

UF

Anita Zucker Center *for* Excellence  
*in* Early Childhood Studies  
UNIVERSITY *of* FLORIDA



## A LETTER FROM OUR DIRECTORS



### ***Starting ahead means staying ahead.***

That's why the first five years of a child's life are a critical time for early childhood development and learning — and early promotion, prevention and intervention activities.

For too many children who are vulnerable — those living in poverty or unsafe neighborhoods, with developmental delays, no medical home, or unstable access to food — research shows these risks negatively affect their future. The research suggests, however, that buffers such as nurturing and responsive caregivers, food security, or participation in a quality early care and education program can mitigate the impact of risk and foster resiliency.

Thanks to a transdisciplinary team of scholars, partners and advocates, **the Anita Zucker Center for Excellence in Early Childhood Studies** is changing the paradigm for early childhood to ensure all young children have the supports they and their families need to thrive. Forging partnerships among diverse disciplines, the Anita Zucker Center is creating, implementing and sharing science-informed solutions that lead to transformative change, creating a trajectory that can unleash the potential of children, families and communities.

Our work is a top priority at the University of Florida thanks in part to early childhood champions like Anita Zucker, UF Trustee, and David Lawrence, Jr., Chair of the Children's Movement of Florida. Their collective commitment inspires us to pioneer and persevere to close the chronic chasm that impacts our children and families, our communities and our future.

Read more about the people behind our work and how the Anita Zucker Center is preparing future leaders, engaging with partners, advancing early childhood research, and impacting policy and practice to create results that Go Greater!

A handwritten signature in dark ink, reading "Maureen Conroy". The script is fluid and cursive.

**Dr. Maureen Conroy, co-director**

A handwritten signature in dark ink, reading "Patricia Snyder". The script is fluid and cursive.

**Dr. Patricia Snyder, director**



## HISTORY

When **David Lawrence Jr.**, UF alumnus and former publisher of The Miami Herald, decided to devote his energy to public service full-time, early childhood was emerging as an area of pressing need in Florida and beyond.

In 2004, he worked with UF leadership to establish the David Lawrence Jr. Endowed Chair in Early Childhood Studies. The inaugural chair is held by Dr. Patricia Snyder, director of the Anita Zucker Center.

Several children's advocacy groups and more than 75 individuals donated more than \$1 million to create the Lawrence endowed chair at UF, with the state contributing another \$500,000 under Florida's matching gifts program.

## HIS VISION FOR EARLY CHILDHOOD BECAME THE FOUNDATION OF OUR WORK.

"I simply came to believe that the whole future of the United States depended on educating people about the importance of investing in early childhood," he says. "I came to understand fully that, if you could ever get the early years right, you'd probably give children and families momentum to reach their potential in life."

The Center for Excellence in Early Childhood Studies was founded in 2010 and has grown into a well-funded, highly regarded research center. It was formally named the Anita Zucker Center for Excellence in Early Childhood Studies in 2014 to honor Anita Zucker, a UF alumna, global business leader, advocate and supporter whose transformational gifts are advancing our research, teaching, and service.



## MISSION



The Anita Zucker Center focuses on advancing young children's health, development, learning, and wellbeing from birth to age five through transdisciplinary research, teaching, professional development, model demonstration programs, outreach and dissemination. As has been well-established and understood, investing in the first five years of a child's life opens lifelong pathways to reaching each child's potential as contributing members of society.

The challenges facing young children who are vulnerable and their families are too vast to be overcome by a single academic discipline. The Anita Zucker Center brings together transdisciplinary faculty and other key stakeholders across UF, the community, nation, and world to build and advance the implementation of new, innovative approaches which address the grand challenges in early childhood studies. To that end, the Anita Zucker Center is committed to creating partnerships with others to bring science-informed solutions to action.

### OUR WORK CENTERS ON THE FOLLOWING PILLARS:



**PREPARING LEADERS**  
Mentoring tomorrow's leaders  
in early childhood studies



**GENERATING KNOWLEDGE**  
Real-world science to improve practice  
and policy in early childhood



**ENGAGING WITH PARTNERS**  
Building connections with local, state,  
national and international partners



**MAKING AN IMPACT**  
Advancing solutions  
that transform lives



“As I advance my career, I want to make sure the field continues to examine what works best with which children and families and under what conditions to ensure empirically as well as socially valid intervention.”

