

## Home Economics: Creating a Viable Future

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Thank you for inviting me to come and to share some ideas and engage in dialogue with you about our discipline and profession. Although I have studied home economics (family and consumer sciences), its history, and philosophy in the United States for most of my career, I have quite a shallow understanding of the profession in other countries. I must acknowledge this limitation out of respect for you and for our common profession. There is much you can teach me about the state of the profession in Korea--its strengths and challenges. I hope that we can have many discussion at this meeting and afterward and later in Kyoto at the IFHE Congress. Such dialogue can help us gain insights that we cannot obtain by talking with colleagues from our own cultures, even if we disagree, because we are blinded by our cultural orientations to the world and to our professional practice.

In this presentation, I will summarize briefly several conceptualizations of home economics held by professionals within the field as an internal challenge. Then I'll discuss some contextual or external challenges that seem to be relevant to the status of the profession today, at least in the United States. Third, I want to share collaborative work across several family and consumer sciences organizations being done to try to address these challenges.

One of the challenges that we in home economics have is to agree upon a definition and philosophical orientation to our own discipline and profession. We have both internal

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and external strengths and challenges. An internal challenge is to address this lack of agreement and inconsistency in how we understand, define, practice, and structure our field in different institutions in different countries.

## **Philosophies of home economics**

Our internal inconsistency also weakens our identity and validity among those outside the profession and raises the question among some decision makers of whether there really is a discipline and profession of home economics. To illustrate this point I will discuss briefly several conceptualizations of the field and profession. Some have emerged from similar circumstances and are related and somewhat overlapping, while others are incompatible.

There are several technical conceptualizations of home economics

An **applied science** orientation is one technical conceptualization that applies the reasoning and the findings of the natural sciences to everyday life. Ellen Richards, a chemist and other science-educated founders of the profession in the U.S., were looking for a way to use their scientific education to improve the conditions resulting from the industrial revolution. The social sciences were in their infancy, so the applied science conceptualization focused primarily on the physical aspects of everyday life.

A **technical skills** orientation emerged from the industrial revolution and the recognition that workers needed to be prepared for this new way of life, quite different from an agrarian lifestyle. This prompted an expansion of public education to the masses and the manual training movement which was based on the assumption that the mind could be trained through manual education that developed skills. This conceptualization envisions the world and humans in mechanistic terms, subject to natural laws. With the introduction of scientific management to the industrial factories, this conceptualization of the field emphasized manual skills, efficiency, economy, and predetermined outcomes. It also assumed and still assumes that human behavior is predictable and controllable. Home economics from this orientation aims to predict and control the social and natural environment by using the best techniques to control the future. It generates technically useful knowledge and skills in order to facilitate the efficient management of families' everyday lives within households. It conceptualizes homes and families as factories.

The **vocational** orientation is also technical, focusing on knowledge and skills in preparation for a particular role or job in the workforce. At first it focused on homemaking as the role for women in the workforce, but later shifted focus to paid employment in societal institutions and industries that provide the basic products and services for individuals and families. When this vocational conceptualization of home economics gained momentum in the U.S. in the early 1900s, it also grew out of the industrial revolution and the movement to educate the masses to function in a democracy and contribute to the nation's prosperity in a capitalist environment. Based in individualism and competition, individual economic independence increased in value. Society needs trained workers and the vocational programs prepare learners for that role. The federal money has influenced not only home economics programs in public school, but also those in higher education. Dr. Rima Apple (1997) shared her historical analysis of how that perspective developed from a more liberal arts view of the field as being preparation for life to have the vocational orientation.

The **Practical Arts**, which Benn (n.d.) claims is a Canadian term that implies a more aesthetic perspective combined with the practical. **Handicraft**, a term used in the Baltic and Scandinavian countries, Benn argued, reflects the creative period of the 1960s to the 1980s, developed out of a healthy economy and the women's movement that downgraded housework. In response, home economics emphasized the practical creativity in schools in Denmark (Benn, n.d.) and in the United States. Today, this perspective is manifested in design programs that focus on creating wearable art rather than functional design.

