

REQUEST TO CONSOLIDATE TWO EXISTING MAJORS

I. Request

The Department of Family and Consumer Studies (FCS) is an interdisciplinary unit in which faculty and students examine how the social, economic, political, and physical environments affect families and communities. FCS currently offers three undergraduate majors: (1) Human Development and Family Studies, (2) Consumer Studies and Family Economics, and (3) Environment and Behavior. The Department proposes combining the latter two majors into a single major entitled, Consumer and Community Studies.

II. Need

A. Rationale

Two forces drive the proposal for a combined major: one conceptual, the other practical. At the conceptual level, we perceive the opportunity to blend the fields of consumer studies and community development in a way that provides a fresh perspective on a number of contemporary social issues. At a practical level and in accordance with the Department's 2000 Graduate Council Report, the proposal allows FCS to better manage its faculty resources to meet student needs.

Traditionally, both the fields of consumer studies and community development have used interdisciplinary approaches to generate knowledge of practical value to citizens and policy makers. Whereas the field of consumer studies has tended to focus on national and international developments and has stressed the economic determinants of behavior, the field of community development has, by its nature, looked at local phenomena and relied primarily on social and psychological perspectives.

Recently, there has been a convergence between the fields of consumer studies and community development. The field of consumer studies is paying greater attention to the local impact of community-level institutions and initiatives. For example, consumer scientists are studying the effects of e-commerce on local retailers, credit unions on community development, energy-efficient buildings on their occupants, and community-based long-term health care facilities on the elderly and their family members. Within our department, faculty members specializing in consumer studies have examined the impact on low-income consumers of check-cashing outlets, pawn shops, rent-to-own stores, and other local institutions in the "alternative financial sector."

At the same time that the field of consumer studies is turning toward the community level, the field of community development is placing greater emphasis on the economic underpinnings of policies that are important to improving communities. For example, in attempting to understand the problem of homelessness, the field of community studies has married social-psychological approaches with those explaining homeless in terms of larger economic and public policy

choices. Faculty members within FCS have been leaders in studying neighborhood revitalization efforts as well as in describing the factors that keep neighborhoods vibrant.

The fields of consumer studies and community development now share an interest in housing, transportation, and energy provision. Whereas consumer studies is most interested in how individuals can make wise choices in these domains, community studies emphasizes how providing these goods is related to larger issues of what is beneficial for communities given patterns of community growth and decline, demographic change, and design preferences. FCS hopes to capitalize on the convergence of these two fields by offering a major that combines the most valuable elements of both and reflects a more general movement within higher education toward civically engaged teaching and scholarship. (See, as examples, the Service-Learning Project of the American Association of Higher Education and the Utah Campus Compact.)

In addition to the intellectual convergence of the two fields, the motivation to merge two existing majors is also pragmatic in nature. During the 1990s, FCS experienced explosive growth in undergraduate enrollment. Most of this growth occurred in only one of the Department's majors, Human Development and Family Studies (HDFS). The number of HDFS majors blossomed from roughly 100 in 1990 to 700 a decade later. The number of students majoring in the Department's other two majors remained relatively constant, on the order of 90 in Consumer Studies and Family Economics (CSFE) and 35 in Environment and Behavior (E&B) at any one time, despite a variety of efforts to boost enrollment.

The Department responded to the disproportionate growth in the three majors in several ways. First, part-time instructors were hired to teach HDFS courses. Second, the core requirements for all three of the Department's majors were adjusted to encourage HDFS students to take more hours in the two lower-demand majors. Third, faculty in the two lower-demand majors offered a number of courses designed to serve the needs of HDFS. Fourth, with the help of the College of Social and Behavioral Science and the Senior Vice President for Academic Affairs, two new HDFS faculty positions (1.5 teaching FTE) were secured by the Department. Last, and more dramatic, one faculty line was shifted to HDFS from CSFE in 1995 and, most recently, two faculty lines were shifted to HDFS from E&B (one due to a reassignment and the other due to a retirement). While the needs of the HDFS major are currently being satisfied, there are only four CSFE faculty members (including one serving as department chair and another on phased retirement) and one E&B faculty member (plus a vacant line for which recruitment is in process).