– Cinda Clark, post-doctoral associate

PREPARING LEADERS

TOMORROW’S EXPERTS IN EARLY CHILDHOOD STUDIES

Faculty leaders are shaping tomorrow’s experts who will carry forward lessons learned today to inform and transform the future of early childhood studies. These emerging leaders receive training and situated mentoring in recommended practices in early childhood research, policy and practice.

POST-DOCTORAL ASSOCIATES

Building off a post-doctoral research training fellowship program funded by the Institute of Education Sciences, our post-doctoral associates program provides specialized training in early childhood research, practice and policy. Guided by transdisciplinary research faculty who are internationally recognized, fellows are trained in advanced practices in early childhood studies, research methods and implementation science.

DOCTORAL TRAINING

Our doctoral training program prepares students at UF with a transdisciplinary concentration in early childhood studies. The concentration combines coursework and applied research opportunities focused in early childhood studies, including health, mental health, early education and care, policy and law, and family and community-based social supports.

MASTERS STUDENTS

The Master of Arts in Education program prepares graduate students in the area of early childhood studies, with a focus on children from birth to kindergarten, and their families. It readies students for a number of roles and career opportunities, including future doctoral studies, serving as a coach for teachers or parents, or enhancing their teaching or leadership skills in the area of early childhood.



Now and Next

The Anita Zucker Center serves as both a convener and a connector. We create, demonstrate and recommend research-informed practices and expand local, state, national and international partnerships. It is an advocate for science-informed policies that integrate systems of support and service that can make a difference for all children and families — everywhere.





## Research Focus Areas

As an integral part of their mission to support young children’s health, development, learning and wellbeing, the Anita Zucker Center’s transdisciplinary faculty are committed to advancing research in the areas of policy and practice.



### POLICY DEVELOPMENT AND ANALYSIS

Faculty create, validate and share knowledge that informs policy. They serve in leadership and advisory roles on federal, state and community boards, as well as organizations dedicated to early childhood development and learning. Many faculty members evaluate the effects of current policies to examine what is working for whom and under which conditions.



### PROMOTION, PREVENTION AND INTERVENTION PRACTICES

Faculty design, implement and evaluate innovative, science-based practices for improving early childhood development and learning, and supporting families and practitioners to implement these practices as intended in authentic settings. Through the Anita Zucker Center’s partnership with Baby Gator Child Development and Research Center, and the Children’s Health, Imagination, Learning and Discovery (CHILD) Center, we take on real-world challenges with cycles of knowledge, implementation and feedback that impact children and families in communities in Florida, across the nation and beyond.



### LEARNING SCIENCES AND NEUROSCIENCE

Through transdisciplinary work that is collaborative and multifaceted, faculty are building synergistic approaches to applying research in the learning sciences to advance practice, design evidenced-informed tools and equip families and caregivers with solutions that leverage every child’s motivations to learn and grow in everyday activities and routines.

## GENERATING KNOWLEDGE

## Current Research

### LEARNING IN EVERYDAY CONTEXTS: *Embedded Instruction for Early Learning*

Embedded instruction is used to meet children’s needs by providing opportunities to learn and practice important skills in the context of their daily lives. The Anita Zucker Center has received multiple grants to implement embedded instruction in early childhood classrooms and in families’ homes in Florida, Tennessee, Kentucky, California and nationwide, especially with children who have or are at risk for disabilities.



**Funding:** Institute of Education Sciences | California Department of Education | Florida Department of Health

### SUPPORTING TEACHERS AND CHILDREN: *Creating Positive, Social and Emotional Learning Environments*

Healthy social-emotional development is the foundation for children’s learning and development. We are developing and studying interventions that support teachers’ and caregivers’ use of effective practices to promote the social-emotional competence of young children, including those who demonstrate persistent and challenging behaviors in early childhood programs. We also evaluate comprehensive, classroom-wide preschool intervention systems that promote social and emotional skills, and prevent or address challenging behavior through two intervention programs: BEST in CLASS and the Pyramid Model.



**Funding:** Institute of Education Sciences

### BUILDING FAMILY AND CAREGIVER COMPETENCE AND SKILLS

Research points to the early years as a critical period for caregivers to engage in responsive caregiver-child interactions that promote optimal child development. Faculty have received multiple grants to improve caregiver interactions with children with disabilities, including parents of children with autism and caregivers of children with developmental disabilities in Zambia.



