

**Home Economics:
A contextual study of the subject
and Home Economics teacher education**

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1. The current state of Home Economics education

Home Economics is taught in Asia, Africa, Europe, the United States, South America, Central America, and Canada. In almost every jurisdiction there is currently a shortage of Home Economics¹ teachers. This has been reported in scholarly papers prepared by academics in countries such as the United States (Wehan & Way, 2006), Australia (HEIAI, 2000), the Sudan (Shommo, 1995), Botswana (Bennell & Molwane, 2007), and Canada (Grimmett & Echols, 2000, 2001; Smith & Dryden, 2005). It has been deemed newsworthy in the popular media in countries such as the United States (Maldonado, 2008; Zehr, 1998), Scotland (Schofield, 2005), New Zealand (TVNZ, 2007), and Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania (Lamber, 1999). Discussions of the issue have also appeared in Home Economics and educational publications such as newsletters and journals in Canada, the United States, Australia, and New Zealand.

The international context

United States

In the United States, concerns about the supply of Family and Consumer Science (Home Economics) teachers were raised throughout the late 1980s and '90s (AAFCS, 1999; Burge & Stewart, 1991; Hall & Miller, 1989; Miller & Meszaros, 1996; Rehm & Jackman, 1995; Stout, Couch, & Fowler, 1998; Fox & Van Buren, 1997; Werhan & Way, 2006), and the most recent publication of the US Department of Education (2008) shows that shortages exist in almost every state. Concerns about the desperate situation are appearing in the popular press (Maldonado, 2008, Zehr, 1998). Dramatic declines in the number of teacher preparation programs and the dismantling of home economics/human ecology/family and consumer science undergraduate degree programs have led to lower enrolments in teacher education programs. The American Association of Family and Consumer Sciences, and several state organizations, have been exploring various options to address the crisis, such as: promoting a positive image of the profession and subject area recruiting (Simerly et al, 2000; Miller & Tulloch, 1999; Pickard, 2005; Mimbs, 2002; Jensen et al, 2003), developing alternative certification programs (Lee, 1998; Klemme, 2008) and improved collaboration; networking and mentoring designed to retain existing Family and Consumer Science teachers (Mimbs, 2000). The alternative certification programs included: flexible scheduling of courses to meet the needs of nontraditional students (Travers, 1999); joint certification with other vocational program areas (Miller, 1997); collaborative approaches that allow students to combine family and consumer sciences teacher, certification with a major in one of the family and consumer sciences content specializations and expansion of fifth-year/post-baccalaureate options (Bull, Uerz, & Yoakum, 2000; Bull & Cummings, 2002), and offering teacher certification programs through distance education (Picard, 2005; Draper et al, 1999; Reinboldt, 2001).

¹ Home Economics is still the preferred terminology in British Columbia, Australia, and many parts of the world. The International Federation continues to use Home Economics as its professional reference. In the United States, the national association changed its name to Family and Consumer Sciences and many states re-named their school programs Family and Consumer Science (FACS). In some parts of Canada (e.g., Manitoba and Alberta) university programs have been re-named Human Ecology. In Great Britain, Home Economics courses in schools became part of technology and re-named accordingly, for example, Food Technology. In Ontario and Nova Scotia the umbrella name for the school subject is Family Studies.

Australia

In 2000, the Australian Home Economics Institute conducted a study of the supply and demand of home economics teachers in that country. The resulting report, *Home Economics supply and demand to 2003—Projections, implications and issues* (HEIAI, 2000), found that there was a growing shortage of home-economics-trained teachers to meet a continuous demand. The major reason for the growing shortage of home economics teachers was a lack of appropriate tertiary teacher preparation courses and a reduction in home-economics teacher-preparation courses. As a result, a small university in South Australia implemented a Bachelor of Education Program in Design/Technology and Home Economics,² and Home Economics Victoria, a Registered Training Organization, developed an accredited Vocational Graduate Diploma of Home Economics Education (vanBronswijk, 2008).

United Kingdom

A 2006 publication by TSL Education Limited, one of the United Kingdom's leading educational publishers, used the headline "Home economics is starved of teachers" (Buie, 2006) to describe the situation in that country. That same year a study conducted by the Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills (OFSTED), a government organization that inspects schools, reported on Food Technology courses and included this information on teacher supply

1. In a growing number of parts of the country, there is a shortage of specialist teachers of food technology. As a result, provision is reduced and, in some cases, abandoned, together with the closure of specialist teaching rooms. Two of the schools visited during the survey had abandoned attempts to recruit food technology teachers and had closed down their food courses. Both schools were popular, well run and had little difficulty in recruiting staff in most other subjects.
2. Other schools have resorted to employing teachers qualified in other focus areas of D&T [Design & Technology], or other subjects entirely, who have expressed an interest in teaching food technology. Whilst some of these teach the subject reasonably effectively, many do not. They find it very difficult to challenge older and higher attaining pupils, and ensure their personal safety. In some areas, therefore, recruitment problems undermine schools' capacity to teach food technology effectively (OFSTED, 2006).

