

EARLY GRADE READING GRADUATE CERTIFICATE

STUDENT HANDBOOK

2018-2019

**COLLEGE OF
EDUCATION**

**UNIVERSITY OF
MASSACHUSETTS
AMHERST**

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Useful Web sites

University of Massachusetts Amherst..... <http://www.umass.edu>
College of Education..... <http://www.umass.edu/education>
Center for International Education..... <http://www.umass.edu/cie>

Early Grade Reading Graduate Certificate: <http://blogs.umass.edu/egrcert>

CPE Academic Calendar: <https://www.umass.edu/cpe/academic-calendar>

Blackboard Learn (course platform): <https://uma.umassonline.net>

INTRODUCTION

The Early Grade Reading Graduate Certificate is the first university program that focuses specifically on early grade reading in developing countries. This 15-credit, fully online program offers state-of-the-art professional development for practitioners and policymakers working on early grade reading projects around the world.

The Certificate consists of five courses that may be taken in any order. You may choose to take from one to four courses as well for your own professional development purposes, but the Certificate is only awarded for completing all five courses.

Courses are asynchronous and designed for working professionals living in countries outside of the US as well as those based in the US.

For each course, you will earn graduate credits which can be applied towards a [master's degree in international education](#) or a [doctoral degree with a specialization in international education](#) at UMass Amherst, if you decide later that you would like to pursue a graduate degree here.

This handbook describes program requirements and provides information to assist you during your time in the program. If you have additional questions, please contact us at egrcert@umass.edu.

Information is also available on our Web site:
<http://blogs.umass.edu/egrcert/>

ADMISSIONS

We encourage you to apply to the Certificate program by the end of your second (2nd) EGR course, if you are interested in completing all five courses and the Certificate. To apply:

- 1) Fill out the [online application form](#)
- 2) Send the following materials to egrcert@umass.edu:
 - a. Resume/CV
 - b. Short personal statement (maximum 1 page single-spaced), explaining your interest in the Certificate, how your professional and educational background makes this program a good fit for you, and your professional development goals.

Once we have received your application form and materials, your application will be reviewed by faculty within 14 days.

To be admitted to the program, you need to:

- Hold a minimum of a bachelor's degree
- Have sufficient English reading and writing skills to participate in the courses (As a guideline, this would be equivalent to at least 80 on the TOEFL IBT. *Note that you do NOT need to take the TOEFL or submit any scores*).
- Show how the program is a good fit for you.

ADVISING

When your application is completed and if you are admitted to the program, you will be eligible for advising by EGR faculty.

Your advisor is available to discuss your professional goals and academic work, your course schedule, and upcoming courses. She can also recommend additional resources on topics of interest, and help you get the most out of each course (e.g. by offering advice on how to tailor your assignments to your goals).

Participants come from different educational and professional backgrounds and have different reasons for joining the program. We

want to make your experience in the program as useful and engaging as possible. Once you are admitted to the program, your advisor will contact you to set up an initial Skype meeting.

NetID

Your NetID and password allow you to access many resources, including [SPIRE](#) (the university student information system), your [UMail](#) account, courses in [Blackboard Learn](#), and the UMass Amherst Libraries. You'll receive your NetID via email after you fill out the *Non-Degree Enrollment Application* in SPIRE (see Enrolling in Courses below).

SPIRE

[SPIRE](http://spire.umass.edu) (<http://spire.umass.edu>) is the student information system used at UMass Amherst. SPIRE is used to enroll in courses, and is also where you check your grades and download your transcript.

BLACKBOARD LEARN

The EGR program uses [Blackboard Learn](#) as the platform for online courses. Log in here: <https://uma.umassonline.net>.

The course platform will have all readings for the course, which you can download or read online, all discussion questions, all assignments, and all resources. You will also submit all your assignments and discussion posts directly on Blackboard. Review an [Introduction to Blackboard here](#).

If you would like to add a **profile picture** next to your name in the Blackboard forums, here is how to do so:

1. Click on your name at the upper right-hand corner of your Blackboard screen. A menu should appear.
2. On the menu, click on the top left icon (which looks like a person's head) - "Edit your Blackboard Profile".
3. The first time you do this, you will be asked to agree to the Terms of Service and also to set up a MyEdu account.

