In the last five years, Early Childhood Education (ECE) vocational training has expanded beyond the preschool and child care setting to include local, state, and federal funded programs and agencies which service a diverse population of at-risk families and children. In spite of the expansion of ECE career options, most community college programs still offer a more traditional training program for preschool teachers and child caregivers.

To bridge this gap, this grant project will establish a practicum course for students to train as Family Service Specialist (FSS) interns to serve families and children of diverse backgrounds under the direct supervision of an ECE instructor. In this lab setting, the Family Service Specialist interns can develop, practice, and master the skills they will need when they work in programs and agencies serving families and children.

The innovation this project offers is the triangulation of three different populations: parents, advanced ECE students, and Family Support Specialist interns having the opportunity to interact in a more inclusive environment which reflects the current movement of collaborations of agencies and programs to coordinate services and to support families and children in a diverse environment.