

A Look at Home Economics Programs

In North American SDA Schools

BY THEA HANSON

Greeting his pupils, the master asked
What would you learn of me?
And the reply came:
How shall we care for our bodies?
How shall we rear our children?
How shall we work together?
How shall we live with our fellowmen?
How shall we play?
And the teacher pondered these words, and sorrow
was in his heart, for his own learning touched not these things.¹

These are the things that young people need to learn in order to live successful and happy lives. The home economics curriculum deals with many of these important topics. Therefore, home economics would seem to be a necessary and required topic in all our schools. What exactly is its status today in SDA academies and colleges in North America?

In April 1988 I developed four surveys dealing with the teaching of home economics in Adventist schools in the North American Division. The surveys included 220 junior and senior academies in the U.S. and the 12 NAD colleges and universities.

Surveys were sent to the presidents, academic deans, registrars, and home economics departments of the colleges and universities. Eighty-three percent of the presidents, 92 percent of the deans, 58 percent of the registrars, and 92 percent of the home economics departments responded. A telephone survey contacted each union conference department of education for information regarding the home economics requirements of their union. There was 100 percent participation in this survey.

Survey results indicate that the majority of our schools no longer require or even offer home economics at the secondary or college level. However, remaining home economics departments do offer viable programs. On the secondary level more and more schools are terminating their home economics classes. Those that do offer home economics teach mainly cooking and sewing.

College Level

Table 1 indicates that of the 12 institutions of higher education in the North American Division only five have an active home economics department. Of the remaining seven, one still offers a minor but has no students enrolled. A second college offers two classes. The third college never had a home economics department, although it did offer a food service program. A fourth school, which terminated its home

TABLE 1

Status of Home Economics Departments at SDA Institutions of Higher Education in the North American Division (n=12)

	Number of Institutions
Department terminated	7
Department currently active	5

economics department, still offers foods and nutrition on the graduate level, and early childhood education in the education department.

The majority of home economics departments were terminated in the 1980s. The reason cited in every case was low student enrollment. Three schools also indicated that the program was not cost effective. None of the schools cited a lack of qualified personnel as a reason for termination.

Table 2 indicates that of the five institutions still offering home economics, the student enrollment is quite good. The number of majors ranges from 22 to 63 students. This represents 2.1 to 4.2 per-

cent of total school enrollment. With so many majors in home economics, why are most departments suffering from insufficient enrollment? I believe that one reason is diversification of programs within the departments. But, unfortunately, without this diversification, students would not gain enough in-depth knowledge to make them competitive in the job market.

Another important reason for the low enrollment in home economics classes is failure to include the area in general education requirements. None of the institutions surveyed required a home economics class in the general education curriculum. Three of the institutions reported that nursing students are required to take nutrition, and one also indicated that physical education majors are required to take nutrition. Four institutions stated that students are allowed to use specified home economics classes toward certain general education requirements, but that other classes also meet these requirements.

What is the status of home economics today in North American SDA schools?

Table 3 not only shows how many colleges and universities offer each of the home economics-related majors, but also whether the student enrollment is increasing or declining in each of those

majors. The area that has experienced the greatest drop in students is the home economics education major. This has serious implications for the future of home economics (see section on home economics at the secondary level). The food service major has decreased so drastically in most schools that one more school is dropping it this year, leaving only three schools with a major in this area. Of these, two have very low enrollments in food service classes, while the third has just begun a new food service program and is doing very well. This area offers more jobs than graduates can fill, but students are seemingly not attracted to the major.

Although the four-year foods and nutrition major is declining in enrollment, the four-year dietetics program² has experienced an increase.

The fastest-growing areas of home economics are fashion merchandising and interior design. Fashion merchandising is a new major for most of the schools. It generally replaces a clothing and textiles concentration. One of the schools now offers a combined fashion and interiors major, although in Table 3 they were tallied separately under both majors.