Thus, both conceptual and practical considerations undergird this proposal for a combined major. First, the Department faculty perceived an opportunity in exploiting the convergence of and commonalities between the two existing majors. Both majors focus on community-level behavior relevant to housing, transportation, and energy consumption. Moreover, both fields have a commitment to the consumer or citizen's right to participate meaningfully in the development and application of public policies, and both place great importance on using sound research to inform societal decisions.

B. Impact on Students and Community

Current FCS students are supportive of the combined major. Some majors in Consumer Studies and Family Economics liked the proposed name of the combined major, Consumer and

Community Studies, feeling that the word “family” in the present name detracts from the practical, business- and public policy-oriented knowledge that they had acquired. Other majors in CSFE noted that they are reluctant to establish a career outside of Utah, so gaining skills and contacts relevant to the local job market would be useful to them. Students majoring in E&B are also supportive of the combined major. Though proud of their broad training in sociology and psychology, these students see the job-market value of gaining knowledge of the economic dimensions of community issues and community organizations. Both groups of students are enthusiastic about the greater emphasis on internships and community-based research projects (see Group C in the course requirements).

Community needs also appear to be well served by the combined major. FCS has a tradition of working closely with non-profit organizations and businesses in the local community, and FCS enjoys an excellent and long-standing relationship with the Lowell Bennion Community Service Center. The proposed combined major would bolster this tradition of community service and service learning, especially in the burgeoning area of housing development. A local example illustrates the potential benefits of the combined major. American Express/Centurion Bank, as part of its Community Reinvestment Act responsibilities, works closely with a broad array of local non-profit organizations. (Jane Shock, American Express/Centurion Bank’s local director of community development, is a member of the FCS advisory board.) Some of these organizations help consumers avoid bankruptcy, plan their spending more carefully, and enhance their savings, often with the goal of buying a house. Other non-profits working with American Express/Centurion Bank aim to expand the availability of low- and moderate-income housing. Graduates in the combined major would have both the financial management and consumer protection skills to work with consumers plus the community development skills to expand the supply of emergency, rental, rehabilitated, and owned housing.

Job prospects for graduates of the combined major look promising. Government agencies at the national and local level seek people who can combine knowledge of consumer and community phenomena. The Federal Reserve System, for example, operates twelve regional Community Affairs Programs that engage in “ongoing outreach, educational and technical assistance activities to help financial institutions, community-based organizations, government entities, and the public understand and address financial services issues affecting low- and moderate-income persons and communities.” Similarly, the U.S. Department of Agriculture runs an Indoor Environment Program that addresses “issues dealing with housing, residential air quality, water quality, waste management and energy.” Closer to home, the City of Ogden recently advertised for “qualified professionals to assist staff in the Department of Community and Economic Development in drafting an analysis and strategy for understanding Ogden City’s current housing inventory and potential for change, from a market approach.”

There are also many job opportunities for our graduates in the for-profit and non-profit sectors. Banks, investment companies, and real estate companies should find graduates of the combined major attractive. There are also numerous non-profit organizations, including many of the 277 members of the Utah Non-Profits Association, that will value the skills of our graduates...and already do. For instance, Utah Issues recently came to the Department looking for someone who could coordinate their newly created Poverty Action Network. In all these examples, students with an economics-based understanding of consumer studies combined with social science-based

knowledge of community development should compete well.

C. Relation to Other Programs

The marriage of consumer studies and community development, while not common around the country, is far from unprecedented. The University of Vermont, for example, has a Department of Community Development and Applied Economics, and one of its concentrations is consumer economics. The University of California at Davis has a Department of Community and Regional Development that emphasizes the economic elements of community development, including labor and housing markets. Moreover, several colleges are organized such that programs in consumer studies and community development are sister departments in one college (e.g., University of Tennessee, Ohio State University, and University of Illinois).