**Home Economics** is a concept contrasting to the concept of social economics (Benn, n.d.). It is the overarching interdisciplinary view of the field integrating knowledge from many disciplines to address problems of everyday life, designated the primary concern of women. Dr. Patricia Thompson has described home economics as being concerned with the private sphere, the household as the haven from the heartless world, in comparison to concern for the larger society, the public sphere. Since these spheres have different ethics, values, and characteristics, the household is seen from within quite differently than it is from the public sphere. She argues, as have human ecologists, and Dr. Marjorie Brown, that the public and private spheres are interdependent. What people do in the private sphere certainly manifests itself in the public sphere of norms, expectations, economic

activity and political policy and actions and vice versa.

**Human Ecology** is another conceptualization of home economics that further emphasizes the interdependence of humans and their environments. Although it was discussed during the Lake Placid Conferences (1899-1908) that established the profession in the United States and became part of the applied science view of the field, it gained broader recognition in the 1960s and 1970s as the effects of industrialization, population growth, awareness of the limits of non-renewable resources, and pervasive pollution affirmed that the earth is a closed life-support system that cannot be sustained by unconstrained human exploitation. In the United States, Hook and Paolucci (1970), contributed to the development of this orientation in home economics through their landmark article, *The Family as an Ecosystem* which inspired exploration of the complexity of the family as a life-supporting environment interdependent with its human built, social-cultural, and natural physical and biological environments (Shanahan, 1998). Michigan State University became a center for development and implementation of this view, although other home economics units in American higher education adopted this perspective as well.

Ironically this spring, the Provost at Michigan State University, announced plans to dismantle the College of Human Ecology, saying that a human ecological perspective is so widely used in multiple disciplines that it cannot describe the uniqueness of the field. Therefore, it can no longer be the name of a college at Michigan State University. Of course, there are other issues involved in this decision, but the Society of Human Ecology illustrates the point she made. Its members include biologists, home economists, sociologists, environmental scientists, anthropologists, geographers, and other natural and social scientists, educators and practitioners (<http://www.societyforhumanecology.org/>).

A contrasting view of home economics was proposed by Alice Chown, an English professional, Marian Talbot and Benjamin Andrews. They were all Lake Placid Conference attendees, who focused on the importance of the home as the center of **mutuality and rational consciousness** that promotes the development of moral and intellectual capacities of its members as agents who can make choices about their actions. This is certainly inconsistent with the mechanistic view of human behavior. It is also concerned with improving aspects of the larger society that hinder the family from

fulfilling its obligations. This orientation acknowledged that both men and women are concerned about understanding the processes, activities, obligations and opportunities that make home and family effective components of society. Within this perspective, home economics has integrated, interdisciplinary knowledge organized to obtain understanding of individuals and families in their home environment interacting with a democratic society. Although this orientation did not prevail during the Lake Placid conferences, it has been revived since then. It purports that the profession should be concerned with moral and intellectual freedom in addition to physical and economic well-being, enhanced through family life, an educated culture, and society (Vaines 1995; Grundy and Henry, 1995). This view is consistent with the critical science orientation to home economics and was acknowledged by Dr. Brown (1985) in her *Philosophical Studies of Home Economics in the United States*.

Brown and Paolucci (1979) first introduced the **critical science** perspective of home economics in their definition paper. Although this perspective has been studied and used by home economics around the world, it is still a minority view, presumably because, without a great deal of study, critical science is not easy to understand, explain, apply, or even question. Almost twenty-five years after Drs. Brown and Paolucci introduced their conceptualization, home economics/family and consumer sciences professionals are still asking for clarification of the meaning of critical science and what it would mean for the profession if it were understood and used more widely.