4. Once you have set up your MyEdu account, you will see a profile page. Click on "Settings and Privacy".
5. Under "Picture", click on the "Change Picture" button to upload an image from your computer.

You can view step-by-step instructions with screenshots here:

<https://confluence.umassonline.net/display/UASO/Creating+Your+Blackboard+Profile>

UMAIL: UMASS EMAIL

You will also receive a UMass email address (XXX@umass.edu), which will be your “official” email contact for the University. **Official emails, including bills and course announcements**, will be sent to this address.

You can access your UMail account by logging in to:

<http://umail.it.umass.edu/>

Alternatively, you can set it to forward emails to a different address. To do this, log in to UMail, then find the link to the “**UMail Post Office**” on the top left hand corner of the screen, and follow the instructions.

Step-by-step instructions to set up email forwarding:

1. Use your NetID and password to log in to UMail at: <https://umail.it.umass.edu>
2. Click on “UMail Post Office” on the top left hand corner of the screen. You will then have to log in *again* with your NetID and password.
3. In the Post Office menu, click on "Forward email".
4. Under "Enable or disable forwarding," choose "Forward all my incoming email to this address" and enter your alternate email address. (Make sure it is correct!)
5. Click the "Submit Changes" button.
6. Click "Logout" of the UMail Post Office (upper right).

Important Note: Make sure you have the correct alternative email address entered. If you turn forwarding on, emails will be sent to the address you specify **only**. They will NOT be archived in UMail, i.e. there will be *no copies* of the emails left in the UMail Inbox.

LIBRARY

Your NetID gives you access to the [UMass Amherst Libraries](#) and to **online databases** that you can use to find journal articles about topics of interest. You can do a search and log in with your NetID to download full-text articles. If you would like help finding resources, Steve McGinty is our subject librarian for Education. Feel free to email him: smcginty@library.umass.edu.

WRITING CENTER CONSULTING

This Certificate program requires extensive writing. If you need help with your academic writing, the [UMass Amherst Writing Center](#) offers online consulting so you can take advantage of their services even at a distance!

DISABILITY SERVICES

Disability Services provides services for students who require accommodations due to a disability. There are three main areas these services cover: (1) collecting diagnostic documentation in order to identify individuals with qualifying disabilities, (2) determining eligibility for reasonable accommodations and modifications to campus programs and services, (3) notifying faculty/instructors/program coordinators of a student's accommodation eligibility while participating in their course/program.

In order to be eligible for accommodations, you must first register with Disability Services. The registration process involves completing an intake form and submitting supporting diagnostic

documentation. Intake forms are available on the [Disability Services website](#).

ACADEMIC HONESTY

Since the integrity of the academic enterprise of any institution of higher education requires honesty in scholarship and research, academic honesty is required of all students at the University of Massachusetts Amherst. Academic dishonesty is prohibited in all programs of the University. Academic dishonesty includes but is not limited to: cheating, fabrication, plagiarism, and facilitating dishonesty. Appropriate sanctions may be imposed on any student who has committed an act of academic dishonesty.

Instructors should take reasonable steps to address academic misconduct. Any person who has reason to believe that a student has committed academic dishonesty should bring such information to the attention of the appropriate course instructor as soon as possible.

Instances of academic dishonesty not related to a specific course should be brought to the attention of the appropriate department Head or Chair. Since students are expected to be familiar with this policy and the commonly accepted standards of academic integrity, ignorance of such standards is not normally sufficient evidence of lack of intent.

Learn more about the [Academic Honesty Policy](#).

Download the 2-page [Academic Honesty Student Guide](#).

ENROLLING IN COURSES

New/Returning Students – enrolling in courses through SPIRE

If you are a new student or you did not take a course in the previous Fall/Spring semester, you need to create or reactivate a student record. *Please note that because the EGR program is a certificate, not a degree program, you are considered a "non-degree student."*

1. **Create a student account.** Go to [SPIRE](#). From the menu options on the right hand side, under the heading ***Apply/References***, click on ***Non-Degree Enrollment Application***. Fill out the form there. You will receive an email with your NetID and password (this may take several days.) *NOTE:* If you are a returning student, please use the same First Name and Last Name (and if you have it, your 8-digit student ID) from your previous enrollment.
2. **Get an enrollment appointment.**
 - a. After activating your account, log in to [SPIRE](#) with your NetID and password.
 - b. Go to Main Menu > Enrollment > Summer/Wntr/Non-degr Enroll Appt and [follow the instructions](#).