**Funding:** National Institutes of Health | College Research Incentive Fund

### QUALITY MEASUREMENT TOOLS: *Early Childhood Assessment*

We are committed to developing tools that support quality early childhood assessment practices and help inform decisions about whether professional development and evidence-based practices are being implemented as intended. Among the measurement tools we have developed with our collaborators are the Teaching Pyramid Observation Tool, the Embedded Instruction Observation System, the Teacher-Child Interaction Observation System, treatment integrity measures, practice-based coaching implementation tools, and assessments of young children’s learning and development.



**Funding:** Institute of Education Sciences

### EARLY CARE AND EDUCATION SYSTEMS POLICIES AND PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT RESEARCH: *Evaluating Access*

The Child Care Access Index is a tool to help State Child Care Administrators understand the extent to which young children, particularly those in families with low socio-economic status, have reasonable access to quality early care and education. Our team is actively engaged with policymakers at the local and state levels to inform policies related to professional development systems, as well as measuring and supporting increased access to and participation in high-quality services.



**Funding:** U.S. Administration for Children and Families, Office of Planning Research and Evaluation

### PREVENTING CHILDHOOD ADVERSITY: *Focusing Prevention Programs*

The classroom is an ideal setting for the implementation of child abuse and neglect prevention programs. In a series of studies, faculty are examining how the occurrence of child physical abuse changes across the school year and, based on the timing of these occurrences, how to focus prevention programs. In another study, faculty are testing the effectiveness of a school-based child maltreatment prevention program for reducing abuse and neglect.



**Funding:** Monique Burr Foundation



## ENGAGING WITH PARTNERS

### *Collaboration is Key*

Our work is conducted in partnership with **LOCAL, STATE, NATIONAL** and **GLOBAL** stakeholders. Through our partnerships and transdisciplinary research, context-relevant solutions emerge and evidence-informed practices are implemented in authentic settings. Listed below are some of our collaborations.



#### LOCAL PARTNERSHIPS

Alachua County Children's Services Advisory Board | Alachua County Head Start | Early Learning Coalition of Alachua County | Child Advocacy Center | CHILD Center for Early Learning | Episcopal Children's Services | School Districts and Early Childhood Agencies in Clay, Marion, Flagler, St. Johns and Volusia counties | Southwest Advocacy Group | Suwannee Valley Community Coordinated Child Care (4Cs) program | United Way of North Central Florida



#### STATE PARTNERSHIPS

Faculty are working with Child Care Quality and Accessibility with the Office of Early Learning. We are partnering with the Florida Department of Health's Early Steps program at three model demonstration sites to advance early intervention practices for infants and toddlers with or at risk for disabilities and their families. The Anita Zucker Center is also collaborating with the Children's Movement of Florida to improve our state's pre-K program and to address parent skill-building, screening and treatment for children with special needs and mentoring programs.



#### SETTING A NATIONAL VISION

The UF invited the nation's top early childhood experts to convene at the Starting Ahead. Staying Ahead. Early Childhood National Summit in 2017. UF's colleges of Education, Medicine, Public Health and Health Professions, and Law, ICHP, and Baby Gator, in concert with the Anita Zucker Center, hosted 104 scholars, policymakers and advocates with a common goal: to create solutions to the grand challenges faced by children who are vulnerable and their families.



#### GLOBAL COLLABORATIONS

Faculty members Brian Reichow, Marylou Behnke and Patricia Snyder are working with collaborators in Zambia to study the effectiveness of a parent skills training program developed by the World Health Organization (WHO). The program teaches caregivers how to use a parental skills training program to support the growth and development of children with disabilities. Many of these children receive very few, if any, services or treatments. If shown to be effective for improving children's outcomes, WHO plans to make the resource available free online. We also partner with Massey University in New Zealand on professional development for early care and education practitioners, embedded instruction for early learning, and social-emotional development and learning.

## MAKING AN IMPACT

#### THE SOUTHWEST ADVOCACY GROUP (SWAG)

The Southwest Advocacy Group (SWAG) is a grassroots organization created in 2010 to improve living conditions, health and educational opportunities in Alachua County's neediest area.

