

TAKING STEPS FOR FAMILY AND CONSUMER SCIENCES EDUCATORS IN CONNECTICUT: A MODEL FOR CHANGE

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The Family and Consumer Sciences (FCS) classroom provides one of the few places where young people receive life-skills training. Middle and high school FCS programs today prepare youth for the dual roles of family leader and wage earner. In a recent survey of Connecticut FCS teachers, 77% of those responding indicated that they would retire by 2012. Many constituent groups expressed concern that without a FCS teacher education program at a public institution in Connecticut, secondary programs would be eliminated due to a lack of qualified professionals. The Cooperative Extension Service would also be confronted with a lack of new professionals. A consultant worked with various constituents to develop a proposal and to form coalitions for reinstatement of the teacher education program. The development and implementation of this process provide a model for other institutions.

Family and Consumer Sciences (FCS) educators are the front line professionals helping to solve real-life problems at a time when families in our society are faced with major crises and limited life skills (American Association of Family and Consumer Sciences, [AAFCS], 1999). These professionals convey information to various audiences on topics such as personal, financial, and consumer management; parenting and child development; nutrition and wellness; housing and clothing decisions; and career preparation. FCS programs provide the education needed to reduce welfare dependency and increase self-sufficiency by empowering individuals with the knowledge and skills to manage their personal and family lives as well as their work responsibilities. The mission of the FCS profession is to affect the optimal well being of families and individuals (AAFCS, 2001).

Today's focus in middle and high school FCS programs is on the preparation of youth for the dual roles of family leader and wage earner. In the past, the family passed many life skill concepts from generation to generation, but times have changed. American families are facing numerous new challenges in the 21st century. The structure of many families has been reconfigured, and resource constraints often do not allow for multi-generational interactions to occur where youth learn adult roles.

Today, the FCS classroom provides one of the very few places where youth receive life skills training. FCS teachers are the link in preparing youth for their roles as adults, parents, and wage earners. Prevention of unwanted teen pregnancies, wise credit use, building positive relationships, buying insurance, and avoiding eating disorders are just a few of the contemporary issues being addressed in FCS classrooms. Cooperative extension programs train community agency personnel to work with their clientele on issues such as money management, lead

poisoning prevention, parenting skills, and nutrition. At the same time, declines continue in the number of collegiate teacher preparation programs for the very professionals now needed.

The premise of the FCS profession has always been that prevention is better than rehabilitation. One of the core values of the American Association of Family and Consumer Sciences is holistic interdisciplinary, interpretive, and preventative perspectives in addressing the issues of individuals and families as consumers (AAFCS, 2001). This premise provides the foundation for public school and extension FCS programs.

Trends in Family and Consumer Sciences Education

National Trends

Issues of supply and demand for FCS educators have been of concern for at least the last decade (AAFCS, 1999; Bowman, 1998; Burge & Stewart, 1991; Miller & Meszaros, 1996; Miller & Tulloch, 1999; Stout, Couch & Fowler, 1998; Travers, 1999; & Zehr, M.A., 1998). Serious declines have been evident in both the number of institutions offering FCS education programs and the number of individuals choosing to enroll in and graduate from these programs. At the same time, the demand for FCS educators in the public schools, the cooperative extension system, and community agencies have remained high (Miller & Meszaros, 1996; AAFCS, 1999; Stout, Couch & Fowler, 1998). A variety of strategies have been proposed for the maintenance of programs and the recruitment of majors into FCS teacher education programs (Burge & Stewart, 1991; Bowman, 1998; & Travers, 1999; Lozado, 1999). However, critical to recruitment and retention is the availability of such programs which research shows have significantly declined (AAFCS, 1999). In 1984 there were 281 FCS pre-service teacher education programs in the United States. In 1995 there were only 171 such programs, a decline of 40%. In the 1968-69 academic year, 7,002 baccalaureate degrees were awarded in FCS education. In 1990-1991 there were only 426 degrees awarded to individuals with a major in FCS education. This represented a 94% decrease. Since 1990 the number of undergraduates choosing to major in FCS education has decreased 22%. The demand for educators is estimated to be four times the supply. With anticipated retirements, in 1996 it was projected that a minimum of 6,976 (or 77%) of all FCS positions would not be filled due to a lack of qualified applicants in the ensuing five year (Miller & Meszaros, 1996; Hall & Miller, 1989).

New England Trends

One location where the shortage of FCS teachers and lack of programs is most evident is in New England. In 2000 there were only three FCS teacher education programs in New England. The teacher education program in Home Economics at the University of Connecticut (UConn) closed in the late 1980's.

In a recent study (AAFCS, 1999) professionals in Connecticut, Maine, New Hampshire, and Vermont projected that between 1999-2003, there would be a need for 590 new FCS educators. The maximum number of new teachers to fill this need was projected to be only 70 individuals over the same four-year period.