(NOTE: It can take 1-2 days for SPIRE to recognize your NetID, so if you do not see [these screens](#), try again the next day.)
3. **Enroll in classes.** Your enrollment appointment should be immediate.
 - a. Go to Main Menu > Enrollment > Add Classes.
 - b. Search for the class, add it to your Shopping Cart, then select it and click “Enroll”.

Continuing Students - enrolling in courses through SPIRE

If you took a course the previous Fall/Spring semester:

1. **Get an enrollment appointment.** Log in to [SPIRE](#). Go to Main Menu > Enrollment > Summer/Wntr/Non-degr Enroll Appt and [follow the instructions](#).
2. **Enroll in classes.** Go to Main Menu > Enrollment > Add Classes. Search for the class, add it to your Shopping Cart, then select it and click “Enroll”.

Dropping a course before the end of Add/Drop

Before the Add/Drop deadline for the semester, you can drop classes through [SPIRE](#). The course will not appear on your transcript and **all course fees** will be removed from your account. The deadline is usually two weeks after the start of the course. See the [CPE Academic Calendar](#) for Add/Drop deadline.

Dropping a course after the end of Add/Drop

Between the end of Add/Drop and the end of the “Drop with W/DR” deadline, you can still drop a class using [SPIRE](#). If you drop before this deadline (usually about six weeks after the start of the course), the course will appear on your transcript as “DR” and you will receive a **50% refund** on the course tuition (but not the registration fee.) See the [CPE Academic Calendar](#) for the “Drop with W/DR” deadline. Here are [step-by-step instructions for dropping the course](#).

Dropping a course after “Drop with W/DR”

If you need to drop a class after the “Drop with DR” period is over, you will need to fill out the [Graduate Late Add/Drop form](#) and return it to Cristine Smith, egrcert@umass.edu, who will sign the form as the Program Advisor and return the form to Continuing & Professional Education (CPE) for processing. Please note that if you drop the class after the Drop with “DR” deadline, there is **no refund** and you will be charged the *full* tuition and registration fee.

PAYING YOUR TUITION BILL

Bills are generated by the Bursar’s Office around the 15th of the month after you have registered for a class, and are due by the 10th of the following month. You will receive an email in your UMail account when your invoice becomes available.

You view and pay your bill in QuikPAY. To access QuikPAY, log in to [SPIRE](#). Go to Main Menu > Finances > View/Pay Bill.

QuikPay allows you to pay by e-check or by **credit card**.

International Payments

QuikPay also allows you to make international payments from an [overseas bank via Flywire](#).

Adding an Authorized Payer

If someone else will be paying your bill, you can add them as an “Authorized Payer” so they can view the bill and make the payment directly.

1. Log in to SPIRE (<http://spire.umass.edu>)
2. Go to Main Menu > Finances > View/Pay Bill.
3. In the left menu, choose "Authorize Payers".
4. Click on the "Add New" button on the right.
5. Fill in the form – enter the person's name and email, and create a login name and password for them. Make a note of this information.
6. Click "Add"
7. Send the person the login information (username and password) so that they can log in and pay the bill for you.

For specific billing questions, including obtaining invoices, you can contact the CPE Bursar's office: email cpebursar@admin.umass.edu or call (413) 545-0337.

Scholarships and Financial Aid

Unfortunately, there are no scholarships available from the university for these courses. However, previous participants have sometimes been able to obtain financial support from their employer. International NGOs and development agencies often have professional development support programs for their staff. As these are university-accredited courses, they are usually eligible for such schemes. Do check with your employer to see if such support is available for you.

U.S. federal financial aid is not available for this program. University of Massachusetts employees may be eligible for full tuition waivers; Massachusetts state employees may be eligible for 50% tuition waivers. For more information on waivers, see <http://www.umasslearn.net/financial-info/financial-aid>.

EGR CURRICULUM

The Early Grade Reading Graduate Certificate consists of five courses or 15 credits (each course is worth three credits). The courses are intended to build your capacity to develop, monitor and improve early grade reading programs in development contexts.