Critical science, as Brown and Paolucci (1979) would have professionals use it to solve practical perennial problems, involves a number of concepts from critical theory: human interests in a specific kind of action, communicative dialogue, and moral consciousness. They drew upon the work of the German Frankfurt School of Philosophy's foremost contemporary critical theorist, Jürgen Habermas, who has rethought and further developed the philosophies in predecessors' (Horkheimer, Adorno, and Marcuse) earlier writings (Held, 1980), building on basic ideas of critical theory. Brown and Paolucci (1979) applied his work to home economics. Habermas (1971) further developed his vision of social evolution as resulting from three types of action related to corresponding human interests in three types of knowledge.

Habermas' predecessors from the Frankfurt School had complained that theory,

traditionally defined, reinforced the status quo. In response, they presented another possibility for theory, adding "what ought to be" to the more traditional describing "what is" and "what can be." They saw their conceptualization of theory as a form of resistance to unhealthy trends in contemporary society. They argued that the rationality of science and technology had become the dominant mode of reasoning, resulting in the belief that all problems were solvable by science and technology. This dominant form of reasoning has allowed the mass media to promote a perception of the good life as limited to access to material goods and power. In contrast, their major focus was on promoting justice, equity, and human freedom. (Bredo & Feinberg, 1982; Held, 1980).

The need for instrumental adaptation to the material world prompts an interest in the kind of knowledge that predicts and controls events. Habermas calls it a "*technical*" *cognitive interest*:

1) Technical interest seeks to produce what is needed for material existence through manipulation and control of objects in the natural world. Often technical interest is focused on the domination of nature. A problem arises when technical, fact-based knowledge is used to control people who have free will, treating them as reactive objects in the natural world. In spite of this misuse, technical knowledge is needed to address the next two interests.

The need for social integration creates a related interest in knowledge that facilitates the reaching of understanding with others. Habermas calls this *interpretive/communicative cognitive interest*:

2) Interpretive/communicative interest seeks to communicate with others through mutually understood symbols. Although language is the most common focus of examination, other symbolic communication, e.g. cultural norms and practices, family patterns of interaction, values and valued ends, and the meanings of personal experiences also are studied for meaning. Interpretive/communicative knowledge is that which emerges from particular human interaction; it is not given externally as generalizations from independent research.

The need to resolve contradictions between the first two types of action, in a way that increases autonomy, creates an interest in knowledge that facilitates this resolution. Habermas refers to it as an *emancipatory cognitive interest*:

3) Emancipatory interest seeks to improve the human condition by freeing consciousness from its dependence on internal distortions of ideas, experiences, and relationships, as well as social forces that are repressive and distort communication. Emancipatory interest requires the use of technical and interpretive knowledge to understand the use and misuse of power and to determine and facilitate change needed to enhance human dignity, freedom, justice and equity for all affected by a situation or problem. An emancipatory interest is central to critical theory (Vincenti and Smith, 2004, pp. 64-65).

In his later work, Habermas (1987) wrote more extensively about his original theory of communicative action, also endorsed by Brown (1985, 1993). He identified it as an orientation striving for interpersonal or inter-subjective understanding (consensual meaning). The defining features of communicative action are communication, cooperation, and mutual understanding, not control and prediction. Central to communicative action is argumentation, a type of speech act in which participants defend or criticize a disputed validity claim through dialogue. It seeks consensus based on insight rather than on coercion such as threats and rewards (external constraints) or internal constraints such as habits and distorted thought resulting from traumas or ignorance. To achieve consensus everyone involved commits to using argumentation to seek agreement about the definition of a specific situation, justifiable valued ends for that situation, the best prospective alternatives, and a plan of action (Habermas, 1987). The discourse should be based on openness, honesty and continuity over a period of time sufficient for consensus building.

Lastly, in his 1990 work, Habermas developed more thoroughly the moral consciousness aspect of critical theory. In his moral theory he sought to apply the discourse process to moral-practical decisions.

