The Early Intervention Special Education (EISE) licensure program prepares early interventionists/early childhood special educators to provide services to young children (birth to five years old) with special needs and their families. An additional focus of the program is training students at the preservice level to provide culturally responsive services to young children with disabilities and their families who are from diverse backgrounds.

This EISE license and master’s program is offered in a fully online format with a cohort model. The 64 quarter hours can be completed in a convenient two-year, part-time schedule. Graduates receive more than 700 hours of field experience, including classroom, home visiting, and consultation in childcare models. An EISE endorsement is also available in a part-time, fully online 21-credit program with a cohort model.

Every day, children and families nationwide receive early intervention services, and more well-trained specialists are needed. The EISE program prepares highly sought-after leaders who become valued members of education service district and agency early intervention teams.

Early Intervention lasts a lifetime: learning starts at birth

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Hollie Hix-Small, an early intervention specialist in the Special Education Department, is partnering with several organizations in the Republic of Georgia. Since 2011, she has worked with Open Society Foundations to build early intervention (EI) services for children with developmental delays and disabilities. Hix-Small has hosted Georgian EI specialists interested in learning about EI practices in the United States. Together with local service district partners, Hix-Small introduced them to services in Portland. They are part of an emerging effort in Georgia to transform the lives of individuals with disabilities.

“Eastern Europe and Central Asia have the highest rates of institutionalized children in the world,” said Hix-Small in a recent article she authored in the Open Society Foundations newsletter. “For many, placement in an institution begins at birth.”

In 2013, the Georgia parliament passed a resolution to ratify the rights of persons with disabilities. Much like people in the United States, all Georgians now have the right to inclusive education, employment, family life, socialization, and self-determination, and can be better protected from discrimination. Georgians are moving away from institutionalization practices and are recognizing the benefits of inclusion.

EI specialists provide services to infants, toddlers, and young children with special needs, and their families. Portland State University offers a license and master’s in EI, coordinated by Hix-Small, through the Special Education Department.

Hix-Small has focused on the Republic of Georgia because the environment there is ripe for social change and these partners have shown incredible passion, dedication, and perseverance. “Their work on early intervention is some of the best in the region, and they are also developing inclusive preschool education,” she said.

Hix-Small sees this project as a model for the PSU EI program that could be expanded. “Early intervention is the foundation for an inclusive education and an inclusive society, but we must view and support inclusion across the lifespan,” she said. People with disabilities in this former Soviet Union republic have fewer resources compared to those in the West and little opportunity for education, socialization, and employment. Her goal is to develop a partnership with several universities in Georgia to build capacity and expand the work.

Hix-Small wants to invite PSU students and faculty to join her in the quest for a long-term relationship to build inclusive education and an inclusive society in Georgia. She hopes to enlist PSU faculty and students from a wide range of disciplines who will join her in sharing ideas with Georgians. “Disabilities should not be an afterthought or isolated to the education sector,” she said. “Those working in city planning, recreation, housing development, transportation, health care, and other sectors should all be mindful of the needs of individuals with disabilities.”