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An undergraduate home economics core: perceptions of students

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An undergraduate home economics core: Perceptions of students

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An undergraduate home economics core:

Perceptions of students

by

Lisa Christine LeBleu

A Dissertation Submitted to the
Graduate Faculty in Partial Fulfillment of the
Requirements for the Degree of
DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

Department: Family and Consumer Sciences Education
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INTRODUCTION

The need for interrelatedness of various disciplines and areas of specialization is an issue of growing concern in higher education. The recent report released by the National Endowment for the Humanities, "50 Hours: A Core Curriculum for College Students," stressed the need for a core of learning which encourages "...substantive and coherent learning in essential areas of knowledge" (Cheney, 1989, p. 8).

Similarly, the home economics profession has been sensitive to the interrelatedness of its areas of specialization (Horn, 1988; McGrath & Johnson, 1968). An increase in the number of majors in specialized home economics programs in higher education has raised serious questions about the necessity for a core of learning in home economics that would provide students with a common orientation from which to function as professionals.

The American Home Economics Association's documents outlining accreditation criteria and guidelines (1982, 1984; Caples, 1990) identified a common body of knowledge as a necessary criterion for programs of home economics in higher education. Requiring specific course work of all majors has been the most common method of meeting this criterion. Often the courses are selected from established offerings in areas of specializations. As a result, the interrelationships of all the courses may or may not be evident to students.

The College of Family and Consumer Sciences at Iowa State University reviewed its core concepts when the university changed from a quarter system to a semester system. The core consists of eight hours of specific coursework to address the concepts of Professional Development, Human Development, and Nutrition. In addition, concepts of Management,
Aesthetics, Educational Principles, and Public Policy can be filled by specific courses in the college, parts of courses in the major, or by courses outside of the college.

A research project was simultaneously begun with the implementation of the new core in order to monitor results of the curriculum innovation. An instrument designed to determine students' perceived competence to perform tasks related to the concepts was administered to students using a pretest and posttest design. The items in each category contained a strong emphasis on individual and family applications using a Likert-type scale for measurement. A factor analysis of the graduating seniors' responses to the items verified the original concepts and one additional concept, Home Economics Profession. The data from this project revealed that students generally reported a higher ability to perform tasks more closely related to their majors (Smith, 1990). Additional comparisons of the pretest and posttest data from students' responses showed that change occurred in each category of concepts (Smith, 1988).

These studies provided important information about students' growth and change in relation to predetermined core concepts. However, they also indicated a need for additional research that would allow for the emergence of new concepts and provide some insight into students' views of the integrative nature of home economics. This research project was designed to address that need by seeking insight into the personal meaning of home economics as experienced by students and working with the students to describe those meanings and their relationship to concepts, values, and competencies to be used by specialists in home economics.
Explanation of Dissertation Format

This research is presented in the alternate dissertation format approved by the Iowa State University Graduate Faculty. In the alternate format, the research is presented in manuscript form suitable for submission to refereed scholarly journals.

The dissertation begins with an introduction and review of the literature that provide an overview for the entire research project. The body of the dissertation includes two manuscripts. The first manuscript, Testing a Theory for an Undergraduate Home Economics Core, explores the theory that is the foundation for a proposed home economics core. This manuscript has been published in Themis: Journal of Theory in Home Economics. In the second manuscript, An Undergraduate Home Economics Core: Perceptions of Students, experiences with and perceptions of home economics are described from the viewpoint of fourteen undergraduate students in the College of Family and Consumer Sciences at Iowa State University. This manuscript is written for submission to the Home Economics Research Journal. The authorship for both manuscripts is shared with Dr. Frances Smith, major professor of the doctoral candidate.

The final chapter of the dissertation provides an overview of the research procedures, findings, conclusions and recommendations for future research directions. The reference list following the final chapter includes references used in the introduction, review of the literature, and research overview and future directions. The two individual sections contain separate reference lists.
Human Subjects in Research Statement

The Iowa State University Committee on the Use of Human Subjects in Research reviewed this project and concluded that the rights and welfare of the human subjects were adequately protected, confidentiality of data was assured, informed consent was obtained by appropriate procedures, and risks were outweighed by the potential benefits and expected value of the knowledge sought. The Human Subjects Approval Form is in Appendix A.
REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Introduction

Over the years, the field of home economics has been sensitive to the interrelatedness of its areas of specialization. The issues of integration and specialization have raised questions about the necessity for core concepts in home economics curricula and the role of such concepts in facilitating the students' understanding and identification with the integrative nature of the home economics profession.

The review of literature begins with an examination of selected goals and definitions of general education which share the common theme of general education as a foundation for lifelong learning as well as preparation for the art of living. From these, a foundation is built for a home economics core curriculum as a more focused general education in home economics whose purpose is to strive for both breadth and depth of knowledge related to the home economics profession.

An Integrative Focus in General Education

Selected definitions and goals of general education

Despite its simplicity and familiarity, the term general education remains ambiguous. Various meanings and interpretations have evolved over the years and current discussions have yet to yield a generally agreed upon definition and set of goals. Nevertheless, general education has been one guiding ideal for American colleges since their inception (Gaff, 1983). It seems appropriate, then, to set the stage for a home economics core by providing an overview of selected definitions and goals of general education.
education that provide a foundation for an integrated home economics core curriculum.

Historically, general education on the intellectual side consisted of the 3 R's--reading, writing, and arithmetic. These were the fundamental tools of communication and exchange, and they constituted the least possible educational necessities likely to permit one to deal effectively with fellow human beings (Wriston, 1934). With the passage of time, however, it was found that this education reflected a mere subsistence level and was thus deemed inadequate.

Among the earliest and most readily recognized advocates of general education was John Henry (Cardinal) Newman. He believed that the university was a "place of teaching universal knowledge" (Newman, [1873], 1976, p. ix). Teaching and learning were to occur in a community of scholars where the goal of an education would be to prepare students for life. Studies consisting primarily of literature and religion were deemed most appropriate for achieving this goal (Gaff, 1983).

Alfred North Whitehead (1929, p. 1), a philosopher and mathematician, focused on education from the viewpoint of the student and suggested that educators should strive to produce individuals who "possess both culture and expert knowledge in some direction," and avoid the teaching of inert ideas, that is, "ideas received into the mind without being utilized." He further suggested that knowledge of the past should be used only insofar as it equips and prepares the learner for the present. In his book, The Aims of Education (1929, p. 10), Whitehead states, "...the solution which I am urging is to eradicate the fatal disconnections of subjects which kills the
vitality of our modern curriculum. There is only one subject matter for
education, and that is Life in all its manifestations."

Like Whitehead, Prescott (1934, p.21) suggested that general
education be devoted to preparation for the art of living and advocated the
following specific objectives for general education: (1) the development
of clear thinking leading to intelligent action; (2) the development of
clear, convincing, and persuasive expression as the medium of sharing
thought; (3) the development of an imagination sensitive to the effects of
literature, music, and art; and (4) the knowledge and understanding of the
history of the past and the environment of the present in those respects
that vitally affect intelligent activity in our present day world.

Similarly, McGrath (1959) identified three types of abilities and
traits of personality which a general education might be expected to
engender. These are: (1) to provide essential knowledge; (2) to cultivate
intellectual skills accompanied by the ability to express oneself through a
variety of media; and (3) to cultivate traits of personality and character
which include, but are not limited to, intellectual curiosity and humility.

The term "useful" as it relates to education appeared in early
writings. Wriston (1934, p. 1) suggested that general education is "an
education useful to all who possess it, at all times, and under all
circumstances." He advocated categories of intellectual experiences that
comprise general education. Among these are appreciation, hypothesis
formulation, and reflective synthesis. Appreciation is defined as
"assertion of the validity of emotional experience as worthy of recognition
on a parity with the intellectual life" (p. 9). Hypothesis formulation
refers to the construction of coherent patterns of thought from available data. One of the major functions of hypothesis formulation is to awaken students to a recognition of the necessity for and genuine validity of tentative conclusions. Reflective synthesis is viewed as the ultimate experience in general education. It involves the synthesis of patterns built up through hypotheses. It is an effort to give reality not merely to observation but to experience itself and to find meaning not only in the world about us, but in life.

On the other hand, Robert M. Hutchins (1936) held a strong belief that general education was the training ground for the intellect. Believing that universities were becoming too vocationally oriented and that faculty had research rather than teaching as a primary interest, he instituted an experiment in general education at the University of Chicago during the 1940s and early 50s called the "Chicago Plan." Among the basic tenets of the Chicago Plan was that it was possible to decide what knowledge and competence all students should acquire and that such knowledge was best acquired by actively examining and discussing exemplary works, leading ideas, and central issues in the humanities, social sciences, and natural sciences (Ward, 1989).

As societal changes occurred, so did the conversations about general education. Bailey (1976) advocated three basic purposes of general education: (1) to help individuals understand, anticipate, and successfully adapt to major physical and psychological changes over the life cycle; (2) to assist individuals in building communities where they can cope, work, and share free time to "...maximize inner fulfillment and
joyful reciprocities" (p. 5); and (3) to assist individuals in understanding and influencing political systems in order to promote liberty and justice for all persons. Similarly, Leon Botstein (1979, p. 36) suggested that a liberal arts core curriculum should "stress common substance, ... with a cogent approach to the central personal and political questions facing students."

Stauffer (1979, p. 95), on the other hand, advocated a set of common educational goals that included job entry skills, preparation for professional growth and the development of professional attitudes and ethics and "general education for the liberation of the thinking process."

The mission of general education today has been described by Boyer (1981) as a way

...to help students understand that they are not only autonomous individuals, but also members of a human community to which they are accountable. In education, as in life itself, one aspect of our being must not eclipse the other. In calling for a reaffirmation of general education, our aim is to help restore the balance. Rather than continuing to be the spare room in the house of intellect, general education must have a central purpose of its own (p. 10).

Boyer (1981) identified six broad themes illustrating areas of interdependence which should be studied by all students. These themes focus on the shared use of symbols, shared membership in groups and institutions, shared dependency from the standpoint of the individual as both producer and consumer, an understanding of the ordered interdependent nature of the universe, an understanding of a shared sense of time, and an
exploration of our shared values and beliefs. Learning, then, "is not simply a matter of empiricism or of conditioning but a skill that derives from our unique ability to deal with the world symbolically" (Bell, 1968, p. 300).

Unlike Boyer, who advocated a more prescribed framework for achieving a general education, Wick (1981) suggested that it was not necessary for all students to follow an identical framework. Rather, he contended that experiences in general education should share a historical dimension, an intellectual dimension, and an analytical dimension.

Despite considerable variations and interpretations of the meaning and goals of general education, some common qualities have been identified. In summary, Gaff (1983) contends that general education is rooted in the liberal tradition and involves study of the basic liberal arts and sciences; stresses breadth and provides students with familiarity with various branches of human understanding as well as the methodologies and languages particular to different bodies of knowledge; strives to foster integration, synthesis, and connectedness of knowledge rather than discrete bits of specialized information; encourages the understanding and appreciation of one's heritage as well as respect for other peoples and cultures; includes an examination of values--both those relevant to current controversial issues and those implicit in a discipline's methodology; prizes a common educational experience for at least part of the college years; requires the mastery of the linguistic, analytic, critical and computational skills necessary for lifelong learning; and fosters the
development of personal qualities such as tolerance of ambiguity, empathy for persons with different values, and an expanded view of self (p. 7-8).

Concerns and criticisms of general education

Despite the continued interest in general education, there is growing concern on many campuses as well as among the general public that too many students are failing to become generally educated people. According to Tobias (1982), one of society's major criticisms is that students are not receiving a broad general education. Similarly, Gaff (1989) discussed the concerns that college graduates lack a broad span of knowledge, clear communication and critical thinking skills, and the ability to work with others as well as accepting responsibility for independent action.

Kerr (1991) suggested that general education has been losing ground for a long time. According to Kerr (1991, p. 300) the curricula of today tend to "reflect more the internal pressures of student choice and departmental rivalry, and external labor market pressures to add to this or that subject, than they do any careful intellectual consideration." It is precisely this attention to outside market demands which Roemer (1983) identified as an obstacle to achieving a core curriculum. While Roemer believes that "certain qualities of mind are needed in order to use knowledge well", he points out that "market forces and the demands for professional training do not ordinarily focus attention on developing those qualities of mind" (p. 300).

Boyer (1987) lamented that one of the tragedies of our time is that students have very little understanding of connections and tend to be
lacking in perspective. Chambers (1981, p. 45) defined perspective as "context or point of view, the ability of an educated individual to evaluate relative significance of things and events in relation to other things and events." Chambers suggested that perspective is the essence of liberal education and that it must be sufficiently broad and encompassing so as to go beyond disciplinary boundaries.

Likewise, Miller (1983, p. 101) has suggested that "education is less a single lens through which the world is examined than a process enabling students to recognize, to assess, and to use the variety of lenses available for the examination of a given 'landscape'."

The recent report released by the National Endowment for the Humanities, "50 Hours: A Core Curriculum for College Students," stressed the need for a core of learning which encourages "...substantive and coherent learning in essential areas of knowledge" (Cheney, 1989, p. 8). Similarly, Crowell (1989, p. 60) suggested that a new way of thinking is needed in order to find the best ways to prepare students for the future. He questioned many of our current curricula and instructional practices which "convey to students a world of knowledge unrelated to meaning and a world in which outcome is independent of process." Crowell advocated a new paradigm in which content and process are reconceptualized to stand in relation to one another. He further suggested that the school and all of its constituent parts become more integrated, and that curriculum development must focus on interdisciplinary studies.
Students' views of general education

Although general education has been receiving increased attention over the past several decades, there seems to have been little effort to assess the views of students. Nevertheless, the few studies conducted have revealed interesting and valuable information concerning students' perceptions of general education and their suggestions for change.

Vacc and Silvestro (1980) conducted a study to assess the degree of similarity or differences in the opinions and attitudes of students who attended the same university in 1967 and 1978. They assessed the four general areas of personal values, attitudes and perceptions about higher education in general, intellectual, cultural, and social development of students, and future plans and aspirations. In the 1967 survey, a total of 990 undergraduates were randomly selected from the resident student population at a state supported college in western New York State. The sample included 420 freshmen, 246 sophomores, 186 juniors, and 138 seniors. For the 1978 survey a total of 431 undergraduates were randomly selected from the resident student population of the same institution. The sample consisted of 142 freshmen, 105 sophomores, 100 juniors, and 84 seniors.

The findings indicated that the 1978 students tended to value business executives while 1967 students held writers and scientists in higher esteem. The students of 1978 showed a trend toward emphasis on the importance of preparation for making a living while 1967 students placed greater importance on the stimulation of new ideas. In addition, the students in 1978 reported that time spent in college was more positive than did students in 1967. The 1978 students also reported that their college
courses were more interesting, thought-provoking, and less structured than that of 1967 students.

In general, Vacc and Silvestro (1980) found that the students of 1978 were more liberal in personal behaviors and values, more vocationally oriented and less "knowledge for knowledge's sake" oriented, and pragmatism was the philosophical basis for their academic endeavors. Further, the stimulation of new ideas and the reading and discussion of contemporary issues basically assumed a position secondary to the pursuit of their own goals.

