HELPING FOREIGN UNIVERSITIES DEVELOP
HOME ECONOMICS PROGRAMS
by Kathleen Rhodes*

The Human Resource Needs of the Country

My comments cannot apply to all foreign universities, except in so far as they apply to all universities. They will apply to a university in a developing country such as the one in which I have recently had the privilege of working. So far as I can gather from hearing and reading reports of work in other developing countries they may have some general application. However, when I say this I am reminded of the motto on a local "mammy" bus in Accra, Ghana, which reads, "Nothing is permanent."

I have been working in Ghana, West Africa, where the university has been modeled in the classical British tradition and where the traditions, beliefs, and practices of western civilization have been considered of major importance. Patterns of adaptation are already emerging. African nationalism and African culture studies are increasing, but there is no rejection of western economics, science and technology. Western control as exemplified by expatriate administrators is being rejected and foreign aid is regarded with some distrust. But the English language, western academic standards, and expatriate teachers are welcomed. Formerly the curriculum was predominantly British in pattern and content; now there is increasing concern that the curriculum should meet national needs, first to train the manpower required for the number of professional jobs available, and second to make the students aware of African civilization. There is a constant tug-of-war between faculty members valuing the classical tradition and those valuing the utilitarian outlook required for rapid economic development. In Africa the university is a powerful instrument of change and therefore must work hand in hand with the state -- it cannot stand aloof from the government.

After graduation, the university graduate will probably serve the government in some way, for the government increasingly requires the university to devote attention to job training in agriculture, engineering, technology, home economics, and business administration. The student has to leave the matrix of his family and village and take on traits which help him to be successful in a technological society -- to be conscious of time, to be responsible for himself, to learn new customs and new values. How can the young university graduate in home economics who has learned to be respectful to all older people learn to teach adults without diminishing that respect? How can she assume a leadership role among her people when already her education may be separating her from her family. Is it any wonder that, in spite of the favorable position of women in Ghana, they have more difficulties than we realize in coping with the responsibilities and privileges thrust on her by a college education?

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Perhaps one of our main jobs in home economics is to keep the home economics graduate in touch with her reason for being at the university -- the homes and families where she is to act as a change agent. Any university graduate is somewhat of a "marginal man," particularly the home economics graduate. How to help such graduates keep this delicate balance and deny neither their home background nor their new knowledge and status is a problem that must be solved.

The primary purpose of home economics at the university level in developing countries is the expectation of increased economic growth through the development of human resources. Education is both the flower and the seed of economic growth; there is a high correlation between per capita gross national product and secondary and higher education enrollment. However, certain sorts of education may be said to be productive of economic growth while other types have little relation to such growth. By emphasizing the development of people through improved practices in child rearing, housing, food, clothing, management and disease prevention, the study of home economics is essential in the development of human resources. Anyone with a home economics education can exert a useful influence on their community whether they are professionally employed or not. Some of the most influential women in Ghanaian communities are those who have learned principles of nutrition, health, and child rearing and are practicing these in their homes and communities, albeit at a simple level.

Another reason why governments are interested in home economics is, I believe, that the struggle to achieve rapid and self sustaining growth is likely to be long and arduous. The development of university home economics graduates who understand this can stimulate the training of other home economists at lower educational levels who can profoundly influence home and family practices towards healthy living and careful management of available resources.

The need for home economists in developing countries is probably greatest at intermediate or sub-degree level. It does not take a college degree in home economics to teach children or their mothers the things they need to know about food, clothing or shelter. But a college-graduate is required to find out what needs to be taught and to teach the teachers. A country that omits provision for this high level work may find itself with a program that is based on routine skills and makes little or no provision for the urgent needs of development. Similarly a country that depends on sending its ablest women for education in another country cannot expect to develop the needed research very rapidly, nor can it expect that graduates trained overseas will have the needed expertise in local customs and resources as those who have learned research methods in their own country.