You may take the courses **in any order**, although ideally you will take EDUC 680 (*How Children Learn to Read*) early on in the Certificate program. Normally one or two courses are offered each semester (fall, spring) or summer session. Each course is 12 weeks long.

Core Courses

EDUC 680 - *How Children in Developing Countries Learn to Read* (Foundation Course)

EDUC 680B - *Systems to Support Early Grade Reading*

EDUC 697TP - *Teacher Preparation and Support for Early Grade Reading*

EDUC 687T - *Materials and Technology for Early Grade Reading*

EDUC 687R - *The Role of Community and Family in Supporting Early Grade Reading*

Elective Courses (planned)

- *How Children in Developing Countries Learn to Do Math*

See our Web site for up-to-date [course objectives and syllabi](#).

CHECKING YOUR GRADE

Grades are normally posted in early January for Fall courses, mid-May for Spring courses, and the end of August for summer courses. To check your course grade:

1. Log in to SPIRE (<http://spire.umass.edu>)
2. Go to Main Menu > Academics > My Grades.

OBTAINING YOUR TRANSCRIPT

When you have received your course grade, we encourage you to log in to SPIRE and [print an unofficial transcript](#) for your personal files, as a record of course completion.

Once you complete all five courses in the Certificate program, then you will receive the Early Grade Reading Graduate Certificate from the university. For individual courses, a transcript serves the record of course completion.

The transcript will have the UMass Amherst logo and your name, your 8-digit student ID (which you can use later to reactivate your account if needed), course ID and course grade on it.

The difference between an official and an unofficial transcript is that the official one has a signature and seal. Usually you only need an official transcript if you are applying to a university program and need to show that you have the credits. Otherwise, the unofficial transcript is often sufficient as a record of course completion.

Printing an unofficial transcript is free of charge and must be done **while you still have access to SPIRE**. So please do this as soon as possible after your course grade is posted on SPIRE (for Fall courses, usually in the first week of January; for Spring courses, fourth week of May; for Summer courses, first week of September).

1. Log in to SPIRE (<http://spire.umass.edu>)
2. Go to Main Menu > Academics > Unofficial Transcript.
3. Click on the “View Report” button.
4. Your unofficial transcript will be generated as a PDF. Click on the “Download” icon at the upper right hand corner to save a copy to your computer.

[Official transcripts](#) (electronic or paper) may be ordered for a small fee from the Registrar’s office at any time. To order an official transcript, log in to SPIRE. Go to Main Menu > Academics > Request Official Transcript and follow the instructions. If you no longer have access to SPIRE, you can go to the [Alumni & Former Student](#) transcript page to put in your order.

COMPLETING THE PROGRAM

During the semester when you are taking your fifth and final course for the Early Grade Reading Graduate Certificate, you will need to submit the [EGR Certificate Completion Form](#).

Please download, fill, and **email the form to egrcert@umass.edu**.

You can generate all the information you need to fill the form easily by printing a transcript (see p. 13 above). *(Note: you do not need to complete the grade column for your current/final course, since you won't have received it yet. Please complete it for the other courses.)*

UMass Amherst has three graduation dates, in February, May, and September each year. Please submit your Completion Form by the deadline in order for your certificate to be processed in time. Current deadlines are: **November 24** (for February graduation), **March 9** (for May graduation), and **August 10** (for September graduation).

Also, check SPIRE and make sure that your address is correct. The certificate will be mailed to that address about 6-8 weeks after the graduation date (may be longer for May graduation).

You will receive your official certificate from the UMass Amherst Graduate School.

At the end of the final semester, you also need to submit a **one-page (single-spaced) reflection** on:

- what you feel you gained from the courses;
- how you think you will apply what you've learned in your professional life and work; and
- how you would improve or change any of the courses or the Certificate as a whole.

Please send your reflection paper to egrcert@umass.edu.

When your final grade is posted on SPIRE, please remember to print your unofficial transcript, which will reflect all your courses and grades, for your records. (see **Obtaining your transcript** above).