McDougle (1980) conducted a survey of college students for their perceptions of their most meaningful and least meaningful college experiences, their pet peeves on campus, and desired changes. McDougle administered his questionnaire to an introductory physical science class of 120 students at a church related, coeducational, private liberal arts college with an enrollment of 1,200. The course was designed for non-science majors, and was a core course required of all students for graduation. His findings revealed that students did not appear to be overly concerned with the academic aspects of their college experiences. Instead, they appeared to be far more influenced by activities that went on outside of the classroom rather than what occurred in classes.

The students expected faculty members to be academically competent, but were most impressed by the interest which faculty exhibited in them as individuals. According to the students, the major shortcoming of administrators was a lack of awareness of students' feelings and attitudes.
In terms of general education, 12 students listed a specific general education course as their most meaningful experience while 37 listed a specific general education course as their most meaningless experience. (The names or titles of these courses were not indicated). McDougle noted that the courses named as meaningful were not the same ones as those listed as meaningless. Based on this information, he contended that faculty members who taught the courses were probably responsible for the dichotomous views of the general education courses.

Gaff and Davis (1981) undertook a major study of student views of general education as part of the Project on General Education Models (GEM), an activity of the Society for Values in Higher Education. Ten of the Project member institutions participated in the survey. This was a diverse group that included both public and private institutions as well as large and small schools. A total of 1,698 usable questionnaires were completed and returned. The findings of their study indicated that a vast majority of students viewed a broad general education as being important. Students also felt that other goals such as career related knowledge and skills, self-knowledge and personal development, understanding and mastery of specialized knowledge, the ability to get along with others, and intellectual tools to continue learning new areas were important.

When asked to rate the importance of several specific competencies often regarded as objectives of general education, several clusters of abilities that students rated as very important were (1) an understanding of one's self-concept, motivations, and personality; (2) the ability to get
along with people; (3) good oral and written communication skills; and (4) the development of higher level thinking skills.

The students generally tended to view specific subject matter areas such as foreign language and Western civilization and heritage as less important than the development of thinking and communication skills and personal/interpersonal competence. Gaff and Davis (1981) concluded that there is no evidence that students are content with narrow specialization. "On the contrary, students attest to the importance of general education, particularly if it is viewed as one among other liberal purposes of a college education" (p. 116).

In response to questions about courses outside of the major but required for graduation, Gaff and Davis (1981) found that 46% of the respondents said all or most of these courses introduced them to significant ideas, concepts or intellectual perspectives while 53% said this was accomplished in only some or very few of the courses. Forty-three percent said the majority of the courses contributed to a broad intellectual foundation for the study of their major field of specialization. Only 37% of the students reported that the majority of courses had engaged and challenged their own ideas and attitudes. Furthermore, only 35% said the courses had stimulated their curiosity and desire to learn more and 33% indicated that the courses had helped them to master new methods of intellectual inquiry. As a result of these findings, the researchers concluded that a majority of required courses outside of the students' majors failed to accomplish the purposes for which they were intended.
An additional section of Gaff and Davis’ questionnaire focused on directions for change. The results of this section indicated that 83% of the students preferred distribution requirements over a prescribed core curriculum; 79% preferred active methods of learning over passive methods; 74% reported a preference for integration of courses as opposed to independent courses, and 72% preferred an emphasis on practical or concrete matters rather than an emphasis on theoretical or abstract issues.

While the number of studies specifically focusing on students’ views of general education is limited, their findings indicate that students share many of the concerns of faculty members and administrators who are attempting to strengthen general education. Students do value a broad general education and their views must be taken into consideration if general education reforms are to succeed.

The relationship of general education to specialized education

An emphasis on general education does not imply that it should be embraced without regard for "specialist" education. "If knowledge be a true whole, depth of understanding in one field and appreciation of many are parts which enrich not only the whole, but each other" (Williams, 1968, p. 7).

Williams (1968) has suggested that the aims of study in breadth should focus on helping the student to see his special field in the context of the whole of knowledge. It should also develop a freedom from pride which reminds the individual that he does not know all the answers but gives him the curiosity to look for answers and the confidence to know where to find them. "General education should develop the humility which
comes to the student who knows enough about a subject to know who knows it better" (Williams, 1968, p. 8).

Stauffer (1979) emphasized that institutions of higher education must blend general and professional education in order to produce individuals who are both well educated and prepared for fulfilling careers. Boyer (1987) contended that most students come to college with fundamental questions about the relationship among disciplines, but these questions are rarely addressed as the emphasis is increasingly placed on specialized or professional education.

It has been suggested that interdisciplinary or multidisciplinary approaches to knowledge are not a substitute for disciplinary depth. Rather, they are supplements to specialization, links to connect specializations, and "new lenses through which to see the three-dimensional character of all specializations (Bailey, 1977, p. 257)." Bailey further states:

This nation is in woefully short supply of people equipped to look at problems as a whole, at life as a whole, at the earth as a whole. Without a sense of the whole, we have no way of evaluating the parts, no way of appraising the importance of the expert, no way of seeing that the fragmentation and violence we lament in the world around us is but the mirror image of our own cluttered and frenetic psyches.

[General education] at its best is not designed to relieve life of its pain and uncertainty. It is designed to help people have creative engagements with adversity, to discover and draw upon the wellsprings of existential joy, and to recognize our common plight
and the need for one another (p. 257).

In summary, there is a place for both specialized and generalized knowledge in the curriculum. The key appears to lie in a more healthy balance between general and specialized knowledge and in the integration of one's discipline or area of specialization with that of others.

An Integrative Focus in Home Economics

Having examined general education and its aims, what is its relationship to the social sciences and to home economics in particular?

In his discussion of the relationship of social sciences to general education, Gaus (1934, p. 75) stated that in general education the "ability to observe, appraise, and communicate is employed in an effort to understand natural forces, social institutions, and human intellectual and aesthetic appraisals of them." All individuals must somehow become acquainted with the world in which they live--a world of physical things and forces as well as persons who by nature are best able to realize themselves in such social groups as the family, the neighborhood, and political society. The ability to cope and survive in this "social" world then becomes practically a prerequisite to life itself.

Though dated, Gaus' (1934) view seems to coincide with the mission of home economics. Home economics is identified as a professional field dealing with the practical aspects of human life (e.g., family relationships, child rearing, financial management). Home economics is not the only profession dealing with one or more aspects of family living; however, its uniqueness is that it is the only profession concerned with all of them, with their interrelationships, and with the total picture
which they form (Committee on Philosophy and Objectives, 1959). This holistic approach provides the rationale for advocating that future home economics professionals be able to conceptualize the synergistic, integrative nature of the profession as they work within their various areas of specialization to assist individuals and families in solving practical problems (AHEA, 1984).

The American Home Economics Association's (AHEA) documents outlining the accreditation criteria and guidelines (AHEA, 1982, 1984; Caples, 1990) identified a common body of knowledge as a necessary criterion for programs of home economics in higher education. This common body of knowledge is composed of a knowledge base in the areas of human/family development over a life span, human nutrition, resource management, and aesthetics/design (Caples, 1990).

Requiring common experiences of all students through a core curriculum is one means of acquainting students to this holistic approach. It helps individuals "identify with the profession while recognizing the specializations within the field" (Beavers, et al., 1980, p. 7). According to Weddle (1986, p. 6), "a true core curriculum gives professionals a common body of knowledge, but more importantly provides them with a common orientation or focus to all knowledge." The integrating focus is "the study of the inter-relationships of people and of people to their near social and physical environments" (Caples, 1990, p. 5). The professional practice of home economists therefore will be facilitated by a common, integrating focus and the ability to relate to other areas of
specialization. The purpose of the core curriculum is to strive for both breadth and depth of knowledge related to the profession.

Barriers to an integrated curriculum in home economics

Although there is support for and recognition of the value of an integrated core curriculum in home economics, the development and implementation of such a curriculum have not occurred to the extent which many educators would like. The reasons for this lack of curriculum development and implementation are closely linked to those which have hindered general education.

Roemer (1983) has suggested that a core curriculum is difficult to justify because it involves a claim that some particular knowledge is necessary to becoming an educated person and such a claim is not easily defended in view of our pluralistic society. He further identified economic considerations as factors which impinge on the core curriculum. The need to make graduates competitive in the job market sometimes leads to an emphasis on professional training which leaves little time for humanistic studies.

Dressel (1979, p. 316) argued that interdisciplinary core requirements have failed largely because "faculty members trained in specific disciplines are not interested in ... interdisciplinary courses, are uneasy in teaching them, and generally see their stature in their basic disciplines as eroded by the interdisciplinary demands."

Much like general education, a number of barriers have hindered an appreciation and acceptance of an integrative focus in the home economics profession. The first of these is an increased emphasis on
specializations. According to Boyer (1987) the percentage of baccalaureate degrees awarded in business, computer science, engineering, and the health professions increased between 1968 and 1984 while the percentage of degrees awarded in traditional liberal arts fields, social sciences, and education declined.

Following the same trend, enrollment data for home economics in higher education from 1968-1982 showed significant increases in specialized programs while enrollment in general home economics and home economics education programs decreased (Harper and Davis, 1986). This growth of specializations has led to a narrow focus which de-emphasizes a common body of knowledge.

A second reason the profession of home economics seems to have difficulty in implementing an integrative core is the move toward personal ambition and preparation of students for careers while simultaneously placing less value on the domestic sphere of life. In placing career preparation ahead of the family and the common good of society, the home economics profession has contributed to a world view that lessens the emphasis on education for family life (Horn, 1988).

Thirdly, the integration process in home economics has been hindered by professors who have been trained in the specialist mode and have not learned the integrative process themselves. According to Horn (1988, p. 32), the academic environment of the 1960s and 1970s produced a generation of professors who have utilized their subject matter to pursue their own areas of interest rather than turning to integrative
perspectives. "They have become subject matter experts rather than professional home economists."

A fourth reason relates to the nature of higher education institutions. These institutions have contributed to the narrowly focused, highly specialized view (Vincenti, 1990; Irvin, 1989). Universities are expected to be more research oriented, and the reward system caters to such a narrow, specialized focus. According to Irvin (1989, p. 6), "almost all faculty members have been trained in research universities and hold research credentials. Their expectations are that they will be appointed and evaluated on the basis of their performance as researchers, and in fact, that is commonly the case...."

Although barriers to integration do exist, there is no real evidence to suggest that they cannot be overcome. In fact, serious consequences may result if home economics professionals do not seek solutions to such barriers. Vincenti (1990) has suggested that lack of a common commitment to a mission and philosophy of home economics may lead to the dissolution of the profession.

The potential of integration

Bell (1968) defined an intellectual community as one in which common standards and values permit the exchange of judgments and opinions on diverse matters of experience. With this in mind, an examination of the potential of integration in the "intellectual community" of home economists follows.

Because of its centrality to the focus of home economics, the family must have primary consideration. The structure and functioning of families
and individuals within these families may vary at different times and in different places, but it remains the basic group in human societies. "It provides newborn members with their initial experiences of other human beings and with their earliest definitions of themselves and the world in which they are destined to live" (Yorburg, 1983, p. xii). Because each newborn ultimately assumes his/her role in a larger society, it is imperative that society accept some responsibility for the nurturing of each of its members. This, then, prevents "family" from being solely relegated to the private sphere of life and moves it, at least in part, into the public sphere. The two spheres are no longer separate once we realize that transactions must take place across boundaries as families interact with their environment.

As a profession whose mission is to enhance the well-being of individuals and families, the home economics profession is charged with the task of finding an appropriate role in assisting families as they strive to reach a maximum level of functioning. Individuals and families may encounter problems which require the expertise of specialists, however, the problems are often complex and multi-faceted. As a specialist within the home economics profession, each individual has unique competencies and skills which allow him/her to contribute to solving a particular aspect of a complex problem. Addressing the problem to its fullest extent and in all of its complexity often could benefit from the combined expertise of a number of specialists in home economics. Here, then, is where home economists must rely on their knowledge and skills as integrationists to
seek out those with whom they might work to address the issue in its broader context.

As a professional, there is also much to be gained in the pursuit of knowledge through an integrative focus. Vincenti (1990, p. 191) has suggested that this integrative focus may facilitate a better understanding of the various "paradigms or theories of knowledge that underlie various specializations and/or that could provide alternative ways of knowing, being, and working." These endeavors in shared learning may lead to previously unimagined possibilities in theory building. Theories which allow for approaching and resolving the practical problems of individuals and families while simultaneously rebuilding the bonds between areas of specialization can be the foundation of larger research efforts. Additionally, the researcher’s skill in theory formulation is enhanced by the ability to see the interconnectedness of paradigms from each area of specialization.

Shared endeavors can build the foundation for cooperative research which, according to Horn and Nickols (1982), marks a significant step in the developmental process of a discipline (home economics) becoming a true profession instead of a mere collection of parts (specialties). Planned connections between and among the various specializations within home economics offer the potential for a holistic and interdisciplinary contribution in research related to concerns of individuals and families. The reward derived from such an approach is the possibility of a more comprehensive impact on the research questions posed. The researcher often gains personal growth and enlightenment as he/she discovers new insights
into his/her area of specialization as well as the role of that specialization in the broader context of society.

Furthermore, integration fosters the ability to make connections between native intelligence and disciplinary expertise. In discussing connections, Miller (1983, p. 103) suggested that the building of connections stems beyond the holistic view to include "the ability to take disparate 'units' and to note that they are relevant to a wide variety of wholes. This ability assumes that the capacity to combine is endless, that what is learned in any one context may take on a very different meaning, significance, and value in another context." The ultimate recognition is that there is not one "big picture" but rather that each bit of information can be connected to others to form numerous possibilities and practically endless interpretations. This, alone, makes integration an exciting and worthwhile undertaking for it encourages depth of knowledge, breadth of understanding, and the transfer of knowledge from one situation to another.

In addition, the ability to pursue a meaningful career is enhanced by a broad education that enables understanding of how that career meshes with others and in turn, provides expanded employment opportunities. Birch (cited in Horton, 1990) forecasted that college graduates of 1990 would hold 10 to 12 jobs across three to five fields. According to Horton (1990), those who prepare themselves for growth and change will have the highest probability of success. Abilities such as that of assessing situations, determining alternatives, and providing a support system which allows others to determine desirable actions are useful in many job situations. A professional with a broad general education and an
integrative focus related to individuals and families is a valuable asset
to employers in a variety of job settings.

Developing and Testing a Theory for an Integrated Undergraduate
Home Economics Core Curriculum

The meaning of a common body of knowledge as well as the merits of an
integrated core curriculum have been addressed in previous sections of this
literature review. The development of a theory for an undergraduate home
economics core curriculum and proposed procedures for testing it are
presented here.

Theory Development

A review of the history of home economics provided insight for the
development of a theory related to an integrated undergraduate home
economics core curriculum. Individuals who gathered for the Lake Placid
conferences from 1899 to 1909 had an underlying concern for the effect of
the industrial revolution on the home and family. Some examples of these
cconcerns (practical problems) were sanitation, nutrition, welfare of
children, and role of women in household work. These concerns related to
family are still valid, but the social context from which they evolve has
changed (Brown, 1985). Family forms have become more diverse and the
family unit has moved from one of production to consumption. Regardless of
the changes, however, "family" remains as the central focus of home
economics.

The early areas of study in home economics were food, clothing, and
housing. Later, household and institutional management was added because
institutional households were seen as occasional substitutes for homes.
Much of the early research in home economics was focused on relieving the drudgery of household work.