He argued that, although moral theory explains and grounds a moral point of view, thereby clarifying the universal core of moral intuitions by making them explicit, it cannot make a substantive contribution to those morals. That is, moral theory does not develop a scheme or system of morality that is prescriptive, but it uses moral principles or admonitions already in place as a starting point for discourse. By proposing a procedure for moral decision-making, moral theory provides a framework for persons to find answers to the moral-practical issues or problems they face or those imposed on them

through such forces as history (cultural norms, precedence and habits). The Golden Rule and role of women are examples of culturally defined norms that can be examined as a beginning point in the process of building moral theory. Thus, Habermas argued, norms (valued ends), can and should be chosen through rational discourse, not just accepted because of tradition, coercion or ignorance.

Thus to Habermas discourse is crucial. It is meant to stretch context-bound ethics beyond a particular culture to identify the universal and perennial aspects of a particular problem and the best rationally and ethically justifiable solution.

However, discourse cannot itself insure inclusive and enlightened participation of all concerned. Not only does discourse have to attract participants, it must also be ethically based. To enable individuals to take part in moral argument, discourse ethics has to be prominent in the socialization and educational processes in our profession and in society.

The last perspective I will discuss today is one Vaines (1995) referred to as a **no-choice interpretation of home economics**, is pervasive and has strongly influenced the evolution of home economics. Many within the field (at least in the United States) avoid taking a position about the profession. They are not willing to commit the time and energy it takes to participate in rational dialogue because it more convenient to pursue their own interests rather than fully commit to the profession. They believe this example of "radical individualism" that devalues community life is acceptable, even desirable and morally defensible. Since their own families are their first priority, they consequently consider their work to be a job and are not truly committed to helping families beyond their own.

This internal lack of agreement on philosophy and inconsistency between its philosophy and professional practice is evidenced by the many names we have for the programs and the field, numerous professional home economics organizations, the many configurations of specialties in our programs/units, and too little commitment to the integrative focus of the field.

To resolve these inconsistencies between our philosophical views of our own profession, and between our stated philosophies and our own practice, we need to have national and international scholarly discussions that could begin with understanding of the different orientations (a way to begin any serious dialogue) and the rationales for each. Vaines (1993) argued, and I agree, that it would require study of theory, translation and incorporation of significant historical and contemporary literature to find meaning of



professional service and our mission or missions as well as extensive dialogue among members of our profession. This would involve dialogue like none we have had to date. It would require a different set of assumptions about the world and about how knowledge is obtained than those of a technical orientation. This is quite an internal challenge!

## **Where we are heading**

Our external challenges are complex as well. I'm afraid my discussion of this is ethnocentric. Therefore, I hope you will share your understanding of the context and state of home economics in Korea. A shift in societal values in the U.S. from underlying civic virtue to competitive individualism, exponential expansion of knowledge, belief in the limitless benefit of science and technology, and other factors have contributed to the weakening of a sense of community and a growing fragmentation in American society and academia. Individualism has weakened cooperation, trust, and a sense of shared stewardship of that common good that we need in society (Miles, 2003). Public universities have evolved from universities focused on developing educated persons to "multiversity's multiversities" with many disciplines developing their own cultures and competing for resources (Awbrey, Scott, and Vincenti, 1997). This contextual shift has contributed to fragmentation within home economics as specializations developed in the last half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

The internal and external challenges family and consumer sciences is facing seem to offer some explanation about why, according to Dr. Lou Ann Simon, there is a national dialogue about how to structure FCS programs in universities, presumably among top university administrators. Dr. Simon is the top academic administrator (Provost) at Michigan State University.

## **Program Viability<sup>1)</sup>**

Reorganization and restructuring of U.S. academic units within higher education is

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1) This section was developed in 2003 by the AAFCS Program Viability taskforce within the Higher Education Unit.

occurring with increased regularity. New programs are being initiated and others eliminated, and interdisciplinary and multidisciplinary areas of study are encouraged. Public universities in the U.S. have been undertaking major restructuring to reduce expenses as state governments reduce their appropriations to these institutions. Please share what is happening in higher education in Korea. What are your contextual challenges?