TIPS FOR TAKING THE COURSES

Getting started

- Get a headstart during the Preview Week, usually one week before the official start date of the course. During this time, the course site will be open, so you can read the introductory information (especially the syllabus, which you should review carefully to see what readings and assignments will be expected) and familiarize yourself with the site. Log in with your NetID to the [Blackboard Learn course platform](#).
- Schedule regular times in your schedule to work on the course. (You will likely need several sessions each week, to read the articles, write your discussion posts, and respond to others. In terms of learning, it is better to space out your sessions so you can engage with the ideas more effectively and recall information better.)
 - The course week usually runs from Monday to Sunday. If you have more time on the weekends, you may want to plan to do the bulk of the readings then (i.e. the weekend *before* the official start of the week), but also schedule time during the week to participate in the discussions.
- If you have any questions at all about the course, do not hesitate to ask! You can contact your course instructor directly via the email address they provide on the course site or the EGR admin assistant at egrcert@umass.edu. We are here to help.
- If you are not sure if you will be participating in the course, please take careful note of the Add/Drop deadline. If you are late in dropping the course in SPIRE, you will still be charged tuition fees.

Tips for online discussions

The online discussions are the most important part of the course, since you don't meet face-to-face. Consider the discussions to be the equivalent of going to class—everyone should participate.

- **Plan to read** the discussions each day, and try to post most days. Ongoing engagement is crucial.

- **Your instructor** will be joining the discussions regularly. Don't be afraid to comment on their posts, or to disagree with them, based on your experience. You are all learning from each other.
- **Start early in the week.** You don't have to have read everything to start thinking about the questions for the week. You also don't have to sound like you have everything figured out. Ask a question if you're not sure about something.
- **Write a new subject line.** For each posting (including a reply) write a new subject line which summarizes your post. You can make your subject lines catchy or humorous, but you don't have to.
- **Don't make a post too long.** Aim for a maximum of 150-200 words, and stick to one main point. If you have multiple points you want to make, make them in separate posts.
- **Use paragraphs.** It's easier to read a post when the paragraphs are short and you leave a line (hit Enter twice) between them.
- **Sign your posts.** Using your name in your posts allows us to get to know each other better. When you're responding to a colleague's post, use his or her name to begin your comment.
- **Have a conversation.** This is a discussion, not just a bulletin board for you to post a statement and forget about it. Follow the thread of the discussions, comment on your colleagues' posts, move the discussion along. A response shouldn't just agree with the previous post: instead, extend the point, elaborate on it, give examples, draw comparisons, make connections to your own experiences.
- **Be respectful** of your colleagues' contributions. You don't need to agree with everything a fellow participant writes, but use respectful language to engage with the content.
- **Bring in your own perspective and experience.** When discussing a reading, please feel free to bring in examples from your own experiences.
- **Post early and often!** The minimum expectations for online participation each week is usually one post and two responses. This is just a minimum! You will get more out of the material if you grapple with it more extensively.

Tips for academic reading

- **Before reading**, look at the article's context. How does it relate to the topic for the week? Has the instructor indicated any particular questions or areas to focus on in the article?
- **Get an overview**. Look at the article's title, read the abstract (if there is one) and look through the section headings to get an overall idea of the content.
- **Read actively** – as you are reading, mark and highlight important ideas in the text; write questions next to points that pique your interest or that you want to know more about.
- **Try not to get bogged down** if you encounter a difficult passage. Continue reading and come back to it later, after you have a better idea of the author's overall argument.
- **After reading**, try to summarize the main ideas and note any significant points or questions that struck you.

Note: If you are reading electronically, PDF readers like Adobe Acrobat Reader and software like Mendeley allow you to highlight and take notes on the PDFs as well.

Tips for assignments

- Plan ahead. Review the syllabus and note in your schedule when the assignments are due. Look at the Assignments section of the course site to see what is expected in each assignment.
- Start early in thinking about your topic and ideas. Do some background research in advance so that you do not have to scramble at the end. Discuss your topic with your instructor if needed.
- If you are using ideas or quotes from readings or other articles, be sure to cite your sources. It should be clear which are your own words and ideas and which are from others (for more details, see the section on *Academic Honesty* above).
- Note the desired format of the final product (e.g. length, single or double-spaced, file type) and follow the instructions.

Remember, feel free to email your course instructor if you have any questions or need clarification about the readings, discussions or assignments.

NOTE

Information and Web links in this Handbook are subject to change. We will do our best to keep this Handbook current, but please let us know if you come across any information or links that need updating—email us at egrcert@umass.edu.

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