Today, the research base has broadened to include the near and far environment that impinges on the family. Home economists are now encouraged to play a role in determining the impact on families of public procedures, programs, and policies, as well as being influential in determining these policies.

The field of home economics continues to encompass both diversity and unity. It is not a single discipline, but an interdisciplinary field. The problems home economics professionals encounter are often interdisciplinary in nature, requiring the use of specialized knowledge in an interdisciplinary way. Professionals are asked to view humans and their near environment as an integrated whole, mutually influencing each other (Bubolz and Sontag, 1988).

According to Brown and Paolucci (1979) "...theory consists of knowledge formulated in conceptual categories and in patterns of relationships among those categories" (p. 79). This definition by Brown and Paolucci allows the idea of a common body of knowledge to be formed into a theoretical framework. The central theme focuses on practical problems of home and family. It is hypothesized that the common orientation of home economics professionals in relation to this focus requires a knowledge base in the concepts of human/family development over a life span, human nutrition, resource management, and aesthetics/design (Caples, 1990). In addition, there is need for knowledge related to education and public policy concepts. (See Figure 1).
Programs built around these common learnings would identify concepts, values, and competencies needed by all professionals. Common concepts provide a basis for professionals to work together as a team to address needs of individuals and families. Core values provide a common justification for motivation and action. Competencies enable actions necessary for the mission to be achieved.

Figure 1. An integrated home economics core
Each category of concepts consists of knowledge and skills used by professionals in specialized fields of home economics to assist individuals and families as they seek to resolve a specific discipline-related problem of the home and family. All the specialized categories are needed to provide a framework for helping individuals and families resolve simultaneously all the special parts of a practical problem. For example, a family with a financial problem has a many faceted problem. In this case, knowledge about management of resources is augmented by knowledge about food, clothing, and shelter. In addition, other concerns (e.g., family relationships and job or school-related factors) often enter into the determination of any action to be taken. Knowledge from each category provides the foundation for the whole.

AHEA accreditation guidelines require that programs include sufficient studies to provide knowledge of lifespan growth and development (Caples, 1990). Professionals with knowledge of human development will understand the physical, intellectual, emotional, and social characteristics and needs of individuals and families as they progress through the life cycle. They will use knowledge about developmental characteristics and norms in working with individuals and families.

"The interdependence of the principles of human nutrition and food in the behavior and health of individuals..." is another area of study outlined in AHEA accreditation documents (Caples, 1990). Professionals with knowledge of nutrition will understand the basic need of every individual for food and nourishment, and their relationship to growth and development. Evaluating the soundness of dietary claims, being able to acquire reliable
sources of nutrition information, and educating to improve food choice behavior are useful competencies for helping families deal with practical home and family problems. Professionals also need to recognize the physiological, sociological, psychological, and cultural factors that influence food choices and how these choices affect other areas of family life.

The ability to assist others in their roles as managers and consumers who must make decisions about resources of time, energy, and money requires an understanding of family resource management and decision-making behavior (Caples, 1990). Being able to evaluate alternative actions and recognizing when additional expertise is needed are useful competencies for professionals. Knowledge of the interrelatedness of the family and its near and far environments can facilitate the choice of management strategies.

In accreditation guidelines, the impact of design on human behavior and lifestyles is regarded as a necessary area of study (Caples, 1990). Aesthetics or design fosters an appreciation for those things which go beyond everyday survival to bring pleasure and satisfaction to individuals and families. Using the components and principles of design to enhance individual and cultural environments can add to the sense of well-being of individuals and families.

Education, broadly conceived, is the tool through which one discovers his/her world and its importance cannot be underestimated (Bailey, 1976). Education begins in the family as it nurtures its young, but that responsibility is later entrusted, at least in part, to the care of
institutions such as public schools. Professionals need knowledge that will enable them to help families in their roles as educators as well as assist them in seeking out educational institutions that will foster positive growth and learning experiences for their members. Knowledge of learning theories, planning techniques, dissemination strategies, and evaluation methods are professional tools to enhance the decision-making abilities of professionals as they disseminate information and facilitate the building of competencies by individuals and families.

Mastery of a common knowledge base in home economics is expected to facilitate the development of professionals who will assume roles as "team members concerned with present and future societal issues" (Caples, 1990, p. 5). The concept of public policy addresses the need for home economists to play an active role in the formation of public policy as well as monitor its impact on the family. Being an informed voter is necessary but not enough. Home economics professionals are expected to be strong family advocates who will determine social goals for the benefit of families and work toward the accomplishment of those goals (Brown & Paolucci, 1979, p. 47).

In summary then, specialized knowledge and the common body of knowledge are interrelated by the professional in his/her profession and brought to bear on the analysis of practical problems of home and family. The profession of home economics is seen as having subprofessions (specializations) but all subscribe to a common goal or mission (Brown & Paolucci, 1979). The ultimate goal is to build systems of actions in
families and in society as a whole that lead to individual fulfillment for all persons regardless of age, sex, race and socioeconomic status.

Testing the theory

A study conducted in the College of Family and Consumer Sciences at Iowa State University focused on some questions related to core concepts. An instrument designed to determine students' perceived competence to perform tasks related to the proposed concepts was administered to students using a pretest and posttest design. The items in each category contained a strong emphasis on individual and family applications. A Likert-type scale was used for measurement. A factor analysis of the graduating seniors' responses to the items confirmed the hypothesized categories of concepts. These students generally reported a higher ability to perform tasks more closely related to their majors (Smith, 1990).

Comparison of the pretest and posttest data from the students' responses showed that change occurred in each category of concepts (Smith, 1988). These studies provided important information about students' growth and change in relation to predetermined core concepts. However, they also indicated a need for a research design that would allow for the emergence of new concepts, the elimination of established concepts, and the measurement of the relationship(s) among the categories as perceived by the students.

This need could be addressed through qualitative research methods that would allow the researcher to seek insight into the personal meaning of home economics as experienced by students and to work with the students.
to describe those meanings and their relationship to concepts, values, and competencies to be used by specialists in home economics.

**Method of inquiry**

McCracken (1988) developed a method of qualitative inquiry that could be adapted for such a study. This method involves four distinct and successive steps:

1. Review of literature
2. Self inquiry
3. Interviewing
4. Categorical Discoveries/Data Analysis

The literature review has a special importance for the qualitative researcher. It provides the researcher with key concepts and "expectations that data can defy" (McCracken, 1988, p. 31). It can help in the construction of the interview questionnaire, specify categories and relationships in home economics that may organize the data, and establish the ground upon which the interviews will be conducted.

The second step involves self-examination on the part of the researcher to identify the "associations, incidents, and assumptions that surround the topic (home economics) in his or her mind" (McCracken, 1988, p. 32). Next, the data collection or interview step, initiated with a set of biographical questions, gives a set of "descriptive details of [a relevant part of] an individual's life." Further qualitative questions "...allow respondents to tell their own stories in their own words" (McCracken, 1988, p. 34). The researcher must "journey" through the story with the respondent and avoid overspecifying the substance of the interview.
in order to discover the key concepts, the underlying values, and the perceived competencies which surface as a part of the person's experiences in home economics.

The final step, analysis of data, has as its goal the determination of categories, relationships, and assumptions that form the respondent's view of home economics in general and of a common body of knowledge in particular. A comparison of the categories obtained and those hypothesized would provide evidence on the soundness of the proposed theory.

Such a study would provide a valuable opportunity to test the concepts identified by home economics professionals against the "real world" perceptions of students. A stated purpose of accredited home economics programs in higher education is to provide students with a commonly oriented knowledge base; it cannot be assumed, however, that students' exposure to a core curriculum will automatically result in shared concepts, values, and competencies with regard to their professional competence in helping to solve the practical problems of individuals and families.

The information obtained from this study would provide a measure of students' views of the structural interrelatedness of the various specializations. The meaning of knowledge, values related to this knowledge, and perceived competencies held by these students could assist curriculum planners in further developing core curricula components that would help students to function better from a common knowledge base in home economics.
Summary

The increased emphasis on specializations has created some challenges for the home economics profession, but the issue today should no longer be one of specialization versus integration but rather the realization that both are necessary for functioning within the mission of the home economics profession. Bellah, Madsen, Sullivan, Swidler, and Tipton (1985) stated, Specialization requires integration; they are not mutually exclusive. A professional social science that loses concern for the larger society cannot do even its professional job, for there is too much of reality with which it cannot deal. And if we remember that "calling" or "vocation", with the implication of public responsibility, is the older meaning of "profession" then we would see that a really "professional social scientist" would never be only a specialist (p. 300).

According to Bell (1968, p. 285), specialized knowledge can be a liberalizing experience "if that knowledge is acquired in a context of inquiry, rich in philosophical and methodological presuppositions, and if a student learns not 'received doctrine' but the modes of conceptual innovation."

Hopkins (1937) suggested that disintegration or separateness occurs in the absence of integration. The disintegrated individual moves within such a narrow environment that his/her attempts to solve these limited problems can lead to crises. Then, an emotional response is made with little regard for thoughtful and intelligent action. Eventually, the
disintegrated individual loses control of the situation and becomes uncertain and fearful of himself/herself as well as the larger society.

In reiterating the need for integration, Boyer (1987) stated, In a complex, interdependent world, we simply cannot afford to graduate students who fail to place their knowledge and lives in perspective. To deny our relationship with one another and with our common home, Earth, is to deny the realities of existence (p. 91).

Perhaps the same holds true for the home economics profession. If the common focus and relationships among the areas of specialization in home economics is denied, the meaning of the profession may be lost. On the other hand, a willingness to look beyond the perceived boundaries of specialization toward a unified whole that is greater than the sum of its parts may lead to possibilities and potential of integration which are practically endless.
SECTION I. TESTING A THEORY FOR AN UNDERGRADUATE HOME ECONOMICS CORE
INTRODUCTION

The need for interrelatedness of various disciplines and areas of knowledge is an issue of growing concern in higher education. The recent report released by the National Endowment for the Humanities, "50 Hours: A Core Curriculum for College Students," stresses the need for a core of learning which encourages "...substantive and coherent learning in essential areas of knowledge" (Cheney, 1989, p. 8).

Similarly, Crowell (1989, p. 60) suggests that a new way of thinking is needed in order to find the best ways to prepare students for the future. He questions many of our current curriculum and instructional practices which "...convey to students a world of knowledge unrelated to meaning and a world in which outcome is independent of process." Crowell advocates a new paradigm in which content and process are reconceptualized to stand in relation to one another. He further suggests that the school and all of its constituent parts must become more integrated, and curriculum development must focus on interdisciplinary studies.

Over the years, the field of home economics has been sensitive to the interrelatedness of its areas of specialization (McGrath & Johnson, 1968; Horn, 1988). Faculty who make decisions about higher education programs for preparing home economics professionals continue to discuss the issues of integration and specialization. Enrollment data in higher education from 1968 through 1982 showed significant increases in the number of majors in specialized programs while enrollment in general home economics and home economics education programs decreased (Harper and Davis, 1986). This
growth of enrollment in specializations within the field of home economics has intensified the dialogue.

In the American Home Economics Association's (AHEA) documents outlining the accreditation criteria and guidelines (1982, 1984; Caples, 1990) a common body of knowledge is identified as a necessary criterion for programs of home economics in higher education. Requiring specific course work of all majors has been the most common method of meeting this criterion. Often the courses are not designed specifically for diverse majors. Instead, they may be selected from established offerings in areas of specialization. As a result, the interrelationship of all the courses may or may not be evident to the students. For example, the relationship of a required nutrition course to the professional preparation of a fashion merchandizing major may not be obvious. The challenge, then, is to help students understand the interrelatedness of the various areas of specializations. A home economics core could play a major role in this endeavor.
DEVELOPING A THEORY

A review of the history of the field of home economics can provide insight into developing a theory related to an undergraduate home economics core. One common theme throughout these historical documents (e.g., AHEA, 1902 as cited in East, 1980; Committee on Philosophy and Objectives of Home Economics, 1959; Bivens, et al., 1975; Brown and Paolucci, 1979) is "families" or "individuals in families". Home economics is identified as a professional field dealing with the practical aspects of human life (e.g. family relationships, food, clothing, child rearing, financial management). Home economics is not the only professional field dealing with one or more aspects of family living; however, its uniqueness is that it is the only field concerned with all of them, with their interrelationships, and with the total picture they form (Committee on Philosophy and Objectives, 1959). This theme provides the rationale that students be able to conceptualize the synergistic, integrative nature of the home economics profession as they work with individuals and families in solving practical problems (AHEA, 1984).

Persons who gathered for the Lake Placid conferences from 1899 to 1909 had an underlying concern for the effect of the industrial revolution on the home and family. Some examples of these concerns (practical problems) were: sanitation, nutrition, welfare of children, and role of women in household work. These concerns related to family are still valid, but the social context from which they evolve has changed (Brown, 1985). Family forms have become more diverse. The family unit has moved from that
of production to consumption. Regardless of the changes, "family" remains as the central focus of home economics.

The early areas of study in home economics were food, clothing, and housing. Later, household and institutional management was added because these institutional households were seen as occasional substitutes for homes. Much of the early research in home economics was focused on relieving the drudgery of household work.

Today, the research base has broadened to include the near and far environment that impinges on the family. Home economists are now encouraged to play a role in determining the impact on families of public procedures, programs, and policies, as well as being influential in determining those policies.

The field of home economics continues to encompass both diversity and unity. It is not a single discipline but an interdisciplinary field. The problems home economics professionals encounter are often interdisciplinary in nature, requiring the use of specialized knowledge in an interdisciplinary way. Professionals are asked to view humans and their near environment as an integrated whole, mutually influencing each other (Bubolz & Sontag, 1988).

According to Brown and Paolucci (1979, p. 79) "...theory consists of knowledge formulated in conceptual categories and in patterns of relationships among those categories." This definition by Brown and Paolucci allows the idea of a common body of knowledge to be formed into a theoretical framework. The central theme of the theoretical framework focuses on practical problems of home and family. It is hypothesized that
the common orientation of home economics professionals in relation to this focus requires a knowledge base in the concepts of human/family development over a life span, human nutrition, resource management, and aesthetics/design (Caples, 1990). In addition, there is need for knowledge related to education and public policy concepts. (See Figure 1)

Programs built around these common learnings would identify concepts, values, and competencies needed by all professionals. Common concepts provide a basis for professionals to work together as a team to address needs of individuals and families. Core values provide a common justification for motivation and action. Competencies enable actions necessary for the mission to be achieved.

Each category of concepts consists of knowledge and skills used by professionals in specialized fields of home economics to assist individuals and families as they seek to resolve a specific discipline related problem of the home and family. All of the specialized categories are needed for an integrated whole which provides a framework for helping individuals and families resolve all the special parts of a practical problem simultaneously. For example, a family with a financial problem has a many faceted problem. Specialized knowledge about management of resources is augmented by knowledge about food, clothing, and shelter. In addition, other concerns (e.g., family relationships, job or school related factors)
often enter into the determination of any action to be taken. Knowledge from each category provides the foundation for the whole.

AHEA accreditation guidelines require that programs include sufficient studies to provide knowledge of lifespan growth and development (Caples, 1990). Professionals with knowledge of human development will understand the physical, intellectual, emotional, and social characteristics and needs of individuals and families as they progress through the life cycle. They will use knowledge about developmental characteristics and norms in working with individuals and families.