It has been said by the noted economist Frederick Harbison that in the developing African countries one third of all university graduates should enter the teaching profession.¹ This, I think, is an under-estimate of home economics

where the majority of university graduates will be needed to engage in teaching as they train teachers, community development workers, extension and nutrition officers or day-care nursery directors. In addition, it is estimated that at least three persons are needed in a sub-degree category to each one at the university level. Well educated university graduates are essential to train these and also to carry the heavy burden of in-service education which will be necessary to improve practices as more becomes known about family problems in Africa.

In helping with plans for a university home economics program, among the first steps a foreign consultant must take is a careful study of the country's plan for development, if such a plan exists. In addition to conferences with university officials, I found that study of the Ghana Seven-Year Plan and conferences with officials of the Manpower Planning Board and in the ministries concerned with health, welfare, education and agriculture of enormous value. Reference to the Seven-Year Plan immediately pointed up certain goals consonant with the development of university plan for home economics.

These goals were:

a. Individual Ghanaian able to enjoy a modern standard of living in his home

b. The development of the productive capacity and efficiency of the nation's economy

c. Health and nutrition improvement; better child rearing practices (1800-2700 calories a day)

d. More and better sources of food produced internally (food processing to be improved -- better use of fish and cereals)

e. Improved housing

f. Training of skilled manpower at all levels

g. Increase in all educational services with emphasis on compulsory primary education and adult education and preparation of middle level employees

h. Development of Volta Electricity Scheme -- economical and efficient housing for relocation settlements, use of electricity in the home, and community and home development.

i. Preventive health care for mothers and children because of a scarcity of doctors and health units

j. Management of individual and family resources in order to conserve the country's resources

k. Increased use of women as part of the wage earning population
Each of these items taken directly from the Seven-Year Plan and confirmed by conferences with ministry and university officials emphasizes the need for a comprehensive program of home economics from the university to the rural home level.

**The Total Plan for Home Economics**

A plan for home economics at the university level must grow with and from a total plan for home economics. Such a total plan includes teacher training at sub-degree levels and programs in school and for adult education. The university program may be a small one, but without a system of home economics it can be like a body without eyes, ears, and brain to provide new knowledge and stimulation. It is obvious, too, that the university department must work closely with the appropriate government departments so that they may complement each other in the improvement of the total program.

In Ghana there is a long established system of home economics in the middle schools, where girls learn food preparation, housecraft, and needlework throughout the four years they are there. Most of the girls' secondary schools have some plan for housecraft instruction and many girls take the West African Examinations Council "Ordinary" level examinations in this subject after five years of secondary school. Teacher preparation for middle school housecraft teaching has been going on in the country for many years. Teacher preparation for secondary school teaching was, until recently, accomplished by sending able women with teaching experience to the United Kingdom for study at a domestic science college for teachers. In community development and food and nutrition education, somewhat the same system was used, local training for people working at lower levels and overseas training (usually in United Kingdom) being provided for people at higher levels. The rapid increase in school enrollments and the urge towards greater Africanization resulted in the government's decision to establish additional training centers for middle school teachers, a diploma course for secondary teachers, and a degree course for teacher trainers, supervisors in adult education activities and persons engaged in research and development related to home and family practices. A major need still largely unmet in Ghana is formalized home economics training for community development supervisors, food and nutrition board officers, and home economics extension agents to work in agricultural extension.

The degree program at the university is seen as a potential "power house" to engage in research, to develop a resident teaching program for qualified students at high levels and to provide consultant service to agencies training intermediate level home economists and to other agencies where home economics activities are important.

From the resident teaching program will come the high level workers who will, in time, obviate the need for expatriate teachers. They will staff the intermediate training institutions, supervise the intermediate level workers, and engage in research.
I have explained this system in some detail because I think it is important to point out the way in which home economic has developed in Ghana. There has been a very thriving program in the middle schools and in community development which received its impetus and originally its teachers from overseas. Now the impetus must be provided by Ghana, and in consequence the necessary leaders must be selected and trained. Incidentally, the program itself, instead of being transported from the United Kingdom or wherever the supervisors formerly had their training, is now of necessity as well as choice becoming more truly fitted to Ghanaian needs.

