any language other than English?

Yes=6 ; No=20

6. NAEYC Higher Education Accreditation/Renewal in NC Higher Ed. ECE Programs

A. Question: Please indicate the NAEYC Accreditation Status of your ECE degree program. (28 respondents)

Our program is NAEYC accredited. =12

Our program is in self-study. =1

We do not have a NAEYC accredited ECE program but are considering accreditation. =2

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We do not have a NAEYC accredited ECE program nor are pursuing accreditation. =12

Our ECE program is accredited, but we are considering not seeking renewal accreditation. =1

B. Question: What are the challenges or barriers your program faces in pursuing accreditation?

Top 3 Challenges/Barriers responses were as follows:

- Accreditation/benefits value not worth cost (9)
- Lack of time to complete self-study (8)
- Accreditation process is too cumbersome/rigorous (5)

C. Question: Rate the supports that you need to pursue accreditation or renewal.

Top Rated Responses (i.e., rated helpful, somewhat helpful, or most helpful) were as follows:

- Time to work on Self-Study with team (17)
- Training/Professional Development related to developing rubrics, key assessments, and data collection (13)
- Funding for accreditation costs/fees (12)
- Training/Professional Development on accreditation process, standards, etc. (11)
- Mentor/Support from another accredited program (11)
- Support from college administration (10)

D. Additional comments related to NAEYC accreditation/renewal from faculty:

- College workload inhibits faculty from taking on additional workload.
- Administration wants the award but doesn't value ECE
- Early Childhood Education program enrollment is very low at this time.
- Our ECE program is within a School of Education accredited by NCATE/CAEP
- Our program was previously accredited. The ROI was simply not there for us.
- The ambiguity of feedback to our self-study/accreditation/re-accreditation was not acceptable to our administration who works with many other accrediting bodies that give very specific and helpful feedback.
 - The time, stress, and money are not worth the outcome. ECE teachers are still underpaid and there is no value added to the community. Accreditation is not viewed as important in the ECE field.
 - My college was accredited but we decided not to renew two years ago. Best decision ever.
 - My program now has time to move forward in new innovative initiatives instead of focusing on key assessments.
 - We still embed Standards in our courses but are not burdened by the cost or stress of self-study.

7. NC ECE Higher Education Embedded Content in Coursework/Programs (43 Respondents)

Question: How would you rate the following as being embedded in your ECE program(s) curricula?

	Fully/Deeply Embedded	Somewhat Embedded	Not At All Embedded or Unsure
NCFELD/NC Foundations for Early Learning and Development	33	10	-
NAEYC Professional Standards & Competencies	27	16	-
Trauma Informed Practices	4	33	5 (+1=N/A)
Social/Emotional Development-Pyramid Model Practices	24	19	-
DAP (developmentally appropriate practice)	39	4	-
ECE Advocacy	12	28	1
Quality Outdoor Learning Environments	15	24	4
Professionalism and NAEYC Ethical Code of Conduct	30	13	-
Cultural Competence/Equity	16	26	1
NC Child Care Laws, Rules & Regulations	23	19	-
Environment Rating Scales	14	24	5
CLASS- Classroom Assessment Scoring System	0	18	22 (+2=N/A)
Serving Children and Families that are culturally, linguistically and ability diverse	23	20	-
ECE Career Planning	17	23	3

8. NC ECE Higher Education Faculty Future Professional Development Interests/Ideas

- Managing online teaching and advising in effective ways. I believe the pandemic driven move to online has lasted so long that our institutions will ask us to keep more online so any opportunities for EC Educators to learn how to create highly interactive and effective online instruction would continue to add value. (x3)
 - CLASS training (x4)
 - Developing course content to support all the above needs like inclusion, equity, ethics, and DAP.
 - Actual course content to share that we could use in our classes that have been designed with all the above.
 - Great ready-made resources and activities that could be utilized and embedded into courses.
 - Free apps to use with students online and in the classroom.
 - More information about how to align our course with the CDA.
 - Easy to use/embed tech tricks for student engagement and check in on learning.
 - New and innovative ideas for reaching the student. Ways to make courses more user friendly and enriched. (x3)
- New professional standards and competencies
- Increasing Interest and Excitement in ECE Programs
- Maintaining/Supporting a Diverse Staff
- Lesson Plans- Writing measurable learning objectives.
- Mental health
- Promoting high quality outdoor learning experiences for young children.
- Always more on new research that marries theory and practice. I have really appreciated recent focus on trauma informed teaching.
- SCRIPT-NC and anything Camille Catlett touches has been amazing to use with my students.
- ACCESS has also been engaging us with tech tool sessions. So, appreciated.
- Reinforcing the basics in EDU 119
- Rules and Regulations for NC
- SCRIPT NC
- Teacher formation
- Disconnect between industry standards expectations and professional standards
- Career ladder is desperately needed to demonstrate importance of education
- Finding research to add to and enhance college courses.

NC ECE Higher Education Faculty Survey Survey Respondent Demographics (Total Respondents=43)

Which of these Categories Best Describes your Institution? (select all that apply)	
Solely Associate degree granting institution	32
Baccalaureate degree granting institution	5
Graduate degree granting institution	3
Public institution	28
Private institution	2
Rural institution	6
Suburban institution	6
Urban institution	7
Historically Black institution	3
Hispanic serving institution	1
Tribal institution	-
Multi-campus institution	12

Indicate the ECE Certificates/Degrees your Institution Offers. (select all that apply)	
ECE Certificate(s)	36
ECE Associate Degree	36
ECE Bachelors Degree- leading to licensure	6
ECE Bachelors Degree- non licensure	5
ECE post baccalaureate certificate	3
ECE Masters Degree	2
ECE Doctoral Degree	1

Which of the following best describes your role at your college/university?	
Full Time faculty	19
Part Time faculty	4
Program Administrator (i.e. the individual who has responsibility for overseeing the ECE program)	20

Please indicate your race/ethnicity. (select all that apply)	
American Indian or Alaskan Native	1
Black or African American	6
Hispanic, Latino/a or Spanish heritage	1
Middle Eastern or North African	1
Multi-ethnic/Multi-racial	1
White	34