The early childhood education major (ECE) is offered in more than the three schools shown in Table 3; however, in the other two schools it is housed in the education department. With the renewed emphasis on day care in society, this major should see a significant jump in enrollment in the near future.

Future Trends

Looking ahead to the next five years, college presidents and academic deans

TABLE 2

Number and Percentage of Students Majoring in Programs Offered by Home Economics Departments in SDA Institutions of Higher Education for 1986-1987

College	Number of Undergraduate Home Ec. Students (Majors)	Percentage of Total School Enrollment
A	22	2.1%
B	24	2.2%
C	30	2.3%
D	60	4.2%
E	63	3.3%
Graduate school	26 Graduate students	2.4%

TABLE 3

Trends in Number of Students Majoring in Home Economics Programs in SDA Institutions of Higher Education for the Past Five Years (n=5)

Name of Major	Number of Institutions				
	Great Student Increase	Slight Student Increase	Same	Slight Student Decrease	Great Student Decrease
Child Development (n=1)			1		
Clothing & Textiles (n=1).....			1		
Consumer Economics (n=0).....					
Dietetics (n=3).....	1	1	1		
Early Childhood (n=3)			1	2	
Family Studies (n=1)			1		
Fashion Merchandising (n=4)	2	1	1		
Foods/Nutrition (n=3)		1		2	
Food Service (n=3)	1				2
General Home Economics (n=5) ...		1	1		3
Home Economics Education (n=5)..			1	1	3
Interior Design (n=3)	2	1			

said that they anticipate little change in the number of home economics classes to be offered, the number of faculty or programs, or in institutional support. Four administrators anticipate a moderate increase in the number of home economics majors, though two expect a moderate decrease.

Another trend in home economics is a name change for the department. One college has already changed the name to consumer and family sciences, and a second is doing the same. A third school is searching for a new name. This trend has been very pronounced in public colleges and universities and reflects the shift of emphasis within the programs from domestic science to professional career development.

Secondary Level

Table 4 indicates that 61 percent of the

Survey results indicate that the majority of our schools no longer require or even offer home economics at the secondary or college level.

SDA secondary schools in the U.S. do not require home economics. Of these, only 10 percent still offer home economics classes. Those schools that do require it generally schedule it for grade 9 or 10.

Who decides whether home econom-

ics will be required at the secondary level? The General Conference does not require home economics for academy graduation. Three of the union conferences do not require home economics; the other five allow classes such as art, business, or industrial arts to fulfill the applied arts requirement. This means that the local conference or individual schools must decide whether to offer home economics, with the parents being the greatest supporters. Some state departments of education do have home economics requirements, but the discrepancy in answers to the survey question, "Does your state mandate home economics classes?" made the results invalid.

Of the secondary schools that do offer home economics classes, the majority teach cooking and sewing, as shown in Table 5. The least-offered classes are housing and interior design, and consumer economics. Topics such as dating and marriage, health, and sex education are generally incorporated into Bible or science classes.

The cutback in home economics at the college level is reflected at the secondary level. Table 6 shows that of the 94 schools that responded to this question, only 13 had experienced an increase in the number of classes offered during the past decade. More than 60 schools underwent either (1) a decrease in the number of classes offered, or (2) a total elimination of all home economics classes (some of the schools had not offered home economics in the first place).

TABLE 4
Percentage of SDA Secondary Schools in the North American Division That Require Home Economics, by Grade (n=156)

Grade	Percentage of Schools
1 - 7	1%
8	3
9	22
10	11
11	1
12	1
Do not require home economics	61

Perceptions About Home Economics

How do most people view home economics? Eighty-seven percent of academy principals and teachers agreed that most people equate home economics with cooking and sewing. Do people see home economics in this way because our schools teach mainly cooking and sewing in these classes? Is this the image we want people to hold? Could we change the perception by altering the curriculum?

At the college level, 70 percent of the respondents agreed that the general public's image of home economics is a profession involving women who cook and sew. Its stereotype as a woman's field is further supported by figures showing that only 4 percent of the academies that mandated home economics required boys to take the subject, whereas 40 percent of these schools required the subject for girls.