Once before, the FCS Department embarked on an untested path. In the early 1970s, the Department changed its name from Home Economics to Family and Consumer Studies and embraced social science as its guiding paradigm. Other departments around the country copied the University of Utah, and eventually the national professional association in the field of Home Economics made the same shift, replacing the name of the American Home Economics Association with the American Association of Family and Consumer Sciences. Now, nearly thirty years later, FCS again is seeking to innovate by combining elements of consumer studies and community studies in a way that will be unique within the state of Utah and regionally.

III. Institutional Impact

The consolidation of the two majors within the Department of Family and Consumer Studies strengthens the Department by combining two majors at or below critical mass into one well staffed major. The consolidated major should still be able to play its traditional role of providing support to other programs at the University of Utah, especially those in Environmental Studies, Urban Planning, Social Work, and Business as well as the Lowell Bennion Community Service Center. (The administrators of all these programs were consulted in the course of preparing this proposal and are supportive of its thrust.)

IV. Finances

There will be no demand for new institutional funds as a result of the proposed consolidation. Indeed, the proposal is strongly motivated by the desire to achieve more with fixed resources. In some instances, the consolidated major may even save resources (e.g., through reduction in low-enrollment classes and consolidation of record-keeping and promotional materials).

MAJOR REQUIREMENTS FOR COMBINED MAJOR IN CONSUMER AND COMMUNITY STUDIES (Total Hours: 35)

Group A: Departmental Core (8 hours)

FCS 3200: Research Methods (4)

FCS 3210: Statistics (4)

Group B: Major Core (12 hours)

FCS 3450: Family Economic Issues (3)

FCS 3600: Consumer and Community Policy (3)

Plus 2 of 3 of the Following Courses:

FCS 5410: Consumer Protection (3)

FCS 5450: Consumer and Community Finance (3)

FCS 5730: Community & Environmental Change (3)

Group C: Community Application of Learning (3 hours)

FCS 5700: Research for Community Needs OR FCS 5920: Internship

Group D: Major Electives (9 hours): Select 3

FCS 1400: Consumer Finance (articulated with SLCC Finance 1050)

FCS 3180: Home, School, and Community Relations

FCS 3420: Housing Policy and Issues

FCS 3430: Introduction to Family Policy

FCS 3470: International Consumer Policy

FCS 3620: Environment and Behavior

FCS 5360: Family Law

FCS 5430: Families, Consumers, and Health

FCS 5440: Consumers, Markets, and Government

FCS 5964: Basic Mediation

(Note: Any course not selected to fulfill the requirements of Group B may be used as an elective in Group D.)

Group E: Department Breadth Requirement (3 hours): Select 1

FCS 1500: Human Development in Context Across the Lifespan

FCS 2400: Family Relations Across the Life Course

Group F: Allied Hours (13 hours required)

Students may choose allied hours from the College of Social and Behavioral Science, College of Business, or Department of Communication. Nevertheless, students should strongly consider courses required for a Business Minor as well as courses in Urban Planning, Political Science, Economics, and Environmental Studies.

SIGNATURE PAGE

Institution Submitting Proposal: University of Utah

College, School or Division in
Which Program Will Be Located: Social and Behavioral Science

Department(s) or Area(s) in
Which Program Will Be Located: Department of Family and Consumer Studies

Program Title: Consumer and Community Studies (consolidated major)

Recommended Classification of Instructional Programs (CIP) Code: ____ . ____ _

Area(s) of Emphasis or Academic Specialty: (if appropriate):

Certificate, Diploma and/or Degree(s) to be Awarded: B.A. and B.S.

Proposed Beginning Date: August 15, 2001

Institutional Signatures:

Department Chair–Cathleen D. Zick

Dean or Division Chair–Steven Ott

Associate Academic Vice President–John G. Francis

Chief Academic Officer–David K. Pershing

President–J. Bernard Machen

Date