The Covid-19 pandemic revealed a nationwide crisis in childcare availability and affordability, creating both immediate and downstream consequences for parents and care-givers. Across the nation, most licensed early-childhood learning centers (serving children from 8-weeks to 5-years of age) have wait lists that limit enrollment and administrators struggle to recruit and retain qualified staff. Likewise, parents who cannot secure care are often forced to find alternative solutions for young children, relying on unlicensed and/or under qualified care-givers. Historically marginalized communities are hit especially hard by this shortage, as prices have trended upwards to meet the demand.

The lack of quality care coincides with a period of time in a child’s life when their cognitive and social development is on overdrive. Children learn through experiential play and the built environments that shape this play become essential in their interactions with each other and with the world around them. Access to nature, daylight, and a built environment that prioritizes their size, activities, and agency is key.

This studio will propose an early childhood learning center that offers subsidized care to low-income families in the Eugene-Springfield community. Students will be asked to observe and conduct research to inform the design of a 10,000 sf care center that supports children from ages 8-weeks through pre-k. In addition to traditional graphic ideation and physical model-building, students in this studio will learn cutting-edge techniques to design and evaluate environmental design quality. Students will be expected to use digital tools such as Rhino, Enscape, and simulation through Climate Studio to model, visualize, and evaluate design proposals. Virtual Reality will be used to experience designs as they evolve throughout the term.

srockcas@uoregon.edu