Conclusions and Recommendations

Like the demographics of the American home, many changes have taken place in the home economics profession during the past 40 years. Where it has survived at the college level, home economics has altered its emphasis from skill development for domestic use to professional development for careers outside the home.

Alarming changes have taken place in homes and society. The family has always been the foundation of the nation and church, as well as the means by which moral and spiritual values are transmitted to the next generation. However, today, with the increased incidence of divorce and dual-career families, parents have little time to spend with their children.

Where do young people learn about family roles? In the July 23, 1988, issue of *TV Guide*, Joanmarie Kalter states that "adults and children alike use TV to learn how to handle their own family roles."³

What kind of roles does TV offer us? On most family shows today, children are the heroes and parents are the villains. Most shows exalt individualism, self-actualization, and materialism. They cause children to question the abilities, values, and authority of adults and leave them wondering whether a traditional family is normal or acceptable.

As a church we have an obligation to instill Christian values in our children and youth. This is why the role of home economics is so important. Nothing is more vital to society and to the church than preparing every secondary and college student for family life. Money can purchase many daily necessities, but it cannot buy a happy relationship with other people.

Our church also emphasizes good

TABLE 5
Percentage and Status of Home Economics-related Classes Taught in SDA Secondary Schools (n=109)

Class Content	Not Offered	Percentage of Schools	
		Taught in Home Economics	Taught in Other Classes
Clothing/Sewing	33%	67%	0%
Consumer Economics	52	27	21
Dating/Marriage	26	20	54
Family Life/Child Develop.	37	38	25
Foods/Cooking	28	71	1
Health	5	9	87
Housing/Interior Design	64	35	1
Nutrition	25	50	25
Sex Education	14	13	73

TABLE 6
Trends in Number of Home Economics Classes in SDA Secondary Schools for the Past 10 Years (n=94)

Trend	Number of Schools
No classes have ever been offered	12
Great increase in number of classes	2
Moderate increase in number of classes	11
No change in number of classes	17
Moderate decrease in number of classes	30
Great decrease in number of classes	8
Eliminated all home economics during past 10 years	14

health. Our bodies are the temple of God, and we must learn to care for them properly. We need to counter fads by teaching about a truly healthful diet. Home economics can play a major role in this area by educating all students about proper nutrition. This area should be a general education requirement for every student in SDA academies and colleges.

Educators and administrators should be concerned about the number of schools that no longer offer home economics. Some of the conferences and principals indicated that it was difficult to find qualified home economics teachers. As fewer secondary level classes are offered, fewer teachers are needed. When students see that the job market is not good for home economics teachers, they will not major in this area. (See Table 3.) The fewer graduates, the more difficult to find teachers, creating a vicious circle.

In summary, I would like to recommend the following:

1. Require *all* students, both male and female, in SDA secondary and higher education to take a family life and nutrition class;

2. Update home economics programs and courses to meet the needs of today's students who attend college to prepare for a career;

3. Change the name of college-level home economics to a term that more

accurately depicts the preparation of professionals of both sexes for careers outside the home;

4. Replace the old cooking and sewing emphases that home economics has had at the secondary level. Offer classes that prepare students for life in the 21st century;

5. Develop an active public relations program to inform students, faculty, administrators, and parents about the mission of home economics;

6. Immediately begin aggressive recruitment for home economics programs.

The above measures will revitalize home economics, making it a viable career field. But more importantly, they will prepare young people for successful and happy lives in the family, community, and church, as well as help equip them for citizenship in the world to come. □

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NOTES AND REFERENCES

¹ Chapman and Counts, Quoted in Arthur E. Lean, *And Merely Teach* (Carbondale, Illinois: Southern Illinois University Press, 1968), p. 9.

² (Coordinated Undergraduate Program).

³ Joanmarie Kalter, "Television as Value Setter," *TV Guide*, 36:30 (July 23, 1988), p. 5.