U.S. programs in home economics, which may be titled Family and Consumer Sciences, Human Sciences, Human Ecology or any of over twenty other names, have not been immune to this movement and in the view of many have been especially targeted. While in some cases this may signal a devaluing of Family and Consumer Sciences (FCS) programs, it may also be a recognition of the contributions we can make in higher education in the 21<sup>st</sup> century and can offer opportunities for new programs and fresh perspectives that enrich our profession.

Responding to either environment requires that we identify factors that are common to situations in which FCS programs were eliminated, combined, or realigned, and examine how these factors can lead to different conclusions and outcomes.

**1. Budget Cuts:** A common challenge in most U.S. institutions, decreased resources is often the stated reason for combining or eliminating programs. The benefits of administrative streamlining are touted as justification for restructuring. In these cases smaller units and those that do not have a high level of productivity, as traditionally measured, will be vulnerable.

Many believe this decreased level of funding, particularly for state-supported institutions, will be the prevailing environment for some time to come. Mark G. Yudof, Chancellor of the University of Texas System, and Graham Spanier, Chancellor of The Pennsylvania State University System, argue that demographic changes, particularly the swelling aging population, have changed state priorities from education to health care, prescription drugs, and public safety. According to Dr. Graham Spanier, Chancellor of the Pennsylvania State University System, the increasing age of our population is forcing local and state governments to shift funding away from higher education to pay for health care (Spanier, 2004). At the same time, the value of higher education has increased and more citizens are seeking access. The result is effectively a "voucher" system as state

officials support direct aid to students in the form of scholarships and tax benefits, rather than following the land-grant university tradition of providing support to institutions and maintaining low cost to enrolled students. Home economics programs have a strong tie to this land-grant model. We need to examine how our programs will fare in the new climate. If the familiar formula-funding model based on the number of students enrolled in a department or college is no longer applicable in state institutions, then the size of the student enrollment, an asset in many home economics programs, is less relevant.

**2. Institutional Administration:** New top-level administrators often initiate reorganization in the academic and support units at an institution. Many new administrators are also seeking to make a mark and raise the ranking of their institution. They may focus efforts on research and funding, on new high profile programs, on development, or on quality of students. In some cases a new administrator may not have sufficiently listened to the constituencies affected by the reorganization and paused to get a "sense" of the institution. This can affect administrators' perceived effectiveness and negatively influence the restructuring process and the eventual outcome.

When combination of academic units is the design of campus administrators, restructuring can provide new opportunities for FCS programs. At a number of institutions FCS has combined with education and exploration of synergies, approached in a positive spirit, has resulted in new and exciting activities--activities that might not have been pursued otherwise.

**3. Timing:** The retirement or resignation of a unit head opens opportunities for changing the structure of that unit, particularly if the conditions described in (1) and (2) pertain. Cohesiveness within the unit and development of future leaders who enjoy status at the institution can affect the outcome in this environment.

**4. Research Trends:** Competition among major research universities is intensifying and this trend, as well as funding programs in federal agencies, has given a boost to large, multidisciplinary research efforts. Researchers in FCS often find common bond with those in disciplines outside our traditional boundaries: nutrition researchers work with biochemists, family studies with psychology, textiles with engineering, and others. Without careful articulation of the distinctions of our programs however, the specialty areas can be peeled off and placed in other academic units.

Another perspective is to view multidisciplinary opportunities positively. FCS specialists bring distinctive capabilities, backgrounds, and methodologies to large research projects. Maintaining an academic home in an FCS unit emphasizes that such projects are multidisciplinary.

**5. Program Core:** There has been attention to maintaining the FCS body of knowledge as a glue to hold the profession together. We have not though consistently required a base of courses from supporting disciplines that are common to all FCS program areas. These supporting disciplines, some of them harkening back to the very foundation of home economics, were for many years pointed to as forming a common core for all majors. As the program areas in FCS have become more specialized, the underlying core courses have become specific to the specialty areas, again loosening the ties among them. Larger programs, which have emphasized the specialty areas, may be especially vulnerable. In these cases, it matters little whether a department is resident in a college or school of family and consumer sciences/human ecology or in another college. At the same time, with departments able to stand independently, a loose aggregation within a college of human sciences/family and consumer sciences may work well and provide an environment in which these programs can thrive.