The interdependence of the principles of human nutrition and food in the behavior and health of individuals is another area of study outlined in AHEA accreditation documents (Caples, 1990). Professionals with knowledge of nutrition will understand the basic need of every individual for food and nourishment, and their relationship to growth and development. Evaluating the soundness of dietary claims, being able to acquire reliable sources of nutrition information, and educating to improve food choice behavior are useful competencies for helping families deal with practical home and family problems. Professionals also need to recognize the physiological, sociological, psychological, and cultural factors that influence food choices and how these choices affect other areas of their lives.

The ability to assist others in their roles as managers and consumers who must make decisions about resources of time, energy, and money requires understanding of family resource management and decision-making behavior (Caples, 1990). Being able to evaluate alternative actions and recognizing
when additional expertise is needed are useful competencies for professionals. Knowledge of the interrelatedness between the family and its near and far environment can facilitate the choice of management strategies.

In accreditation guidelines, the impact of design on human behavior and lifestyles is regarded as a necessary area of study (Caples, 1990). Aesthetics or design fosters an appreciation for those things which go beyond everyday survival to bring pleasure and satisfaction to individuals and families. Using the components and principles of design to enhance individual and cultural environments can add to the sense of well-being of individuals and families.

Education, broadly conceived, is the tool through which one discovers his/her world and its importance cannot be underestimated (Bailey, 1976). It begins in the family as it nurtures its young, but that responsibility is later entrusted, at least in part, to the care of institutions such as public schools. Professionals need knowledge that will enable them to help families in their roles as educators as well as assist them in seeking out educational institutions that will foster positive growth and learning experiences for their members. Knowledge of learning theories, planning techniques, dissemination strategies, and evaluation methods are professional tools to enhance the decision making abilities of professionals as they disseminate information and facilitate the building of competencies by individuals and families.

Mastery of a common knowledge base in home economics is expected to facilitate the development of professionals who will assume roles as "team
members concerned with present and future societal issues" (Caples, 1990, p.5). Public policy addresses the need for home economists to play an active role in the formation of public policy as well as monitor its impact on the family. Being an informed voter is necessary, but not enough. Home economics professionals are expected to be strong family advocates who will determine social goals for the benefit of families and work toward the accomplishment of these goals (Brown & Paolucci, 1979, p. 47).

"A true core curriculum gives professionals a common body of knowledge, but more importantly provides them with a common orientation or focus to all knowledge" (Weddle, 1986, p. 6). That common orientation is seen as a wholeness that focuses on the family and its well-being. The specialized knowledge and the common body of knowledge are interrelated by the professional in his/her profession and brought to bear on the analysis of practical problems of home and family. The profession of home economics is seen as having subprofessions (specializations) but all subscribe to a common goal or mission (Brown & Paolucci, 1979). The ultimate goal is to build systems of actions in families and in society as a whole that lead to individual fulfillment for all persons regardless of age, sex, race, and socio-economic status.
TESTING THE THEORY

The issues of integration and specialization have raised serious questions about the necessity for core concepts in home economics curricula and the role of such concepts in facilitating the mission of the home economics profession. It follows, then, that there is need for research which focuses on the role of core concepts in the education of professionals.

A study conducted at a midwestern university with a large and diverse program in home economics focused on some questions related to core concepts. An instrument designed to determine students' perceived competence to perform tasks related to the six proposed concepts was administered to students using a pre and posttest design. The items in each category contained a strong emphasis on individual and family applications. Measurement was done using a Likert-type scale. A factor analysis of the graduating seniors' responses to the items confirmed the hypothesized categories of concepts. These students generally reported a higher ability to perform tasks that are related to their majors (Smith, 1990).

Comparison of the pre-post test data from the students' responses shows that change occurred in each category of concepts (Smith, 1988). These studies provide important information about students' growth and change in relation to predetermined core concepts, but there is also a need for a research design that will allow for the emergence of new concepts, the elimination of established concepts, and the measurement of the relationship(s) among the categories as perceived by students.
This need could be addressed through qualitative research methods. The data from previous studies (Smith, 1988, 1990) would form the basis for an anthropological research study which would allow researchers to gather data in a "real-world" setting (the college environment), and develop an understanding of the environment in which behavior related to a home economics core occurs. The researchers' basic mission would be to seek insight into the personal meaning of home economics as experienced by the students and to work with the students to produce a description of those meanings and their relationship to concepts, values, and competencies to be used by specialists in home economics.
McCracken (1988) developed a method of qualitative inquiry that could be adapted for such a study. This method involves four distinct and successive steps:

1. Review of literature
2. Self-inquiry
3. Interviewing
4. Categorical Discoveries/Data Analysis

The literature review has a special importance for the qualitative researcher. It provides the researcher with key concepts and "....expectations that data can defy" (McCracken, 1988, p. 31). It can help in the construction of the interview questionnaire, specify categories and relationships in home economics that may organize the data, and establish the ground upon which the interviews will be conducted.

The second step involves self-examination on the part of the researcher to identify the "...associations, incidents, and assumptions that surround the topic (home economics) in his or her mind" (McCracken, 1988, p. 32). Next, the data collection or interview step, initiated with a set of biographical questions, gives a set of "descriptive details of (a relevant part of) an individual's life" (McCracken, 1988, p. 34). Further qualitative questions "...allow respondents to tell their own stories in their own words." The researcher must "journey" through the story with the respondent and avoid overspecifying the substance of the interview in order to discover the key concepts, the underlying values, and the perceived
competencies which surface as a part of the person's experiences in home economics.

The final step, analysis of data, has as its goal the determination of categories, relationships, and assumptions that form the respondent's view of home economics in general and of a common body of knowledge in particular. A comparison of the categories obtained and those hypothesized provides evidence on the soundness of the proposed theory. Further evidence on how categories blend gives insight into how students view the field of home economics.
SUMMARY

According to Brown and Paolucci (1979, p. 80) some empirical theories concerned with human interaction are interpretive in nature. Such theories "...seek to interpret the actor's meaning rather than to impose the preconceived meaning of the scientist." The study proposed here is rooted in this interpretive theory set forth by Brown and Paolucci (1979). By focusing on the experiences of students as told in their own words, the researcher allows students' perceptions to lead to the discovery of new concepts and/or previously identified concepts. Additionally the researcher is afforded an opportunity to determine the students' perceptions of the relationship(s) among concepts.

This will provide a valuable opportunity to test the concepts identified by faculty members against the "real world" perceptions of students. Although a stated purpose of accredited home economics programs in higher education is to provide students with a commonly oriented knowledge base, it cannot be assumed that exposure to a core curriculum will automatically result in shared concepts, values, and competencies with regard to their professional competence in helping to solve the practical problems of individuals and families.

A measure of the structural interrelatedness of the various specializations would allow curriculum planners to evaluate offerings and experiences provided in home economics undergraduate curricula in higher education. The meaning of knowledge, values related to this knowledge, and perceived competencies held by these students could give insight into how areas of specialization have been able to relate to each other and to the
total field of home economics. If home economists are to be advocates of the family, then graduates in the field will function better with an orientation to that focus. Dealing with practical problems of the home and family requires specialists to work together in a special way. For example, the decisions individuals and families make related to food choices are affected by education and public policy; in turn, these decisions affect individual family member development, their management strategies, and other aspects of their lives.

Research and program decisions made by one area of specialization in the field of home economics affect other areas. If not, then, perhaps the areas of specialization no longer comprise a unified field of home economics. This hypothesized theory and subsequent research to test the theory would provide one measure of the status of home economics in relation to a common body of knowledge.
Figure 1. An integrated home economics core
REFERENCES


SECTION II. AN UNDERGRADUATE HOME ECONOMICS CORE: PERCEPTIONS OF STUDENTS
INTRODUCTION

The need for interrelatedness of various disciplines and areas of specialization is an issue of growing concern in higher education. Numerous authors have stressed the need for common learning focused on interdisciplinary studies and a shared membership in human society (Bailey, 1976; Boyer, 1987; Cheney, 1989; Crowell, 1989).

Similarly, the home economics profession has been sensitive to the interrelatedness of its areas of specialization (Horn, 1988; McGrath & Johnson, 1968). An increased emphasis on specializations within the profession has raised concerns about the necessity for a core of knowledge or common learning in home economics that would provide students with a common orientation from which to function as professionals.

The American Home Economics Association's (AHEA) documents outlining accreditation criteria and guidelines (1982, 1984; Caples, 1990) identified a common body of knowledge as a necessary criterion for programs of home economics in higher education. Requiring common course work or experiences of all majors has been the most common method of meeting this criterion. Often these experiences are selected from established offerings in areas of specialization. As a result, the interrelationships of all the courses or experiences may or may not be evident to the students. Consequently, it cannot be assumed that exposure to these common experiences will automatically result in shared concepts and competencies to be used by all home economics professionals.

Much like general education, the home economics profession has sought to maintain an integrative and holistic perspective for its members. The
purpose of this study was to seek insight into integration through an
examination of the personal meaning and perceptions of home economics as
experienced by undergraduate students in home economics programs. An
additional purpose was to work with the students to produce a description
of those meanings and their relevance to an undergraduate home economics
core curriculum comprising a common body of knowledge (LeBleu, 1991).

The setting for the study was a midwestern university with a large
and diverse home economics college. Specialized studies were offered in
the areas of family and consumer sciences education; food science and human
nutrition; human development and family studies; hotel, restaurant and
institution management; and textiles and clothing. This college had an
established core curriculum in home economics consisting of eight semester
hours of specific coursework to address the concepts of professional
development, human development, and nutrition. In addition, the concepts
of management, aesthetics, educational principles, and public policy were
addressed through specific courses in the college, parts of courses in the
major, or in courses outside of the college. The foundation for this
qualitative study was a larger, ongoing research effort to measure
students' self-perceived competence to perform tasks related to the
established core concepts (Smith, 1990).
METHODOLOGY

Because the conventional empirical research paradigms were not appropriate for this type of study, the researcher instead adapted naturalistic procedures which allowed the students to "tell their own stories in their own words" (McCracken, 1988, p. 34).

Sample

Data were gathered through semi-structured, indepth interviews with an opportunistic or purposive sample of fourteen undergraduate students in the home economics college. Purposive sampling is based on informational considerations and is designed to maximize the acquisition of information (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). The researcher sought individuals who would provide maximum variation of sampling.

Although the concept of a representative sample is not usually appropriate for this type of study, the researcher made certain to select informants who represented each of the departments in the home economics college. This was one means of achieving variation in the sample.

The researcher was most interested in the perceptions of graduating seniors as they would have completed or been near completion of the core experiences. In addition, the researcher wanted students who were still involved in on-campus courses as opposed to off-campus internship or practicum experiences.

The instructor of the recitation sections of the senior capstone seminar required of all majors in the home economics college was asked to identify individuals from her class whom she thought would be willing and able to express their views of home economics and integration. The
researcher checked the names of the identified individuals against a list of graduating seniors in the college. From those who were graduating and also were identified by the instructor, the researcher selected individuals whose majors tended to be highly specialized. The researcher purposefully excluded from the sample those students working toward teacher certification in home economics. These individuals were excluded from the sample because they had reported the highest self-perceived ability to perform tasks related to the core concepts as measured by the instrument, Home Economics Core (Smith, 1990). Thus, they would be more likely to hold an integrative perspective.

Six individuals were interviewed in the fall semester of 1990. This group of informants consisted of one major in family resource management, one major in fashion merchandising, three majors in hotel, restaurant, and institution management, and one major in family and consumer journalism.

Upon completion of these interviews, the researcher reviewed the transcriptions in an effort to identify gaps in the type of information and/or respondents. From this review, the researcher identified the particular majors to be sought in the next round of interviews.

Following the previous procedure of the seminar instructor's recommendations cross-checked with a list of graduating seniors, four individuals were identified. They represented the areas of family and consumer journalism, educational services, housing and the near environment, and general studies in family and consumer sciences. The remaining four informants were identified through advisor recommendations. Two of the individuals were graduating seniors majoring in dietetics. The
last two informants were seniors but were not graduating in the semester in which interviews were conducted. They were selected to represent the international studies area. One was co-majoring in international studies and dietetics, and the other was co-majoring in international studies and growth and development of children.

The final sample consisted of fourteen seniors in the home economics college. It included two males and twelve females; and three international students and eleven U.S. students. (See LeBleu, 1990, for additional descriptions of informants).
Data Collection

Based upon a review of the college’s core requirements, an interview guide was developed. The interview was to last approximately one hour. Trial interviews were conducted with three graduating seniors during the spring semester of 1990.

A review of these interview transcriptions revealed that the format was too structured and did not allow students to trace the development of their own perceptions of home economics. To elicit a response to a question asking the respondent to describe common core concepts for all home economics majors, it was first necessary for the researcher to define these common core concepts of human development, nutrition, management, aesthetics, educational principles, and public policy. Then, as students were asked to describe their knowledge related to these concepts, it became evident to the researcher that they were repeating the same information that had previously been given to them rather than describing their own perceptions.

A less-structured interview guide was then developed that would allow for more open-ended responses. It was also decided that more time to allow the respondents to trace the development of their concepts of home economics from childhood to the present would give a clearer picture of their present perceptions.

Initial contact with potential informants was made by telephone. The researcher briefly described the study, procedures, and the amount of time that would be required of all participants. Individuals who agreed to
participate were then asked to meet with the researcher at a mutually agreeable time and place for the first interview.

The researcher conducted three interviews averaging one hour in length with each informant. With the informants' permission, each interview was taped using a cassette recorder. Data were gathered during the fall semester of 1990 and the spring semester of 1991.

The first interview was used as a time to get acquainted and build rapport. The researcher spent some time explaining the study and research procedures to the informant. The actual interviewing consisted of some "grand tour" questions aimed at getting the informant to talk about himself/herself and his/her family. At the conclusion of the interview, the informant was given questions to reflect upon concerning experiences with home economics from childhood to the present.

When the researcher and informant met for the second interview, the informant was asked to share responses to the questions about his/her experiences with home economics from childhood through the present. At the conclusion of the second interview, informants were told that the next interview would focus specifically on their experiences in the college of home economics and they were encouraged to make notes of such experiences prior to the next interview.

During the third interview, informants were given an opportunity to discuss these experiences. In order to acquire additional information, the researcher then used more specific, probing questions (i.e., If I didn't know anything about home economics, how would you define and describe it for me? Tell me how you relate to other areas of specialization. What
ties the various specializations together?). The information elicited from these questions included outstanding experiences, definition of home economics, relationships among areas of specialization, perceptions of common knowledge skills and competencies needed by all professionals in home economics, and recommendations for program changes.

At the conclusion of the third interview, the researcher requested to meet with each of the informants at a later date in order to give informants an opportunity to review the transcript from the third interview and make changes or additional comments if needed. All informants agreed to meet with the researcher. Because most informants were graduating seniors, it was necessary to conduct three of the reviews through the mail.
Data Analyses

The two methods of data analyses used in this study were member checks (Lincoln & Guba, 1985) and the constant comparative method (Goetz & LeCompte, 1984).

Member checks are used as a means of data verification. They provide an opportunity to test categories, interpretations, and conclusions with members of the group from whom data were collected. The member checks occurred continuously throughout the research and were both informal and formal. Informal member checks were conducted during interviews to clarify the researcher's understanding of the data being collected. Formal member checks were conducted at the conclusion of the research. Each informant was asked to review the transcripts from his/her last interview to make certain that it accurately presented his/her perceptions. At the conclusion of the entire study, two of the original informants were asked to review the researcher's interpretations, reconstruction of ideas, and conclusions.