**The Quantity and Quality of Students**

Before I discuss the curriculum, I would like to say a word or two about the students. The present entrance requirements for the university require passing of two subjects in the West African Examination Council's "Advanced" level examinations after seven years of secondary school or 15 years of total schooling. This is accomplished by approximately 60 girls each year in Ghana, although secondary school enrollment is increasing rapidly and this number may be expected to increase. Also the total years of schooling prior to university is to be cut to 12. Meanwhile, however, the university, in response to the urgent need for increased enrollment to prepare high level workers, has introduced a scheme for pre-university preparation which allows the student to enter at an earlier age and complete the preparation in a shorter time than if she remained in secondary school. Even so, we cannot realistically expect a large enrollment in the Department of Home Economics for some time because of the relatively small enrollments of girls in the university and because home economics is not yet recognized by many of the girls secondary schools as a university subject. (In 1964, 172 men were granted a bachelors degree and only 28 women.)

This is, I believe, a matter which time will take care of. In the diploma program with which we also have been helping there were 30 applicants in 1963, 75 applicants in 1964, and 120 applicants in 1965. The enrollment has increased not only because the course is becoming better known but also because increasing enrollment in secondary schools and the larger number of free places available.

In Ghana the woman university student is most frequently from the coastal area and the daughter of an educated father. Many are the younger child in the family. Nearly half of the girls come from homes in towns with at least 20,000 inhabitants and more than half of the fathers are employed in clerical and professional occupations. This has serious implications for home economics since the trend towards urbanization and the known reluctance of college graduates to take jobs in rural areas may make it difficult to fill the jobs in rural areas and the northern region, which has so desperately needed skilled help. Some way of increasing the scope of recruits must be found, and it may be that as secondary schools increase and the country has some of the conveniences enjoyed by towns there will be less difficulty in placing graduates in rural areas.
A test of vocational interest of all girls in the fifth grade ("form") of four secondary schools showed that occupations related to home and family living rated as high as did occupations which had a scientific trend. The Maslow Social Personality Inventory showed that the girls rated low compared with their American counterparts on self confidence. This is not consonant with the story one usually hears of self-reliant confident West African women. Yet from personal experience I would say that the self-confidence comes with increasing maturity and it is not culturally appropriate for a young unmarried woman to be in any-way aggressive. Neither her previous home or school experience has encouraged this.

It seems, therefore, that a study of the anticipated student body is very worthwhile in telling how many are likely to be available and what sort of people they are. Our experience with helping to build the diploma program to provide workers at a level next below the degree program has been invaluable in helping us estimate the number and sort of student we are likely to attract at the university. The level of entrants is also critical. The subjects least frequently taken for the West African Examination Council ordinary or advanced level examinations are chemistry, physics, and mathematics. Only 15 women students passed the subject in 1964. Clearly the students admitted to home economics cannot be of lower level than any other students in the university. However, the present system of advanced level examinations in secondary school is not entirely suitable since a student usually specializes in either an area of science or the humanities. Therefore, the proposed system of university preparation or promotion form the diploma course whose curriculum contains natural science and social science at the equivalent level is seen as a preferable method of preparation. This method of pre-university preparation is increasing in use in West Africa and presents a partial answer to the problem of training higher level manpower.

The Curriculum

The principles of curriculum building are universal. This involves a study of societal needs, of learners' abilities, of the general goals of the institution and of the discipline concerned -- followed by a careful selection of appropriate content and learning experiences with a plan for continuous evaluation throughout.

Consideration of the societal needs has emphasized the application of those natural and social sciences which would bring about an understanding of economic disease prevention, improvement of nutritional practices, management of family resources, the importance of child health, and the transitional status of the Ghanaian family.