A 1997 survey indicated that in the 1995-1996 school year, 1,613 students were turned away from FCS public school classes in Connecticut due to a lack of qualified teachers. In 1996-97, the estimate increased to 1,772. During 1995-96, sixteen vacancies existed for FCS teachers with some of these positions being filled by non-certified teachers (Bull, Uerz, & Yoakum, 2000). In 1997, 15% of the Connecticut FCS teachers reported they planned to retire in the next five years with an additional 29.5% planning retirement in ten years. By 2012, 77% of those

surveyed will have retired (Bull, Urez, Yoakem, 2000). It was clear that immediate and sustained action was needed to prepare future FCS teachers for Connecticut.

Action in Connecticut

Based on the results of this survey, the Dean of the School of Family Studies (SFS) at UConn formed a subcommittee of the newly created School of Family Studies Alumni Society to address this issue. At the same time, a faculty member from another state elected to spend her sabbatical leave working as a consultant on this problem. This individual is a University of Connecticut alumnus who is currently a FCS teacher educator at New Mexico State University. The plan was to lay the groundwork for reinstatement of the teacher education program at the University of Connecticut.

Questions the task force members and consultant explored were:

- Who needed to collaborate?
- What would be the best possible curriculum?
- What resources would be needed?
- Was it possible to re-instate a FCS teacher education program that would cross two schools and one college at UConn?

The following sections outline the major steps taken to address these issues.

Listening Forum

One of the first steps was to open communication among the University of Connecticut School of Family Studies faculty, the School of Family Studies Alumni Society subcommittee, FCS public school teachers, and administrators in the public schools. On March 28, 2000, a FCS Teacher Listening Forum was held on the UConn Campus. A panel of current middle and secondary FCS teachers as well as an urban school district superintendent presented a strong case for the relevance of the current K-12 FCS curriculum offerings. Representatives of the School of Family Studies and the Department of Nutritional Sciences in the College of Agriculture and Natural Resources at UConn presented their course offerings, which were relevant to the secondary FCS teachers' needs.

In structured groups, the following topics were discussed:

- FCS content areas that were being and should continue to be taught in the K-12 system,
- Program needs for K-12 FCS educators,
- The perceived role of the University of Connecticut in FCS teacher education, and
- FCS teacher certification issues.

Among the 50 Forum participants, there was consensus that the following content areas should continue to be taught at the secondary level in FCS: textiles and design, foods and nutrition, consumerism, housing and interior design, human development and, career exploration. Subtopics were delineated for each of these major topics. This information was important in determining the components perceived as necessary in a FCS teacher education program.

Program needs identified included a forum for curricula sharing among FCS teachers in the state, dissemination and usage of national standards and state frameworks in planning FCS curricula, enhanced public relations efforts on behalf of FCS programs, support for middle school FCS programs, the continued development of and articulation to tech prep programs for the post-secondary student, and recruitment of future teachers to FCS.

When the role of the University of Connecticut was explored, participants at the Forum clearly supported the reopening of the FCS teacher education program at UConn, with the concurrent establishment of a faculty position to teach the FCS methods and curriculum courses. Proposals to facilitate the reinstatement of the program included linkages with education programs currently in existence throughout the state; options for certification at both the undergraduate and graduate levels; intensive summer, evening, and distance education components; networking with units across campus to make the best use of available courses and allowing students from various programs to consider this teacher certification option; and increasing opportunities for high school students to experience the University of Connecticut and its programs.

Suggestions related to certification issues were the exploration of dual certification possibilities, provision for life experiences to count towards certification, internships in FCS secondary school programs as a mode of meeting the student teaching requirement, the use of high school FCS teachers as adjunct faculty to teach college courses in high school facilities, and linkages with neighboring states where components of the teacher education programs might be available. An overriding goal was to maintain high standards.

Based on these discussions, the School of Family Studies faculty decided to move forward on the initiative for reinstatement of a FCS Teacher Education program at UConn. In July 2000, the consultant initiated action on several fronts aimed at moving the teacher preparation program forward.

Contacts for Collaboration

The consultant contacted a wide variety of constituents in order to assess the political climate and provide a broad-based sense of ownership in this reinstatement endeavor.

Discussions were held with the following groups and individuals:

- Personnel in the State Department of Education Certification Unit were contacted and alerted to the interest in the reestablishment of a FCS teacher education program at the University of Connecticut. Input was sought on the components of state certification that had to be met through the new curriculum. Ideas were sought on the flexibility that would be permitted by the Certification Unit.
- Leaders at the state level in FCS programming were contacted and brought into the initial discussions. Their support and suggestions were solicited.
- Faculty members and administrators in the School of Family Studies dialogued on the issue. In particular, these discussions focused on the implications for current programming if a teacher education program was reinstated in FCS.
- Faculty members at the only other institution (a private college) in Connecticut offering a FCS teacher education program provided input and ideas for collaboration.
- State FCS consultants from the two other New England states with FCS teacher education programs were contacted for suggestions and input.
- Information was gathered to assess possibilities for collaboration on teacher education efforts across various disciplines within the University.
- On-campus discussions were held with faculty in the School of Education and in the School of Fine Arts Music Education program, which offered a model similar to ideas being explored for FCS education.
- Faculty in the College of Agriculture and Natural Resources, which houses the Department of Nutritional Sciences, were actively involved in exploring ways that

students might feed into a certification program in FCS education. These individuals had long been interested in certification options for their majors. The Dean of the College of Agriculture and Natural Resources and Director of the Extension System was kept apprised of the efforts.