The constant comparative method is an inductive strategy that consists of categorically coding units of information while simultaneously comparing all incidents applicable to each category. While coding each incident for a category, the researcher must compare it with previous incidents in the same category. The process is one of continuous refinement of categories. Categorizing brings together those units of information that relate to the same content. Finally, the categories may be integrated to delineate themes or common ideas.
In this study, interview tapes were transcribed and stored in computer files (one for each interview) in a data management program called Qualpro (Blackman, 1987). Data management was accomplished through a multi-step process. In the first step, the interview transcriptions were printed with line numbers. Following this, the researcher manually coded the data into smaller units of information. For example, in the first interview informants were asked to talk about themselves and their families. From these discussions, smaller units of information such as that of one's hometown, self-description and description of siblings were assigned separate codes created by the researcher and identified by the line numbers on which they occurred.

In the next step, the codes were electronically attached to the previously stored transcriptions using Qualpro. After all codes had been entered for all files, the computer was used to search for and to retrieve all incidents of each code as well as co-occurring codes. These were printed and subsequently grouped by the researcher into larger categories. In the case of the example above, the individual codes were grouped into a larger category called background information.

Although the interviews elicited a large amount of data, the final categories of information represented in the findings are those which serve to fulfill the original purpose of the study. Therefore, only those categories of data which contribute to the reader's understanding of the students' perceptions and experiences with home economics as reconstructed by the researcher are presented in the findings.
FINDINGS

Experiences and Perceptions of Home Economics from Childhood to High School

The informants' experiences with home economics in early childhood were characterized by references to a limited view of home economics. All of the informants had been reared in two-parent families. Early images and perceptions of home economics were based upon gender role expectations for the mother or mother-figure (grandmother). This was true for both international and U.S. students.

"The experiences were rather traditional--cooking, sewing, and so forth... I was taken care of by my grandmother. She cooked three meals a day, took care of the house, did her chores and took care of me. That was basically the cooking, the babysitting, and so forth." (Informant #2, Interview 2, October 24, 1990).

"[At first] I thought home economics had to do with cooking... It [was] a woman's job." (Informant #11, Interview 2, March 22, 1991).

"The earliest experience I [had] with home economics [was] from my home. My grandma used to be a home economics teacher. I lived with her in my childhood. All I know is she [was] a very good cook and she [was] good at needlework." (Informant #14, Interview 2, May 7, 1991).

The gender role expectations were clearly identified by Informant #5 who said,

"Dad made the money and mom bought the groceries and stuff like that. It was a pretty set pattern." (Informant #5, Interview 2, November 12, 1990).

Elementary school experiences with home economics were limited and practically non-existent. The few experiences identified appear to have been in relation to concepts such as health and nutrition which were given brief attention by some elementary classroom teachers. Middle and junior high school experiences consisted of short units of cooking and sewing.
Perceptions of high school home economics programs may be categorized as either limited or more inclusive.

Limited views were characterized by images of cooking, sewing, and preparation of females for marriage.

"Secondary school [was] the basic home ec. experience where you learn to cook and sew and all that. I really didn't have a very broad view of home economics." (Informant #1, Interview 2, October 16, 1990).

"It was basically...for those people who planned on being in the home. It was designed around them. You know, for the girl who was going to marry somebody rich and stay in the house. They wanted to give them a good shot at being a good wife." (Informant #5, Interview 2, November 12, 1990).

Inclusive perceptions of experiences in home economics were derived from courses in nutrition, parenting, human sexuality, dating and marriage, housing, child and family development, and consumer education.

"...In my high school, we had a senior level course...called dating and courtship or marriage. That was a class that a lot of males took. I think it was really good for them to see another aspect of home economics that wasn't cooking and sewing. It [dealt with] relationships, birth control, your engagement, and marriage." (Informant #8, Interview 3, March 6, 1991).

One international student, however, had a rather unique secondary school experience which had a profound impact upon her life. She reported,

"...The class focused on...family and relationships in the family.... I liked this class. It influenced me and changed my whole thoughts and the whole idea about my career." (Informant #10, Interview 2, March 29, 1991).

This student's experience seemed to have been an enlightening one, and with the encouragement of her teacher, she had made a decision to pursue a career in home economics.
In these discussions of high school home economics experiences, there began to emerge perceptions of home economics as being better suited for those thought to be intellectually less capable. Although such incidents were few, they are mentioned here because of their importance in understanding some of the images which affect home economics enrollment in high schools.

"I could have [taken home economics courses in high school], but I looked at the students [who] took those classes. They were generally not the high achievers.... Maybe it was a good program, but people I saw going into it and getting good grades were not the ones who got good grades in other classes. I assumed it was because they weren't hard classes." (Informant #7, Interview 2, February 26, 1991).

"The clothing and the foods classes were basically lower classes for people who wanted to get easy credits.... That was the reputation [home economics] had." (Informant #12, Interview 2, April 4, 1991).

Home economics experiences in school and community related activities were varied. Participation in 4-H, Girl Scouts, Boy Scouts, and Campfire were mentioned as opportunities to develop leadership and management skills.

Current Perceptions and Definitions of Home Economics

As the students discussed their present perceptions and definitions of home economics, it soon became evident that these individuals had developed more sophisticated and broadly encompassing views of home economics.

Two individuals who were majors in Hotel, Restaurant, and Institution Management, produced definitions more closely tied to the concepts of products and services.

"Home economics is...the study of the consumer." (Informant #5, Interview 3, November 14, 1990).
"Home economics is a field of practical knowledge for use in everyday life to provide services or products to people, whether individuals or families, from birth to death." (Informant #2, Interview 3, October 31, 1990).

Further discussion, however, indicated that both individuals were interested in "individuals" or "people" and their needs much more than the idea of simply making a profit.

The holistic focus of home economics was captured in one student's definition.

"Home economics is both a science and an application of different disciplines that help families and other household units lead healthy and productive lives.... I think home economics centers on helping people throughout the lifespan in all aspects of their lives. (Informant 4, Interview 3, November 6, 1990).

Another definition, though somewhat simplistic, identifies home economics as a profession dealing with life.

"[Home economics] is living and life, and everything--socialization, nutrition, health, and managing your money. A lot of people don't realize how much it really involves." (Informant #8, Interview 3, March 6, 1991).

With the exception of one individual who had difficulty identifying with the profession, it was clear to the researcher that these individuals defined home economics as a profession aimed at enhancing the well-being of individuals and families. Each felt that he/she could contribute to this mission through his/her specific specialization.

When asked how their specializations were related to other specializations in home economics, several individuals responded by citing examples. In these cases, the informants selected a particular issue and discussed the contributions each specialization could make in bringing it
to resolution. In some cases, the informants described their relationship to only a few of the other areas. This was especially true in very specialized majors such as Hotel, Restaurant & Institution Management, Dietetics, Housing & the Near Environment, and Fashion Merchandising.

Nevertheless, with the exception of one individual, it appeared to the researcher that the integrative perspective had been successfully conveyed to these individuals. One informant’s remarks illustrate this integrative perspective.

"Everything overlaps. Everything is interconnected.... You have to know just because they are poorly nourished, what are the factors involved in that? It could be their housing situation. It could be their financial situation. It could be...the childrearing practices.... There are so many things that affect every discipline.... You can’t just look at one thing. They are all interconnected." (Informant #12, Interview 3, April 11, 1991).

One individual, who was the lone exception to an integrative perspective, presented a unique case. Although she was a major in Hotel, Restaurant, and Institution Management, this student was only interested in hotel management. As a result, she seemed to identify solely with that part of the major. While she acknowledged that the restaurant part of her major might fit into home economics, hotel management did not. Thus, she could not identify with other areas of specialization. She clearly felt that her major was somewhat misplaced and that she had not received sufficient background in hotel management. This student, then, had been unable to integrate within her own major and further integration seemed impossible without this beginning step.
All of the informants felt that the specializations were tied by a common concern for human beings--whether individuals, consumer, or families.

"I think you could take one family and... every major could apply to that family or do something for that family." (Informant #1, Interview 3, October 25, 1990).

Having identified a common focus, each informant was asked if there were common skills, knowledge, or competencies needed by all professionals in home economics.

Communication skills were the most strongly emphasized, regardless of major or specialization. The following remarks captured the intensity of this feeling.

"I think it is very important to be a good communicator. You can have all the knowledge in the world built up inside you.... Unless you can communicate it, be it written or verbal, ... it is not going to do any good." (Informant #8, Interview 3, March 6, 1991).

An understanding of the lifespan perspective and the needs of one's audience were also cited as important factors. The informants felt that this knowledge was necessary in order to effectively serve the needs of individuals and families.

While communication skills and a lifespan perspective were the most prevalent themes, a few of the informants also indicated a need to have common knowledge about the areas of specialization. This was deemed important because it would provide a basic foundation from which to draw information.

"Everybody should have one class from everybody else's major, not only so you can relate to family, but so you know what other... majors are doing." (Informant #1, Interview 3, October 25, 1990).
One individual, on the other hand, felt there was no way to generalize or delineate certain skills that could be required of all. Although she could see that her major, Housing & the Near Environment, was related in a broad sense to other majors, she could not see the necessity for common skills. Instead, she felt that anyone wishing to be a home economist should be people-oriented.

Although the researcher did not specifically mention core experiences, the informants made various comments about core courses throughout the interviews. From the researcher’s perspective, it appeared that the students equated "core" with core classes or courses. This is important to remember as other identified core concepts (i.e., aesthetics, management, public policy) which are delineated by AHEA accreditation documents and addressed through parts of courses were not a part of the students’ discussions.

A number of other areas were explored for their potential significance in affecting students’ perceptions of home economics. Among these were influential persons and outstanding experiences within the college.

Influential persons, in a positive sense, were identified for their characteristics of caring and a willingness to help students. While no one in the home economics college was identified as influential in terms of a choice of major or general perceptions of home economics, their influence was felt as advisors, professors, or other individuals who genuinely cared and took time to listen, help and encourage students.
As the students discussed their outstanding experiences, it became evident that the remarks could be classified into positive and negative categories. The positive aspects could be further classified in three ways—specific classes, extracurricular activities, and humanistic factors.

Those citing specific classes selected them for their content or other special qualities which stood out in the informant's mind. Extracurricular activities were cited for their leadership opportunities, cooperative work opportunities, and overall fun.

Humanistic factors were, by far, the most frequently discussed positive experiences. Students were especially appreciative of the one-to-one personal treatment, willingness of teachers to help students, and the overall friendly atmosphere of the college.

Negative experiences, though fewer, included problems with advisors and/or professors and poorly taught/organized courses.
CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Data from this study indicated that students did develop an understanding of the integrative nature of the home economics profession. This understanding was facilitated through core experiences within the college. The findings which support this conclusion revealed that perceptions of home economics ranged from limited views to the currently held integrative view. This development occurred primarily as a result of experiences which lead to greater understanding of the meaning of home economics. Early perceptions were very limited and based exclusively on gender role expectations for the female caregiver. By the time the informants reached high school, their perceptions either remained limited or became more inclusive, largely based upon the particular experiences they had encountered in the high schools. At the time of the interviews, the informants (with the exception of one individual who had failed to integrate even within her own major) had developed more sophisticated views of home economics as a field dealing with the well-being of individuals and families and encompassing a number of specializations. The informants were able to describe the interrelationships of areas of specialization as well as their own roles in this integrative perspective. From this, then, one may conclude that the concept of integration had been successfully conveyed to the students, whether or not they were directly conscious of it.

When asked whether there were certain skills, knowledge, or competencies needed by all individuals within the home economics profession, communication skills and a lifespan perspective were the most prevalent ideas. This leads one to question why other core concepts are
not identified despite their contributions to the integrative perspective. It is the researcher's belief that information from the other concepts has been internalized but is not consciously recognized as a part of the home economics core experiences.

Students' references to the "core" in the home economics college are limited to specific courses required of all majors in the college. Therefore, other concepts delineated in the common body of knowledge were not addressed. However, the findings of the quantitative study which formed the basis for this investigation (Smith 1990, 1988) indicated that students self-perceived ability to perform tasks related to the core concepts showed an overall increase from the time of entry into the college to the time of graduation. Those findings, coupled with findings from the present study, suggest that the core program in this college is functioning as intended.

Although the specific core concepts, with the exception of human development over the lifespan and communication skills (a part of educational principles), did not emerge from the students' perceptions as necessary knowledge for all professionals, there is no evidence to suggest that any of the concepts should be eliminated. On the contrary, the data suggest that students have acquired knowledge from these concepts although they may not be consciously aware of such knowledge. Perhaps it may be considered more a part of their overall general education or it may surface in a specific form as the need for this knowledge arises in the students' chosen careers. A five year follow-up interview could provide additional data on these aspects of the core curriculum as well as verify the
stability of the concepts of integration, human development over the lifespan, and communication.

This research was conducted at one site with a specifically identified core curriculum. It is recommended that the same research design be conducted at a comparable institution with comparable specialized majors. A further study might involve the perceptions of faculty concerning the concepts explored with students.

This study suggests that much of what is learned is implicit as opposed to explicit in nature. The environment for learning can be as important as the content itself. The physical environment or organization of areas as well as faculty and staff with whom the student come into contact can affect their perceptions of home economics.

Much like the current movement in general education, the home economics profession is striving to restore the balance between general and specialized education. All individuals possess a shared membership in the human community (Boyer, 1981). Consequently, no individual can function effectively alone and in complete isolation from others. This is also true of home economists in their profession. The problems faced by individuals and families are multi-faceted, thus individuals who possess both specialized knowledge and a commonly oriented, integrated knowledge base in home economics will be better equipped to address these problems.
REFERENCES


Introduction

Over the years, the home economics profession has been sensitive to the interrelatedness of its areas of specialization. The issues of integration and specialization have raised questions about the necessity for an integrative focus in home economics curricula.

The American Home Economics Association's (AHEA) documents outlining accreditation criteria and guidelines (1982, 1984; Council for Accreditation, 1990) identify a common body of knowledge as a necessary criterion for programs of home economics in higher education. This common body of knowledge is composed of a knowledge base in the areas of human/family development over the lifespan, human nutrition, resource management, and aesthetics/design (Council for Accreditation, 1990). A core curriculum which requires specific coursework or a common set of experiences for all majors is one method of meeting this criterion. Often the courses or experiences are selected from established offerings in areas of specialization. As a result the interrelationship of all the courses or experiences may or may not be evident to the students.

Problem Statement

The College of Family and Consumer Sciences (CFCS) at Iowa State University reviewed its core concepts when the university changed from a quarter system to a semester system. The core now consists of eight hours of specific coursework to address the concepts of Professional Development, Human Development, and Nutrition. In addition, concepts of Management, Aesthetics, Educational Principles, and Public Policy can be filled by
specific courses in the college, parts of courses in the major, or by courses outside of the college.