**6. Economic/Political/Social Changes:** One such change, the graying of America, was mentioned above. Others that affect relevance of programs of study in higher education are the communication revolution, the dominance of the service industry, and health care concerns. In all of these areas, FCS professionals have much to contribute, and these economic and social trends have shaped development of areas within FCS. An example is the growth of programs in hospitality and tourism, a significant and growing service industry. Another is the need for nutrition and health education. FCS professionals, with expertise in nutrition and health, as well as links to the network of Cooperative Extension educators, are uniquely poised to contribute in this area. In addition we have been leaders in distance education as it has developed into a new model for teaching and learning (AAFC Higher Education Unit, Program Viability taskforce, 2003).

## **What we need to do to secure the future**

Be self-reflective, study the context, learn from history, and don't be afraid to take

action. There is a good lesson to be learned from the McGrath situation in the late 1960s in the U.S. when the public university presidents wanted to eliminate home economics from their campuses. Realizing this was being discussed, the home economics administrators across the country decided to be proactive. In 1959 they asked the executive committee of the National Association of State Universities and Land-Grant Colleges (NASULGC) for funding to do a study of the problems, objectives, and future of home economics in their member institutions. In 1964 a grant allowed NASULGC to hire Earl J. McGrath, Director of the Institute of Higher Education of Teachers College, Columbia University in New York and Jack T. Johnson, an associate of McGrath at Teachers College, to do the study. In the presidents' charge they asked McGrath and Johnson to assess the future worth of home economics. McGrath and Johnson had reviewed other professions, but with a less threatening charge. Before McGrath could even formulate his questions, the home economics administrators contacted him and offered to help in any way they could. They gave the two researchers mounds of data that they wanted them to have, including the amount of funding their units had been receiving. When the report was finished, it included some criticisms, but it also indicated that there was great potential for home economics units to serve society more than they had been able to do with the limited resources they had. In the report McGrath called for the retention of the integrity of home economics units at higher education institutions so that students could be taught the whole vision of the profession (McGrath, 1968a) and instead of isolating home economics units, McGrath recommended that universities be reorganized so that units of home economics could have a closer working relationship with other units such as education, journalism, and business (McGrath, 1968b). In addition, the report recommended that the profession increase efforts to provide intercultural and international service to establish and expand the profession outside the United States.

McGrath (1968b) confessed to the attendees of the 1968 American Home Economics Association convention that he hesitated to engage in this research because of the biased charge given him and Johnson. Since the final report did not support the university presidents' bias, they quietly filed the report. However, the home economics administrators used it to try to obtain more funding for their units and some were successful.

The lessons to be learned are to be proactive, have data ready, and be cooperative

from a position of confidence and power. We do need better research on impact our programs at all levels so that we can demonstrate the quality of our home economics programs. Be proactive in assessing programmatic weaknesses and improve them until they are truly excellent. Then use our impact data to promote our programs and show how they enhance the institutions of which they are a part. Don't wait until an institutional restructuring or some other threat occurs.

Another proactive action is to join together to make your professional associations strong. You can accomplish more together and get the attention of high level decision makers as an organization representing a large number of professionals with national and international exposure. AAFCS brought together a Program Viability Taskforce of family and consumer sciences administrators from different FCS professional organizations to identify ways to be proactive in strengthening programs and dealing with threats to the profession. We are making progress and hope to learn more from you while I'm here. We have started to talk with university trustees, support and encourage faculty within a threatened unit, but since this is new to us we aren't sure how successful we will be. We are strengthening our research on the impact of our programs, gathering information about our higher education programs, improving our research journal, encouraging grant writing on issues of the profession that need to be addressed. We are being more involved in creating the future for the profession that we want so that we can better serve individuals and families.

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