- The subcommittee members of the School of Family Studies Alumni Society were continually involved in dialogue. This core group led meetings with specific subgroups of FCS teachers in the state as issues surrounding certification and the pragmatics of offering specific courses arose.
- The Dean of the School of Family Studies was a strong supporter of this program thrust, working to identify resources for this effort. During the same time period, the University of Connecticut initiated a Capital Campaign. The Dean targeted an endowed chair in Family and Consumer Sciences Education as one of the thrusts of the School of Family Studies' Campaign efforts.
- Alumni of the former Home Economics Education program were contacted and subsequently lent support and personal financial resources to this effort.
- A presentation on progress on the initiative was made to the Connecticut Affiliate of the American Association of Family and Consumer Sciences at the 2000 Fall Meeting. One book company representative exhibiting at the meeting donated all the books he was exhibiting to the new program-to-be!

The Curriculum Proposal

The curriculum proposal for a teacher education program in FCS took advantage of existing program strengths and resources on the University of Connecticut campus as well as an emerging network of alliances with existing FCS teachers in the Connecticut secondary schools. The program was designed to be minimally draining on already strained financial resources but to remain viable for the future.

The proposed curriculum was a high quality, integrated baccalaureate and master of science program that would normally take an enrollee five years of study. Upon completion of the program, the student would be qualified to apply for teacher certification in FCS under the auspices of the School of Education. Students following the plan would earn either a Bachelor of Science in Human Development and Family Studies or in Nutritional Sciences. In each case, there would be a designated concentration in FCS Education at the baccalaureate level.

Students who completed the Bachelor of Science degree would then pursue the Master of Arts degree in Human Development and Family Studies with a concentration in FCS Education to attain certification. The proposal provided a seamless curriculum from one degree program to the next.

The proposal incorporated relevant courses currently existing at the University of Connecticut for the baccalaureate degree. The program consists of common General Education courses meeting University requirements, FCS content courses, and FCS professional education courses. There are some slight differences in course requirements, depending on whether the student is working towards a baccalaureate degree in Human Development and Family Studies or Nutritional Sciences. The content courses for both baccalaureate degrees cover human development across the lifespan, family development and interaction, nutrition, food science, family resource management, housing, interior design, and clothing and textiles.

At the undergraduate level, professional development courses cover exceptional learners, curriculum and methodology for FCS teaching, and management of teaching responsibilities. At

the graduate level, further work in curriculum and methodology would occur as well as the student teaching experience. Research methods and a lifespan human development course would also be required. Guided electives would assist in the completion of the Master of Arts program. The professional education courses in FCS education cover the competency areas identified in the regulations of the Connecticut State Board of Education.

The need exists for only two new content courses in order to implement the program. These are clothing and textiles and housing and interior design. Secondary FCS teachers may work as adjunct faculty to provide these courses as well as the student teaching experience supervision. Five new FCS education classes will be required, one of which would be student teaching. Depending on electives and science background, the student pursuing the plan may be able to earn cross certification endorsements in health and/or science.

Proposal Revisions

At the end of the consultant's sabbatical, the Dean of the School of Family Studies began negotiations with campus administrators to implement the proposal. In the process some proposal adjustments were made in the professional education classes to take advantage of courses currently offered in the School of Education as a part of their new Master of Arts certification program. These proposal changes were based on the assumption that the School of Family Studies would hire a faculty member in teacher education who would have a joint appointment in the School of Education. The subcommittee of the School of Family Studies that initiated this work continues to meet and assist the Dean as progress is made. The consultant has returned for meetings and continues to provide input.

Looking Ahead

The School of Family Studies Alumni Society teacher education subcommittee remains vigilant. The subcommittee has developed a case statement and a campaign strategy. The goal is to raise \$1 million dollars that would be matched 50% by state dollars as part of a generous UConn 2000 initiative. The resulting \$1.5 million would permit a FCS teacher educator position to be reestablished in the School of Family Studies.

In May 2001 the School of Family Studies faculty officially endorsed the proposal for a program in FCS education. The faculty in the Department of Nutritional Sciences will vote on the proposal during the fall of 2001.

Without the education courses in place, students are not yet being recruited. However, one student is doing the nutritional science and family studies courses understanding that the education courses may have to be taken at another institution.

Work has begun in the School of Family Studies to develop promotional materials for the teacher education program. The only barrier now is the need to generate resources for this position. This barrier that will be overcome!

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