Learner's abilities as revealed by pretesting indicated that learning had frequently been unaccompanied by understanding or faculty in solving problems that included the unfamiliar. Students did not have a high reserve of health or energy and they tended to lack self confidence. They were usually the first women in their family to have achieved a university education. Those who had come from residential secondary schools had an advantage academically and socially, but were frequently in less touch with the community in which
they grew up and knew little about the homes and lives of the majority of their fellow countrymen.

The general goals of the university concerned may vary. At the University of Ghana at Legon the goals are still closely in accordance with what is sometimes called in Africa "the gold standard" of the University of London; at Kumasi the emphasis is on science and technology; at Cape Coast the emphasis appears to be on rapid production of secondary school teachers, and at the proposed college of agriculture goals will presumably be concerned with improving and increasing agricultural products for Ghanaian use and for export.

The general goals of the home economics curriculum must therefore be decided by the university concerned, and it is the responsibility of the foreign consultant to point out the aspects to be considered in light of the situation. This is where the foreign consultant may have a problem in throwing overboard some of her preconceived ideas of what is appropriate and looking at the needs of the situation she faces, prepared to select only the content which seems relevant and much of it in the basic sciences and to face the fact that much of the appropriate applied content has yet to be developed.

Thus the home economics curriculum should be based on a study of those principles of natural and social sciences which would contribute most to an understanding of the concepts essential to improving standards of home and family life. Students must be helped to understand and improve a society which is in transition. Therefore concrete application of basic ideas is useful primarily in enabling them to see ways to apply the principles of the natural and social sciences in many different ways. The goal should be to be as helpful in the coastal fishing village as in the new industrial town, as constructive in an arid community in the north as in a model housing estate in Accra.

This, too, may have an advantage in staffing the department since graduate home economists are hard to come by. Faculty in the natural and social sciences are more frequently available and may be the sources from which university-level home economist with post graduate training overseas may be drawn. Also I have found that faculty members in these departments have been particularly helpful in making practical suggestions for applying their subject to improved home and family practices.

For this reason, too, it is important that careful consideration should be given to planned periods of community experience during long vacations. During those periods students should have opportunity to learn about a variety of homes and families in their country. They should have opportunity to participate in on-going research relating to the family, to child development, and to nutritional status -- and to assist with training programs for young people and adults.

If the foreign consultant's work is to be of full benefit to a university and to other institutions afterwards, a plan for evaluation of the curriculum should be built in at the beginning. Pre-tests and information about the students can be developed and used as the curriculum comes into action, with a constant
checking against the original statement of goals. This of course is not easy in a developing curriculum of this kind since usually a program must be started without too much advance preparation. We have been particularly fortunate in Ghana in helping with the diploma curriculum since 1962. This has provided an excellent background for the next step of establishing a degree course. In the diploma program we are now about to make our first evaluation of graduates on the job, the extent to which the official curriculum is reflected in classroom practices, and the opinions of faculty and employers regarding the "product" being produced. From this we hope to gain much which will provide helpful guides in planning the university curriculum.

A multi-disciplinary approach to a field of study is not easy in a country where each discipline has tended to become solitary and highly specialized. There will be complaints of superficiality and watering down. However, if the home economists concerned can be those with a strong background in physical, biological or social science, they can be put to good use in teaching the root sciences and they can meet the scientists on equal ground and make the appropriate application in home economics.

Research

It is important that there be a planned policy for research in home economics rather than a laissez faire approach. This is particularly urgent because of lack of money, lack of manpower, and pressure of time when results are needed quickly. The need for information about homes, families, and local resources is great. Moreover, experimental studies are difficult to manage in a country where trained manpower is at a premium. Therefore the direction a research project takes should be the result of team work on the part of university and government. The project should relate to the department objective and should be so organized that staff turnover does not halt it and result in wasted money and effort. Dissemination of research results is also of major importance. Ghana is extremely fortunate in this respect; it has a remarkable amount of material available on child development, nutrition, health, and tribal customs from a number of reputable sources. However, even this material has to be hunted and collected. Therefore, it is reasonable to assume that plans for regular dissemination in an easily readable form of research on the family would benefit a far wider public than in the immediate country. It would add to the total of home economics knowledge and provide opportunity for verification of certain principles we likely hold dear without sufficient knowledge of their universality.