A research project was simultaneously begun with the implementation of the new core in order to monitor results of the curriculum innovation. With the help of subject matter experts, an instrument was designed to determine students' perceived competence to perform tasks related to the concepts (Smith, 1990). The instrument was administered to students using a pretest and posttest design. The items in each category contained a strong emphasis on individual and family applications with a Likert-type scale used for measurement. A factor analysis of the graduating seniors' responses to the items verified the original concepts and one additional concept, Home Economics Profession. The data from this project revealed that students generally reported a higher ability to perform tasks more closely related to their majors (Smith, 1990). Additional comparisons of the pretest and posttest data from students' responses showed that change occurred in each category of concepts (Smith, 1988).

These studies provided important information about students' growth and change in relation to predetermined core concepts. However, they also indicated a need for additional research that would allow for the emergence of new concepts and/or previously identified concepts and provide some insight into the students' views of the integrative nature of home economics. The major purpose of this study was to address that need by seeking insight into the personal meaning of home economics as experienced by fourteen undergraduate students in CFCS and to work with the students to
produce a description of those meanings and their relationship to concepts, values, and competencies to be used by all home economists.

Methodology

Researcher's background

Recognizing that the researcher cannot separate him/herself completely from the investigation and that the process of naturalistic inquiry encompasses mutual shaping on the part of the researcher and the respondents, the researcher prepared a narrative of her own background, experiences, and perceptions of home economics prior to beginning data collection. An overview is presented in Appendix D.

Sample

Data for the study were gathered through semi-structured, indepth interviews with a purposive sample of fourteen undergraduate students in the College of Family and Consumer Sciences. Purposive sampling is based on informational considerations and is designed to maximize the acquisition of information (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). The researcher sought individuals who would provide variation of sampling and would have the type of information sought by the researcher.

Although the concept of a representative sample is not a consideration in the naturalistic paradigm, the researcher selected informants who represented each of the departments or areas in the college as identified in the questionnaire, Home Economics Core (Smith, 1990). This was one means of achieving variation in the sample.

The researcher was most interested in the perceptions of graduating seniors as they would have completed or been near completion of the core
experiences. In addition, the researcher wanted students who were still involved in on-campus courses as opposed to off-campus internships or practicum experiences.

The instructor of the recitation sections of FCS 460, the senior capstone seminar in CFCS, was asked to identify individuals from her class list whom she thought would be willing and able to express their views of home economics and integration. The researcher checked the names of the identified individuals against a list of graduating seniors in the college. From those who were graduating and also were identified by the instructor, the researcher then selected individuals whose majors tended to be highly specialized. The researcher purposefully excluded from the sample those students working toward teacher certification in home economics. These individuals were excluded from the sample because they had reported the highest self-perceived ability to perform tasks related to the core concepts as measured by the instrument, Home Economics Core (Smith, 1990). Thus, they would be more likely to hold an integrative perspective.

Six individuals were interviewed in the fall semester of 1990. This group of informants consisted of one major in family resource management, one major in fashion merchandising, three majors in hotel, restaurant, and institution management, and one major in family and consumer journalism.

Upon completion of these interviews, the researcher reviewed the transcriptions in an effort to identify gaps in the types of information and/or respondents. From this review, the researcher identified the particular majors to be sought in the next round of interviews.
Following the previous procedure of FCS 460 recitation instructor's recommendations cross-checked with a list of graduating seniors, four individuals were identified. They represented the areas of family and consumer journalism, educational services, housing and the near environment, and general studies in Family and Consumer Sciences. The remaining four informants were identified through advisor recommendations. Two of the individuals were graduating seniors majoring in dietetics. The last two informants were seniors but were not graduating in the semester in which interviews were conducted. They were selected to represent the international studies area. One was co-majoring in international studies and dietetics and the other was co-majoring in international studies and growth and development of children.

The final sample consisted of fourteen seniors in the College of Family and Consumer Sciences. It included two males and twelve females; three international students and eleven U.S. students. Of the U.S. students, two were out-of-state residents.

Data collection

Based upon a review of the college's core requirements and the instrument, Home Economics Core, a structured interview guide was developed. (See Appendix B). The interview was to last approximately one hour. Trial interviews were conducted with three graduating seniors during the spring semester of 1990.

A review of these interview transcriptions revealed that the format was too structured and did not allow students to trace the development of their own perceptions of home economics. To elicit a response to the
question asking the respondent to describe the common core concepts for all home economics majors (Appendix B, Question 13) it was necessary to give examples from the Home Economics Core. Then, as students were asked to describe their knowledge related to concepts, it became evident to the researcher that they were repeating the same information that had previously been given to them rather than describing their own perceptions.

A less structured interview guide was then developed that would allow for more open-ended responses (See Appendix C). It was also decided that more time to allow the respondents to trace the development of their concepts of home economics from childhood to the present would give a clearer picture of their present concepts.

Initial contact with potential informants was made by telephone. The researcher briefly described the study, procedures, and the amount of time that would be required of all participants. Individuals who agreed to participate were then asked to meet with the researcher at a mutually agreeable time and place for the first interview.

The researcher conducted three interviews averaging one hour in length with each informant. With the informants' permission, each interview was taped using a cassette recorder. Data were gathered during the fall semester of 1990 and spring semester of 1991.

The first interview was used as a time to get acquainted and build rapport. The researcher spent some time explaining the study and research procedures to the informant. The actual interviewing consisted of some "grand tour" questions aimed at getting the informant to talk about himself/herself and his/her family. At the conclusion of the first
interview, the informant was given questions to reflect upon concerning experiences with home economics from childhood to the present. The informant was asked to answer these using his/her own definition of home economics. Additionally, the informant was asked to identify influential persons in his/her life at each stage.

When the researcher and informant met for the second interview, the informant was asked to share responses to the questions about his/her experiences with home economics from childhood through the present, discuss influential people at each stage, and describe the influences of those influential people. At the conclusion of the second interview, informants were told that the next interview would focus specifically on their experiences in the College of Family and Consumer Sciences and they were encouraged to make notes of such experiences prior to the next interview.

During the third interview, informants were given an opportunity to discuss these experiences. The researcher then used more specific questions to acquire additional information which included outstanding experiences, definition of home economics, relationships among areas of specialization, and perceptions of common knowledge, skills, and competencies needed by all professionals in home economics and recommendations for program changes.

At the conclusion of the third interview, the researcher requested to meet with each of the informants at a later date in order to give informants an opportunity to review the transcript from the third interview and make changes or additional comments if needed. All informants agreed to meet with the researcher. Because most informants were graduating
seniors, it was necessary to conduct three reviews of transcripts through the mail.

**Data analyses**

The two methods of data analyses used in this study were member checks (Lincoln & Guba, 1985) and the constant comparative method (Goetz & LeCompte, 1984).

Member checks are used as a means of data verification. They provide an opportunity to test categories, interpretations, and conclusions with members of the group from whom data were collected. The member checks occurred continuously throughout the research and were both informal and formal. Informal member checks were conducted during interviews to clarify the researcher's understanding of the data being collected. Formal member checks were conducted at the conclusion of the research. Each informant was asked to review the transcripts from his/her last interview to make certain that it accurately presented his/her perceptions. At the conclusion of the entire study, two of the original informants were asked to review the researcher's interpretations, reconstruction of ideas, and conclusions.

The constant comparative method is an inductive strategy that consists of categorically coding units of information while simultaneously comparing all incidents applicable to each category. While coding each incident for a category, the researcher must compare it with previous incidents in the same category. The process is one of continuous refinement of categories. Categorizing brings together those units of information that relate to the same content. Finally, the categories may be integrated to delineate themes or common ideas.
In this study, interview tapes were transcribed and stored in computer files (one file for each interview) in a data management program called Qualpro (Blackman, 1987). Data management was accomplished through a multi-step process. In the first step, the interview transcriptions with line numbers were printed. Following this, the researcher manually coded the data into smaller units of information. For example, in the first interview informants were asked to talk about themselves and their families. From these discussions, smaller units of information such as that of one’s hometown, self-description, and description of siblings were assigned separate codes created by the researcher and identified by the line numbers on which they occurred.

In the next step, the codes were electronically attached to the previously stored transcriptions using Qualpro. After all codes had been entered for all files, the computer was used to search for and to retrieve all incidents of each code as well as co-occurring codes. These were printed and subsequently grouped by the researcher into larger categories. In the case of the example above, the individual codes were grouped into a larger category called background information.

Although the interviews elicited a large amount of data, the final categories of information represented in the findings are those which serve to fulfill the original purpose of the study. Therefore, only those categories of data which contribute to the reader’s understanding of the students’ perceptions and experiences with home economics as reconstructed by the researcher are presented. An outline of the final categories
presented in the findings and the codes comprising those categories are in Appendix E.

Findings

The "world" of home economics is affected by the lives of those who have elected to join the profession in its mission to enhance the well-being of individuals and families. Personal experiences and meanings of home economics are not often publicly expressed by professionals in home economics. Nevertheless, they are present and therefore, form part of the foundation for practice. For this reason, an exploration of the background and experiences of informants was undertaken. This information provides a necessary knowledge base from which to understand current values, beliefs, and perceptions of professionals.

This section of the dissertation, then, contains brief descriptions of the informants followed by a discussion of specific findings. Conclusions and recommendations for future studies are presented in a final section.

Description of informants

Following McCracken's model (1988), the interviews for this study were initiated with a set of biographical questions intended to elicit descriptive details of selected parts of each participant's background. These descriptions, derived from interview transcriptions are presented here to acquaint the reader with each informant. (The informants names have been changed to protect their identities).

Informant #1 - Mary Mary was a graduating senior in family resource management. She described herself as a very honest individual who
would say exactly what she thought. She indicated that she was direct in dealing with others but sometimes not tactful enough. She added that this directness was more difficult with people to whom she was closer because she did not want to hurt them.

At the time of the interview, Mary was engaged and planning to be married within a few months. She said she felt very supported by family and friends in her decision and was the happiest that she had ever been. She also felt that her friendships with others were at their strongest point because she was able to give of herself.

Mary's hometown was Osage, Iowa. She grew up in a family of four---mom, dad, Mary, and a younger brother. Her father was a farmer and both parents had instilled a strong work ethic in the children. According to Mary, her family had always been close. She said she was able to talk to them about anything that came up and had no hesitation in doing so.

In talking about herself, Mary said one of the qualities she disliked about herself was the fact she was not a determined person and thus had to push herself to do things. She said she did well in classes when she liked them but had to motivate herself in others.

Informant #2 - Robert

Robert was a non-traditional, graduating senior in Hotel, Restaurant, and Institution Management. He described himself as non-athletic and indicated several times that he had not enjoyed grade school. He said he didn't fit in very well and didn't like the way that students seemed to divide themselves up according to socio-economic groups. He also said he did not follow the high school crowd in their
Robert was born and raised an only child in Okoboji, Iowa. His father was a machinist at a large company and his mother was an elementary school teacher. He indicated that his family was not a very close one and not the kind of family that might sit and discuss things openly and freely. Although he was not close to his parents, he felt closer to his mother than to his father. Robert indicated that he got along fine with his parents and that they now visited him more frequently than when he lived in closer proximity to them.

Robert expressed a special love and fondness for his grandmother who had cared for him as a child. He felt very close to her and still had a special bond with her.

Informant #3 - Sharon

Sharon was a graduating senior in fashion merchandising. She described herself as having a lot of friends and going out a lot (partly due to the fact that she had a light credit load). She said she was a "big people person"—someone who loved being around people. According to Sharon, she had not always been that way. Earlier in her college years, she had more time to herself and liked it at that time. Now, however, she felt bored when she was alone.

At age 22, Sharon was the youngest of four girls. Her sisters were ages 30, 29, and 27. She had grown up in Davenport, Iowa where her father was an engineer and her mother was a registered nurse. Sharon's family had always been very close, and she said she had a really good childhood. Sharon was especially pleased that her sisters had already "broken in" her
parents, but her sisters sometimes felt like she was getting away with everything, including things for which they had been grounded.

**Informant #4 - Katherine**  Katherine was a graduating senior in family and consumer journalism. She described herself as a very talkative person--a trait which she said she shared with her mother. Katherine indicated that she was the kind of person who set her sights on something and didn't let anything stop her.

Katherine was originally from the Chicago area though she had spent six years of her childhood in California before returning to Chicago. She was one of three children and her siblings were a sister and a brother. Katherine had a large extended family in the Chicago area who had influenced her throughout her life. She felt like she was a very "traditional" person in that she felt strong roots and enjoyed the large extended family parties and get-togethers. She felt especially fortunate to have the unconditional love and support of so many people in her life.

According to Katherine, she had a very happy and secure childhood. She described her parents as very supportive and selfless. They would do anything for their children and seemed to have a very happy marriage.

**Informant #5 - Jerry**  Jerry was a graduating senior in Hotel, Restaurant, and Institution Management. He described himself as someone who liked to be around people because he thought they were interesting. Jerry also said he could be very bullheaded when he thought he was right about something.
Neither of Jerry's parents were college educated. His father was a steamfitter and his mother was a secretary. Jerry grew up in Boone, Iowa and had one brother.

Jerry said he enjoyed cars, going to car races, and restoring old cars--interests he shared with his father and brother. He indicated that his family was very materialistic, yet very giving. His family abided by the philosophy that "if you have and somebody needs, you give."

According to Jerry, he had grown up in his father's footsteps and would probably follow similar child-rearing patterns with his own children. However, he also felt like he was discovering his own individuality and had stopped following stereotypical male/female role expectations--something his father had never been able to do. Jerry believed that many classes at the senior level instructed one to be an individual rather than follow the crowd and those classes had contributed to a greater awareness of his own individuality.

Jerry discussed his father's leanings toward racism and sexism. He was bothered by them and said he tried to treat all people equally. At the same time, he was also bothered by reverse discrimination and was very sensitive to those types of issues.

Jerry appreciated his family and friends and all they had done for him, but thought he could survive on his own without any of them if necessary.

Informant #6 - Linda

Linda was a senior majoring in Hotel, Restaurant, and Institution Management. She described herself as a loner with a few friends, mostly guys. She said she seemed to get along much
better with men than with women. Linda said she loved animals, and her family had always had many pets as she was growing up.

While talking about herself, Linda said she was good at empathizing with others and putting herself into another's shoes. She said she probably developed this ability as a result of grade school experiences. Linda had gone to a predominately black elementary school and said other children had often teased her and excluded her from activities because she was white. She said she had developed empathy and never wanted to make others feel as she had felt then.

Linda was 22 years of age and had an older brother and older sister. The family had previously lived in Des Moines but had recently moved to Norwalk. All three of the children had been adopted at birth. Linda's mother was retired but had previously worked at a convenience store. Her father was a stockbroker. She said the family had never been close. Her mother and father had marital problems and were not currently living together. Her father had remained in Des Moines at the time the rest of the family moved to Norwalk.

Linda said she had always wanted a family like that of her father's sister. They lived in Kansas City and were a very close family who did things together and family members supported one another.

Informant #7 - Janice Janice was a graduating senior majoring in family and consumer journalism with a minor in nutrition. Janice described herself as someone who had a strong nurturing aspect. She said she knew lots of people on campus.
Janice said she had been interested in journalism since elementary school and had been especially influenced by her third grade teacher who had creative ways of teaching and encouraging students to write.

Janice had lived in Ames, Iowa since the age of two years. She had an older sister who was married and had children of her own. Her father was a civil engineer with the Department of Transportation and her mother was a homemaker who had been a home economics graduate.

According to Janice, she had very animated conversations with her father while her mother, on the other hand, never spoke out much. She indicated that her family had been supportive throughout her life and she wanted to live near them and take care of them as they were nearing the age of retirement.