SWAG's CHILD (Children's Health, Imagination, Learning and Discovery) Center serves as a child care and early education center located in the heart of Gainesville's SWAG neighborhoods. The center will provide comprehensive child care and an early education curriculum, in addition to creative play and nutritious meals. Opening in the 2017-2018 school year, the new facility is intended to serve as a model demonstration site and professional development hub to enhance the early education, health and wellbeing for young children from birth to age 5. As technical advisers, faculty are providing evidence-informed practices to maximize young children's development and learning, and support their families.

#### EPISCOPAL CHILDREN'S SERVICES

The Early Head Start program began building a collaboration with the Anita Zucker Center to benefit young children and families in 2017. UF and the City of Gainesville awarded a research grant to the Anita Zucker Center to address real-world problems experienced by young children and families in its under-resourced community in East Gainesville, and to serve as a part of a community-wide innovative initiative to advance science and practice in early childhood. Episcopal Children's Services is partnering with the Anita Zucker Center to install evidence-informed, job embedded professional development to enhance the quality of interactional teaching practices being implemented by their teachers and other program staff.

#### NATIONAL PARTNERS

Through our engagement with many national partners, we are able to integrate our collective expertise to extend our research, training, outreach and technical assistance. Working together with colleagues in every region, we are generating impactful solutions for young children, their families and others who support them.

### *Serving Our Community and Region*

The Anita Zucker Center exists to improve resources and outcomes for young children, their families and the practitioners who support them. Our efforts bridge the gap between research and practice and connect caregivers, organizations and practitioners with evidence-informed information and resources to improve outcomes for all young children and their families.



## TIME LINE

### Our Foundation

**2004**

- David Lawrence Jr. Endowed Chair in Early Childhood Studies established

**2007**

- Dr. Patricia Snyder named inaugural David Lawrence Jr. Endowed Chair in Early Childhood Studies

**2010**

- Interdisciplinary Center for Excellence in Early Childhood Studies formally approved by UF
- Dr. Maureen Conroy joins Center for Excellence in Early Childhood Studies

**2011**

- Anita Zucker Endowed Professorship in Early Childhood Studies established

### Growing Momentum

**2012**

- Post-doctoral research fellowship training program focused on early intervention and early learning in special education funded by the Institute for Education Sciences, U.S. Department of Education

**2013**

- Optimizing early childhood development and learning preeminence initiative funded by UF included bringing four transdisciplinary faculty (Drs. Matthew Gurka, Cynthia Johnson, Mary McLean and Brian Reichow) to three colleges and the Anita Zucker Center

**2014**

- \$15 million in federal research funding generated since 2010
- Endowment gift to name the Anita Zucker Center for Excellence in Early Childhood Studies

**2015**

- Dr. Maureen Conroy named inaugural Anita Zucker Endowed Professor in Early Childhood Studies

**2016**

- Over \$25 million in federal research and training funding since 2010
- 230+ postdoctoral, doctoral, master's and undergraduate students

### Building a National Model and Movement

**2017**

- Convened national summit with leaders in early childhood studies to identify action-based strategies for optimizing development and learning
- Broke ground on Children's Health, Imagination, Learning and Development (CHILD) Center in partnership with Southwest Advocacy Group (SWAG) O2B Kids
- Visionary endowment gift from Anita Zucker further propels the center's research, innovation and impact





## ABOUT ANITA ZUCKER



Early childhood champion **Anita Zucker** is an active participant, a discerning philanthropist and the namesake of the Anita Zucker Center for Excellence in Early Childhood Studies. Her parents survived the Holocaust, teaching her to cherish learning and education. She graduated with a B.A. in Education from the UF and went on to teach for 14 years at schools in Florida and South Carolina, where she moved with her late husband, Jerry.

The Zuckers created and led phenomenally successful companies now combined as InterTech Group, a global conglomerate where she leads as chair and CEO. Since Jerry's passing in 2008, she has grown the corporate enterprise to greater heights, while channeling her insight and energy to child- and community-related initiatives in South Carolina and beyond.

UF is where she and Jerry resolved to live out the Hebrew teaching, "tikkun olam," or "repair of the world." She actively extends that principle to the University community, serving as a member of the UF Board of Trustees and the UF Foundation Executive Board. Her time, talents and treasured support have made early childhood studies a preeminent focus at UF and propelled the Anita Zucker Center to become a national leader in the field's research, policy and practice arenas.

“We have a moral and scientific responsibility to rethink and reshape the way we support young children and their families.”

– Patricia Snyder, Ph.D.,  
*Anita Zucker Center director*







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