The development of a plan for research in every university starting a department of home economics is of special importance. The amount of reliable information about ways to improve home and family living is lamentably scarce in most countries. If this state of affairs is to be remedied the undergraduates should get some taste of research methods and some encouragement to assist with simple studies. They need to be encouraged to participate intelligently in research projects when they are on the job and to embark on studies of their own which will increase their knowledge of the material with which they work. Home economists in training must learn to think and discover for themselves or they will never add to the sum total of knowledge about families in their country.
Cooperating with Other Agencies

The main purpose of home economics at the university level in a developing country is to prepare high level manpower for the improvement of human resources and to add to the fund of knowledge about families. Since this assuredly cannot be done in an "ivory tower" it involves cooperating with other agencies in planning, in lending university human and other resources, and perhaps in obtaining funds. This is important insofar as it assists the total development of home economics in a country. The rest of the country will naturally look to the university department for leadership in improving their programs. However, it may be possible for a university department to be too cooperative and in the process to lose sight of its own objectives. Another factor in the case is the faculty members' willingness and interest in such cooperation - if they do not see the value of such cooperation, it will not take place. One test is, Does the proposed cooperation add to or detract from the main purpose of the university department's existence? Another test is, Does the university department have sufficient resources for the proposed cooperation?

In-service and refresher courses, and encouragement of home economics association are a "must" if the work being done by the university is to be understood and accepted by all persons concerned with the improvement of human resources. The inclusion of home economics as a subcommittee in the Ghana Naharal Academy of Sciences has done much for the prestige of the subject.

Cooperating agencies need to clarify their roles to avoid wasted effort and tension. There is so much to be done in a developing country that to duplicate efforts or quarrel about who should have the right to do what, is not necessary. However, some lines of responsibility may have to be drawn and these can be reassessed at intervals. This may be particularly true in a country which is seeking external aid from many sources and does not wish to be too strongly aligned with any other country. A clear delineation of responsibility should be sought.

Good human relationships are perhaps the most important key to cooperation and this is particularly important in West Africa, where there are so few trained personnel. Empire building or the exhibition of feelings of superiority on the part of university faculty are to be avoided at all costs. Open lines of communications must be maintained.

Facilities

I have said little about facilities. The sciences labs, classrooms, and library of the university can be shared. General purpose laboratories, special classrooms, and a housing and home management laboratory, which embody opportunities for investigation of a variety of levels of homemaking, should be available. A department which is simple, economical, and fits the needs of the country can be extended, changed, and improved as the program develops.
Conclusion

In conclusion, let me say that the task of the foreign consultant is to present choices, not make them. The local university and/or the local government must make the decisions -- they have to live with them! There is no single home economics program which can be exported from any country and uncrated in another for local use.

Although certain principles of curriculum planning appear to have universality and to provide a guide in a variety of circumstances, it is necessary in working with a foreign university to help construct an organized concept of home economics which is consistent with the broad goals of national human resource development and the promotion of the dignity and worth of the families of the country concerned.

There is evidence that the potential of home economics in a West African university is considerable. Home economics is seen as necessary in the development of human resources, and there are no religious or cultural pressures which act against it. As a skill subject it has been long established and respected as a part of the school curriculum. The recent establishment of sub-degree courses has provided an impetus towards consideration of a degree course. There is considerable interest in increasing the enrollment of women in secondary and higher education, and home economics is seen as a means of encouragement.

However, if this potential is to be realized, the university home economics program must be accepted by the faculties of natural and social science on whom it will depend for its basic study. It must be prepared to start with few students until there is a larger supply of women from the secondary schools. It needs to encourage a free exchange relationship with other universities with greater resources so that consultants and staff may be obtained and potential staff sent for graduate study. A program of research is as important as the teaching since only in this way can the content appropriate to the country be built up. An active extension program is equally important since the goal of the whole university program is to train leaders and develop knowledge in order that all levels of society may benefit.