Informant #8 - Sarah Sarah was a graduating senior in educational services. In talking about herself, Sarah said she had a tendency to take everyone in as a friend and avoided small groups of friends or cliques. She indicated that she "liked to give a lot" and would much rather give a gift than receive one.

Sarah had grown up in Hudson, Iowa as an only child. Her father was a vocational agriculture teacher and her parents owned an insurance business together. Although she was an only child, Sarah said she interacted with many other children because she spent time at babysitters while her parents worked. While growing up, she always had a pet. Her pets were important because they were her special friends.

Sarah described her parents as very caring and giving individuals who had supported her goals and aspirations and encouraged her to always do her
best. They instilled in her a strong work ethic and taught her to be appreciative of things. At the time of the interviews, however, Sarah had experienced some problems in her relationship with her mother. Though a wonderful parent in many respects, Sarah’s mother had always sought to live her life vicariously through Sarah. The current conflicts centered around that issue. Despite them, however, Sarah contended that she had wonderful parents and felt lucky to have been a part of such a supportive family.

Informant #9 - Patricia

Patricia was a graduating senior majoring in housing and the near environment. She described herself as the only "artsy" person in a family of business majors. Her hobbies included ceramics and water skiing.

Chicago was Patricia’s hometown. Her father was a lawyer and certified public accountant and her mother worked for his company. Patricia was the youngest of four girls and had attended an all female art school in downtown Chicago before transferring to Iowa State. All of her sisters had attended a Catholic university and her family had thought she would do likewise. She said they didn’t really object to her attending Iowa State, but they had probably wanted to shelter her a bit longer.

Informant #10 - Maria

Maria was an international student and graduating senior in general studies in family and consumer sciences. She said she had always wanted to be a teacher and to teach others.

Maria’s parents owned and operated a small supermarket in her hometown. She described her mother as being very energetic but always available to spend time with Maria and her sister. Maria said her mother was good at listening and giving advice and she felt like she could share
her problems with her mother. According to Maria, her father was friendly but somewhat authoritative. He gave his children support, both financial and emotional, when needed but did not spend much time with them due to his work. Maria indicated several times that she really loved her family and missed them.

Informant #11 - Dianna

Dianna was an international student and graduating senior in dietetics. In describing herself, she said she always gave without expectations for receiving something in return. She said she tried to help others and if she could not, she would refer them to others. Dianna said she cared about people and especially loved working with older people. She appreciated them for what they had contributed to society in their younger years.

Dianna grew up in a large family of six children. She had two older sisters, one older brother, and two younger brothers. As a child, she hated going to school and did not understand why she needed to read and study. She described herself as the "lousiest" one in the whole family because others seemed so outstanding compared to her. She felt that her mother was sometimes disappointed in her and worried more about her than the other children.

Dianna appreciated what her parents did for her. Though her father was a doctor, they did not have much money. Early on she learned to be independent and take responsibility for her younger brothers. All of the children learned at an early age that certain requests were inappropriate and that you must ask only for that which you really needed. Despite the financial difficulties, Dianna's mother believed that education was of the
utmost importance and worked hard for all of the children to attend college.

Informant #12 - Rebecca  
Rebecca was a senior in international home economics with a minor in Spanish and was also working toward a dietetics degree. Her interests included fitness, and she liked to bike, workout, hike, and participate in sports activities when possible. She also indicated an interest in sewing, crafts, and cooking. In describing her personal characteristics, Rebecca said she was somewhat introverted and often felt uncomfortable and nervous in social situations.

Muscatine, Iowa was Rebecca’s hometown. Her father was employed as a foreman at Monsanto. Her parents had been married for 25 years and Rebecca had two younger brothers. Her youngest brother was involved in an accident as a child and was handicapped as a result of the accident. She said her father had experienced difficulty in dealing with that situation, but had kept his feelings insides while her mother had kept the family together throughout the ordeal. Rebecca indicated that neither she nor her father had a close relationship with her youngest brother, but her mother was very close to him. Rebecca said she enjoyed a closer relationship with her other brother.

Informant #13 - Brenda  
Brenda was a graduating senior majoring in dietetics. In talking about her personal characteristics, Brenda said she had some passive qualities but also tended at times to get very uptight about things. She further described herself as a perfectionist with a competitive nature and a tendency to be stubborn.
Brenda was the oldest of three children. She had both a sister and a brother. For the first few years of her life, Brenda lived in Ames. Later the family bought a farm in Malcom, Iowa. Her father was a farmer and also ran a trucking business. She described her father as a determined man who was sometimes overbearing while her mother, on the other hand, tended to be passive.

Informant #14 - Pam

Pam was an international student and a senior majoring in growth and development of children and international studies. In her country, individuals still cling to traditional gender roles and Pam said she felt like she was always fighting against the stereotypical expectations. She said she would like to remain in the United States upon completion of her degree program because there is less emphasis on traditional roles for men and women.

Pam grew up in what she called a typical middle class family. She had two sisters. Her father was employed as an air traffic controller and her mother was a housekeeper. Her mother had previously taught English in junior high school.

Pam said everyone in the family loved each other, though sometimes there was jealousy between the sisters.

Experiences and perceptions of home economics from childhood to high school

The informants' experiences with home economics in early childhood were characterized by references to limited views of home economics. All of the informants had been reared in two-parent families. Early images and perceptions of home economics were based upon gender role expectations for
the mother or mother-figure (grandmother). This was true for both international and U.S. students.

"The experiences were rather traditional--cooking, sewing, and so forth... I was taken care of by my grandmother. She cooked three meals a day, took care of the house, did her chores and took care of me. That was basically the cooking, the babysitting, and so forth." (Robert, Interview 2, October 24, 1990).

"[At first] I thought home economics had to do with cooking... It [was] a woman's job." (Dianna, Interview 2, March 22, 1991).

"The earliest experience I [had] with home economics [was] from my home. My grandma used to be a home economics teacher. I lived with her in my childhood. All I know is she [was] a very good cook and she [was] good at needlework." (Pam, Interview 2, May 7, 1991).

The gender role expectations were clearly identified by Jerry who said,

"Dad made the money and mom bought the groceries and stuff like that. It was a pretty set pattern." (Jerry, Interview 2, November 12, 1990).

Elementary school experiences with home economics were limited and practically non-existent. The few experiences identified appear to have been in relation to concepts such as health and nutrition which were given brief attention by some elementary classroom teachers. Middle and junior high school experiences consisted of short units of cooking and sewing.

Perceptions of high school home economics programs may be categorized as either limited or more inclusive.

Limited views were characterized by images of cooking, sewing, and preparation of females for marriage.

"Secondary school [was] the basic home ec. experience where you learn to cook and sew and all that. I really didn't have a very broad view of home economics." (Mary, Interview 2, October 16, 1990).
"It was basically...for those people who planned on being in the home. It was designed around them. You know, for the girl who was going to marry somebody rich and stay in the house. They wanted to give them a good shot at being a good wife." (Jerry, Interview 2, November 12, 1990).

Inclusive perceptions of home economics were derived from courses in nutrition, parenting, human sexuality, dating and marriage, housing, child and family development, and consumer education.

"...In my high school, we had a senior level course...called dating and courtship or marriage. That was a class that a lot of males took. I think it was really good for them to see another aspect of home economics that wasn't cooking and sewing. It [dealt with] relationships, birth control, your engagement, and marriage." (Sarah, Interview 3, March 6, 1991).

Maria (an international student), however, had a rather unique secondary school experience which had a profound impact upon her life.

Maria reported,

"...The class focused on...family and relationships in the family.... I liked this class. It influenced me and changed my whole thoughts and the whole idea about my career." (Maria, Interview 2, March 29, 1991).

This experience in home economics seemed to have been an enlightening one, and with the encouragement of her teacher, Maria had made a decision to pursue a career in home economics.

In these discussions of high school home economics experiences, there began to emerge perceptions of home economics as being better suited for those thought to be intellectually less capable. Although such incidents were few, they are mentioned here because of their importance in understanding some of the images which affect home economics enrollment in high schools.
"I could have [taken home economics courses in high school], but I looked at the students [who] took those classes. They were generally not the high achievers.... Maybe it was a good program, but people I saw going into it and getting good grades were not the ones who got good grades in other classes. I assumed it was because they weren't hard classes." (Janice, Interview 2, February 26, 1991).

"The clothing and the foods classes were basically lower classes for people who wanted to get easy credits.... That was the reputation [home economics] had." (Rebecca, Interview 2, April 4, 1991).

Home economics experiences in school and community related activities were varied. Participation in 4-H, Girl Scouts, Boy Scouts, and Campfire were mentioned as opportunities to develop leadership and management skills.

Current perceptions and definitions of home economics

As the informants described their present perceptions and definitions of home economics, it soon became evident that these individuals had developed more sophisticated and broadly encompassing views of home economics.

Robert and Jerry, both majors in Hotel, Restaurant, and Institution Management, produced definitions more closely tied to the concepts of products and services.

"Home economics is...the study of the consumer." (Jerry, Interview 3, November 14, 1990).

"Home economics is a field of practical knowledge for use in everyday life to provide services or products to people, whether individuals or families, from birth to death." (Robert, Interview 3, October 31, 1990).

Further discussion, however, indicated that both men were interested in "individuals" or "people" and their needs much more than the idea of simply making a profit.
The holistic focus of home economics was captured in Katherine's definition.

"Home economics is both a science and an application of different disciplines that help families and other household units lead healthy and productive lives.... I think home economics centers on helping people throughout the lifespan in all aspects of their lives (Katherine, Interview 3, November 6, 1990).

Sarah's definition, though somewhat simplistic, identifies home economics as a profession dealing with life.

"[Home economics] is living and life, and everything--socialization, nutrition, health, and managing your money. A lot of people don't realize how much it really involves." (Sarah, Interview 3, March 6, 1991).

With the exception of one individual who had difficulty identifying with the profession, it was clear to the researcher that these individuals defined home economics as a profession aimed at enhancing the well-being of individuals and families. Each felt that he/she could contribute to this mission through his/her specific specialization.

When asked how their specializations were related to other specializations in home economics, several individuals responded by citing examples. In these cases, the informants selected a particular issue and discussed the contributions each specialization could make in bringing it to resolution. For many, this was an easy task as they had been asked to do something similar in the senior capstone seminar, FCS 460. In some cases, the informants described their relationship to only a few of the other areas. This was especially true in very specialized majors such as Hotel, Restaurant & Institution Management, Dietetics, Housing & the Near Environment, and Fashion Merchandising.
Nevertheless, with the exception of one individual, it appeared to the researcher that the integrative perspective had been successfully conveyed to these individuals. Rebecca's remarks illustrate this integrative perspective.

"Everything overlaps. Everything is interconnected.... You have to know just because they are poorly nourished, what are the factors involved in that? It could be their housing situation. It could be their financial situation. It could be...the childrearing practices.... There are so many things that affect every discipline.... You can't just look at one thing. They are all interconnected." (Rebecca, Interview 3, April 11, 1991).

Linda, the lone exception to an integrative perspective, presented a unique case. Although she was a major in Hotel, Restaurant, and Institution Management, Linda was only interested in hotel management. As a result, she seemed to identify solely with that part of the major. While she acknowledged that the restaurant part of her major might fit into home economics, hotel management did not. Thus, Linda could not identify with other areas of specialization. She clearly felt that her major was somewhat misplaced and that she had not received sufficient background in hotel management. Linda, then, had been unable to integrate within her own major and further integration would be impossible without this beginning step.

All of the informants felt that the specializations were tied by a common concern for human beings--whether individuals, consumer, or families.

"I think you could take one family and... every major could apply to that family or do something for that family." (Mary, Interview 3, October 25, 1990).
Having identified a common focus, each informant was asked if there were common skills, knowledge, or competencies needed by all professionals in home economics.

Communication skills were the most strongly emphasized, regardless of major or specialization. Sarah's remarks captured the intensity of this feeling.

"I think it is very important to be a good communicator. You can have all the knowledge in the world built up inside you.... Unless you can communicate it, be it written or verbal, ... it is not going to do any good." (Sarah, Interview 3, March 6, 1991).

An understanding of the lifespan perspective and the needs of one's audience were also cited as important factors. The informants felt that this knowledge was necessary in order to effectively serve the needs of individuals and families.

While communication skills and a lifespan perspective were the most prevalent themes, a few of the informants also indicated a need to have common knowledge about the areas of specialization. This was deemed important because it would provide a basic foundation from which to draw information.

"Everybody should have one class from everybody else's major, not only so you can relate to family, but so you know what other... majors are doing." (Mary, Interview 3, October 25, 1990).

Patricia, on the other hand, felt there was no way to generalize or delineate certain skills that could be required of all. Although she could see that her major, Housing & the Near Environment, was related in a broad sense to other majors, she could not see the necessity for common skills.
Instead, she felt that anyone wishing to be a home economist should be people-oriented.

Although the researcher did not specifically mention core experiences, the informants made various comments about core courses throughout the interviews. From the researcher's perspective, it appeared that the students equated "core" with core classes or courses. This is important to remember as other concepts delineated by AHEA accreditation documents and addressed through parts of courses either within or outside of the College of Family and Consumer Sciences were omitted in the comments.

Comments on core courses were mixed and do not convey the views of all informants since they are not an area addressed specifically by the researcher's questions. Nevertheless, they are presented here to give the reader a feel for the students' perceptions.

**HDFS** This course was not always liked, but it was viewed as important in understanding human and family development.

**FCS 110** Reactions to this course were mixed. Those who felt positively indicated it had been helpful in selecting a major. Those who felt that it was useless said they had already decided on their majors and could have managed without it.

**FShN 167** Most comments were positive. Individuals felt it would be useful knowledge for self as well as others.

**FCS 260** There were few comments, however they tended to be negative. The major complaint was that it lacked relevance.
FCS 310 This course also had few comments, but it was viewed as a good course for career preparation.

FCS 460 A number of students talked about their projects and indicated it had provided opportunities to develop a better understanding of the relationships among areas of specialization. It seemed that the most valuable learning had taken place in the recitation sections of the course.

Identified significant experiences in CFCS

A number of other areas were explored for their potential significance in affecting students' perceptions of home economics. Among these were reasons for choosing ISU and CFCS as the setting for one's education, identification of influential persons both within CFCS, and identification of significant experiences, both positive and negative.

When informants were asked how they chose Iowa State for their education, the answers were basically divided among those who needed to remain in-state and those who made their choice based upon prior visits to campus or recommendations from friends.

The selection of the College of Family and Consumer Sciences was either a matter of the placement of the major or a fondness for certain aspects of home economics and a desire to further develop those interests. Five of the informants had switched from other majors into the College of Family and Consumer Sciences. The primary reasons for the changes in major were tied to programs in CFCS that better suited the needs and interests of these informants. One international student had been arbitrarily assigned to the college. She then changed to another college, but after one
semester, came back to CFCS. The remaining eight informants had come into CFCS for a specific major or because of an interest in the general field of home economics.

Influential persons outside of the College of Family and Consumer Sciences were family members, significant others, or teachers who had supported the students throughout their lives and/or had given them confidence in their own abilities. Within the college, influential persons, were identified for their characteristics of caring, and a willingness to help students. While no one in the College of Family and Consumer Sciences was identified as influential in terms of a choice of major, their influence was felt as advisors, professors, or other individuals who genuinely cared and took time to listen, help, and encourage students.

"[My advisor] helped me and influenced me. She kept me interested in what I was doing. She kept me updated and was always helpful in getting me directed in the way I wanted to go." (Rebecca, Interview 2, April 4, 1991).

"I have always really liked my [advisor]. I have had her for lecture and as my [advisor].... She has really helped me through the past four years. She has been a positive influence." (Sharon, Interview 2, November 13, 1990).

As informants discussed their experiences in the College of Family and Consumer Sciences, it became evident that the remarks could be classified into positive and negative categories.

The positive aspects could be further classified in three ways--specific classes, extracurricular activities, and humanistic factors.
Those citing specific classes selected them for their content or other special qualities which stood out in the informant's mind. Extracurricular activities were cited for the leadership opportunities, cooperative work opportunities, and overall fun. Among these were FACES, FCS Council, Cyclone Aid, VEISHEA, honor societies in home economics, and service on a college committee.

Humanistic factors were, by far, the most frequently discussed positive experiences. Students were especially appreciative of the one-to-one personal treatment, willingness of teachers to help students, friendliness and attentiveness of Dean Crabtree, and the overall friendly atmosphere of the college.

Negative experiences, though fewer, included problems with advisors and/or professors and poorly taught/organized courses. Suggestions for improvements in individual programs involved the addition or deletion of courses specific to the informant's major.

From the findings, one may conclude that humanistic factors make stronger impressions than course content. It is the interpersonal, human factors which contribute to more positive impressions.

"Being able to work with faculty so closely and with the students [have been outstanding experiences]." (Robert, Interview 3, October 31, 1990).

"In general, I would say the atmosphere of friendliness in people [stands out]." (Sarah, Interview 3, March 6, 1991).

**Personal changes in the informants** For many students, the undergraduate years are filled with new opportunities for personal growth. Recognizing that changes take place in attitudes, feelings, etc., the
researcher asked the informants if they had encountered anything in their learning that had made them think about things differently than before. The responses were widely varied, but the most prevalent ideas are presented here.

First, many informants felt that they had developed a greater awareness and acceptance of individuals from different cultures.

Second, many felt that they had become more accepting of the values and beliefs of others and were therefore, less likely to form quick opinions and impressions of others.

"...Sometimes I feel that right now if an issue came up... I can tell myself, 'Do not make any conclusion because you [don't] know that situation. You don't know what is going on. Don't just say your personal opinion... because people in that situation will make that decision. They have their own reasons.'" (Dianna, Interview 3, April 5, 1991).

The third area of change occurred in the "self". This included a greater self-awareness and understanding.

An increased understanding of the lifespan perspective was the fourth area of change. Some informants had finally grasped the complexity of human development. Mary, for example, had been greatly influenced by a course dealing with communication. Reflecting on what she had learned, Mary had come to the realization that individuals are shaped by early experiences and that those experiences can have a profound effect on one's life.

"I realize you can look back to when you [were] two years old and [realize] it can affect you. You need to deal with the things that happened in the past and get out the feelings and talk about it." (Mary, Interview 2, October 16, 1990).
Mary further indicated that she could now better understand her family because she could identify its place in the life cycle. As a result, she had developed a greater appreciation for her parents.

Conclusions and Recommendations

Data from this study indicated that students did develop an understanding of the integrative nature of the home economics profession. This understanding was facilitated through core experiences within the College of Family and Consumer Sciences.

The findings which corroborate this conclusion revealed that perceptions of home economics ranged from limited views to the currently held integrative view. This development occurred as a result of experiences which lead to greater understanding of the meaning of home economics. Early perceptions were limited and based exclusively on gender role expectations for the female caregiver. By the time the informants reached high school, their perceptions were either limited or they had become more inclusive, largely based upon the particular experiences they had encountered in the high schools. At the time of the interviews, the informants (with the exception of Linda who had failed to integrate even within her own major) had developed more sophisticated views of home economics as a field dealing with the well-being of individuals and families and encompassing a number of specializations. The informants were able to describe the interrelationships of areas of specialization as well as their own roles in this integrative perspective. From this, then, one may conclude that the concept of integration had been successfully conveyed to the students, whether or not they were directly conscious of it.
When asked whether there were certain skills, knowledge, or competencies needed by all individuals within the home economics profession, communication skills and a lifespan perspective were the most prevalent ideas. This leads one to question why other core concepts are not identified despite their contributions to the integrative perspective. It is the researcher's belief that information from the other concepts has been internalized but is not consciously recognized as a part of the home economics core experiences.

Students' references to the "core" in the College of Family and Consumer Sciences were limited to specific courses required of all majors in the college. Therefore, other concepts delineated in the common body of knowledge were not specifically addressed. However, the findings of the quantitative study which formed the basis for this investigation (Smith 1990, 1988) indicated that students self-perceived ability to perform tasks related to the core concepts showed an overall increase from the time of entry into the college to the time of graduation. Those findings, coupled with findings from the present study, suggest that the core program in the College of Family and Consumer Sciences at Iowa State University is functioning as intended.

Although the specific core concepts, with the exception of human development over the lifespan and communication skills (a part of educational principles), did not emerge from the students' perceptions as necessary knowledge for all professionals, there is no evidence to suggest that any of the concepts should be eliminated. On the contrary, the data suggest that students have acquired knowledge from these concepts although
they may not be consciously aware of such knowledge. Perhaps it may be considered more a part of their overall general education or it may surface in specific form as the need for this knowledge arises in the students' chosen careers. A five year follow-up interview could provide additional data on these aspects of the core curriculum as well as verify the stability of the concepts of integration, human development over the lifespan, and communication.

This research was conducted at one site with a specifically identified core curriculum. It is recommended that the same research design be conducted at a comparable institution with comparable specialized majors. A further study might involve the perceptions of faculty concerning the concepts explored with students.

The results of this study suggest that much of what is learned is implicit as opposed to explicit in nature. The environment for learning can be as important as the content itself. The physical environment or organization of areas as well as faculty and staff with whom the student comes into contact can affect their perceptions of home economics.
REFERENCES


I would like to express my sincere thanks to Dr. Frances Smith, major professor, for her support, encouragement and direction throughout this project. She willingly sacrificed many hours of her own personal time to assist me and for this, I am deeply grateful. Thanks also to Dr. Richard Smith for his technical assistance.

Appreciation is also extended to my committee members--Dr. Sedahlia Jasper Crase, Dr. Harvey Joanning, Dr. Shu-Min Huang, and Dr. Sally Williams. Thanks also to Dr. Michael Whiteford who graciously agreed to serve as a substitute for Dr. Shu-Min Huang during the final oral examination.

I wish to also extend sincere thanks and appreciation to two of my very dearest friends, Miriam Chiza-Muyengwa and Jane Nuhu. They have been a constant source of inspiration to me through their advice, support, and encouragement.

Finally, I wish to thank my family for their unconditional love and support and for the many sacrifices they have made for me throughout the years. Thank you for your love and belief in me!
APPENDIX A. HUMAN SUBJECTS APPROVAL FORM
Checklist for Attachments and Time Schedule

The following are attached (please check):

12. ☑ Letter or written statement to subjects indicating clearly:
   a) purpose of the research
   b) the use of any identifier codes (names, #'s), how they will be used, and when they will be removed (see Item 17)
   c) an estimate of time needed for participation in the research and the place
   d) if applicable, location of the research activity
   e) how you will ensure confidentiality
   f) in a longitudinal study, note when and how you will contact subjects later
   g) participation is voluntary; nonparticipation will not affect evaluations of the subject

13. ☐ Consent form (if applicable)

14. ☐ Letter of approval for research from cooperating organizations or institutions (if applicable)

15. ☑ Data-gathering instruments

16. Anticipated dates for contact with subjects:

   First Contact  Last Contact
   March 26, 1990     February 1, 1991
   Month / Day / Year   Month / Day / Year

17. If applicable: anticipated date that identifiers will be removed from completed survey instruments and/or audio or visual tapes will be erased:

   July 1, 1991
   Month / Day / Year

18. Signature of Departmental Executive Officer  Date  Department or Administrative Unit

   Signature
   3-5-90
   Family and Consumer Sciences Education

19. Decision of the University Human Subjects Review Committee:

   ☑ Project Approved  ☐ Project Not Approved  ☐ No Action Required

   Patricia M. Keith
   Name of Committee Chairperson  3/18/90  Signature of Committee Chairperson
1. Describe what home economics means to you.

2. What are the sources of this meaning of home economics that you described?

3. What part of that description was obtained at ISU?

4. Of the faculty in CFCS, who has had the greatest influence (positive or negative) on your description of home economics?

5. Describe that influence.

6. What is your area of specialization?

7. Would you include your area of specialization as part of the description of home economics you gave earlier? Why or why not?

8. Do you see a relationship between your area of specialization and other areas of specialization in this college? If so, what is it? If not, why not?

9. What are the benefits and/or disadvantages of your major being considered a part of the field of home economics?

10. Which other majors in this college are more closely related to your major? Why?

11. Which other majors in this college are the least related to your major? Why?

12. What, if anything, do the majors in this college have in common?

13. Faculty in CFCS have identified the following common concepts for all home economics majors: human development, nutrition, management, aesthetics, educational principles, public policy, and skills related to professional development in home economics.

   --Describe your knowledge related to these concepts.
   --Where did you obtain your knowledge of these concepts?
   --How do these concepts fit together?
   --What is the unifying theme?
   --What contribution will knowledge related to these make in your expected work life?

14. What are some other concepts that you perceive to be a part of the integrative nature of home economics?
APPENDIX C. DATA-GATHERING INTERVIEW GUIDE
Tell me about yourself and your family.

Describe your family members.

Tell me about your friends.

Identify your experiences related to home economics in each of the following settings:

a. home
b. early childhood/elementary school
c. secondary school
d. school/community activities (e.g., 4-H, FHA)
e. college

As you think about your experiences in home economics, who are (were) the influential persons in each of the following:

a. home
b. early childhood/elementary school
c. secondary school
d. school/community activities
e. college
f. other

How did each individual's influence affect you?

Why did you choose this setting (ISU, CFCS) for your education?

If I didn't know anything about home economics, how would you define and describe it for me?
Where and how do you fit into this description?

Describe your experiences in the College of Family and Consumer Sciences.

Probing questions

What kinds of things stand out most in your mind about your experiences here at Iowa State University in general and in the College of Family and Consumer Sciences?

In your learning here, have you come across an idea(s) that made you see things differently or think about things differently?

What has been the most helpful to you about the College of Family and Consumer Sciences?

Are there things this university/CFCS program didn’t provide that are important to you?

If you could make changes in your program to make it better, what would you do?

Tell me how you relate to other areas of home economics.

What ties the various specializations together?

Are there skills, knowledge, and competencies that everyone in home economics should possess? If so, what are they? Why should professional home economists have these skills, knowledge, and competencies?
APPENDIX D. RESEARCHER'S BACKGROUND
My experiences with home economics began in high school. I took courses in home economics throughout my four years of high school and became an active member of the Future Homemakers of America (FHA). I served as an officer of FHA on the local, parish, district, and state levels. The experiences in home economics, particularly FHA, influenced me to pursue home economics education as my area of study. I am very strongly committed to home economics and its mission.

When I came to the College of Family and Consumer Sciences (CFCS) at Iowa State in the fall semester of 1988, I was given a teaching assistantship to work with the FCS 260 course (then FCSED 205) which was a required course for all students in the college. The course dealt with the philosophical foundations of home economics and the relationships among areas of specialization. Through my work in that course, I became interested in the core curriculum in the College of Family and Consumer Sciences. Personally, I felt that all students in a home economics program should share some common knowledge in addition to the specialized knowledge of his/her own area of study. The common knowledge would provide a foundation from which to function through a holistic approach.

My interest in the core curriculum led me to Dr. Frances Smith who was conducting ongoing research to measure student's self-perceived competence to perform certain tasks related to the core concepts in CFCS. Also, the fact that students tended to complain about core courses and their perceived irrelevance to the students' careers had caused me to question whether these students were actually learning anything about the integrative nature of home economics and whether or not they even cared
about it. My perception was that the students didn't really care to be bothered with "required" courses and were only interested in their own areas of specialization.

This interest in the core curriculum subsequently developed into a study that allowed me to talk with students about their experiences and to listen to their "stories." The study would provide additional information to complement the work of Dr. Smith.

I began the study with both enthusiasm and caution. I was excited about the challenges of the research design and what I might find, but also very cautious about my own perceptions and biases. I exercised the utmost care to ensure that my own views would not be conveyed to the students. I began by writing a narrative of my own experiences, etc. and kept notes about my feelings and perceptions during the study.

At the conclusion of the study, I was quite surprised by the findings as they were not what I had expected. Based upon my informal observations as a teaching assistant and the numerous complaints of students concerning the core curriculum, I believed I would find students who had little interest or desire to know anything about the integrative nature of home economics. Instead, I was pleasantly surprised by the responses. The students had grasped the concept of integration and were able to see their areas of specialization within the broader context of the profession.
APPENDIX E. FINAL CATEGORIES OF DATA
BACKGROUND INFORMATION

HOMETOWN - identification of and/or information about informant's hometown
SELFDESC - informant's description of him/herself
SIBDESC - description of siblings
SIBREL - informant's relationships with siblings
MOMDESC - description of mother
DADDESC - description of father
OCCFATHER - father's occupation
OCCMOTHER - mother's occupation
FAMREL - description of family relationships

EXPERIENCES WITH HOME ECONOMICS FROM CHILDHOOD TO HIGH SCHOOL

HOECH - home economics experiences in the home
HOECEC - home economics experiences in early childhood
HOECES - home economics experiences in elementary school
HOECSS - home economics experiences in secondary school
HOEDSCA - home economics experiences in school/community activities
DESCSHOEC - description of high school home economics
INFLPERSON - influential persons in the informant's life

CURRENT PERCEPTIONS AND DEFINITIONS OF HOME ECONOMICS

HOECOLL - home economics experiences in college
HOECDEF - definition of home economics
FITHOECDEF - the way in which the informant's area of specialization fits into the definition of home economics which he/she provided
RELSPEC - relationships among areas of specialization/ways in which informant's area of specialization is related to other areas
TIES - factor(s) that tie the areas of specialization together
COMMONSKILLS - skills/competencies which all home economics graduates should possess

IDENTIFIED SIGNIFICANT EXPERIENCES IN CFCS

ISUSETTING - reason(s) for choosing ISU as place of study
CFCSSETTING - reason(s) for choosing area of study in CFCS
CFCSINFPERSON - identification/description of influential persons in CFCS
MAJOR - identification/discussion of choice of major
POSASPECTS - positive aspects of CFCS in general
NEGASPECTS - negative aspects of CFCS in general
MAJPOSASP - positive aspects of informant's major
MAJNEGASP - negative aspects of informant's major
CFCSPOSEXP - positive experiences in CFCS
CFCSNEGEXP - negative experiences in CFCS
OUTSTANDINGEXP - outstanding experiences at ISU and/or in CFCS
CFCSCHARACTER - general characteristics of CFCS
CORE - comments concerning specific core experiences in CFCS
MOSTHELPFUL - factors in CFCS identified as most helpful by informants
CHANGES - self-perceived changes that took place in informants during their studies
IDEAS - things that made the informants see things differently or think about things differently than before