More recently, there have been reports of shortages in Scotland³ (Schofield, 2005) and Ireland (Taylor & Usher, 2004). In the 1990s, a new British National Design and Technology curriculum saw the merging of two subjects—home economics and craft design technology. The new course was identified as a foundation (core) subject requiring pupils to apply their knowledge to solve practical problems (Wright, 1993), but the practical problems in food technology (which replaced the name home economics) became focused on product development, marketing, and entrepreneurship. Thus the alignment of home economics with technology meant a loss of knowledge and skills associated with nutrition and practical food preparation. In response to this, in 2005 the British government proposed revisions to the national curriculum, including a

² Denise Nembard, personal report to THESA Inquiry group after interviewing a member of the Australian Home Economics Institute Supply and Demand committee.

³ This was mentioned at a home economics teachers' conference in May 2009, according to a press release from the University of Aberdeen, <http://www.abdn.ac.uk/news/archive-details-3592.php>.

recommendation that all children should also be given the opportunity to experience “food preparation and practical skills in the context of healthy eating” (Halpin, 2005). Responding to spokespeople such as Jamie Oliver, who told British Members of Parliament that “Britain’s obesity epidemic transcends class because for the first time in history a large number of people of all incomes cannot cook” (Pidd, 2008), compulsory cooking classes were put in place in 2008, requiring 800 additional teachers.⁴

New Zealand

In 2006, a position paper on home economics was commissioned in New Zealand. The author noted:

The number of home economics teaching graduates was already in decline at the time of the above research, and the trend has continued.

The consequences of this shortage are that schools face either collapsing courses, recruiting teachers from overseas, or employing teachers with ‘an interest in the field’ but with no formal teacher education in the specialist area. Student learning in home economics is inevitably affected as students are taught at NCEA levels by people without the necessary knowledge of underlying principles, approaches and content. Many schools report the shortage of supply and of suitably trained teachers, including availability of qualified day relievers, is of significant concern to short- and long-term sustainability of home economics. New Zealand has significant career opportunities for people with qualifications and expertise in food and nutrition, for example, as food technologists in industry, nutritionists in health related occupations in the community, and in the tourism industries. The shortage of home economics teachers impacts on the supply of professionals in all these areas (Street, 2006, p. 16).

A report on general teacher shortage the following year stated:

Technology subjects such as home economics are particularly affected. Seven percent of advertised high school vacancies are for home economics teachers but in over 50% of those vacancies, either no-one applied, or there were no suitable applicants (TVNZ, 2007).

The long-term effect is that courses in school are often “scrapped” (Education Forum, 2007).

These few examples serve to illustrate that the problem of the declining supply of home economics teachers is a world-wide phenomenon. At a time when there is increasing concern about health and well-being and the need for practical life skills to be included in school curriculum, the profession most suited to providing the curriculum and pedagogical guidance has been downsized or outright eliminated from universities and teacher education programs.

⁴ See reports at: [http://www.politics.co.uk/news/opinion-former-index/children-and-family/compulsory-cooking-classes-launch-anti-obesity-drive-\\$484512.htm](http://www.politics.co.uk/news/opinion-former-index/children-and-family/compulsory-cooking-classes-launch-anti-obesity-drive-$484512.htm) and <http://www.abc.net.au/news/stories/2008/01/22/2144238.htm>.

The national context

All provinces except Quebec offer high-school home economics or home-economics-related courses⁵ and usually some form of teacher education program that could possibly include home economics. Most provinces have indicated that they are experiencing teacher shortages.

Alberta

In Alberta, home economics in the school system is listed under Career and Technology Studies (CTS) and referred to as human ecology. Hiring difficulties for home economics teachers in province are expected to be acute by 2010 (Alberta Learning, 2003). The University of Alberta (Edmonton) has a Faculty of Human Ecology that offers a Combined BSc Human Ecology/BEd degree in partnership with the Faculty of Education, and prepares students to teach in Secondary Education Career and Technology Courses. In 2007, approximately 20 students were in the combined degree program which serves as entrance into a one-year BEd degree (Williamson, 2007).

Saskatchewan

In Saskatchewan, home economics in schools is the common terminology, although it is sometimes referred to as part of Practical and Applied Arts. Shortages of specialist teachers have been reported especially in the rural and remote areas. The only home-economics-teacher-preparation program is at the University of Saskatchewan, a 4-year concurrent program in the Faculty of Education with a limited intake of 15–20 per year (Pain, 2005).

Manitoba

A Manitoba report prepared in 2002 noted that the greatest need for new teachers included the area described as vocational/industrial (which includes home economics) (Manitoba Education, 2002). Although Manitoba has four universities, only the University of Manitoba has a Faculty of Human Ecology with a general degree program, graduates of which can enroll in a two-year after-degree teacher education program in the Faculty of Education, where they are offered Curriculum and Instruction for the Senior High School (Sichewki & Stephen, 2005; Delf-Timmerman, 2009).

Ontario

In Ontario, the only remaining home-economics-degree program is at Brescia University College at the University of Western Ontario. Three home-economics-related degrees are offered: a Bachelor of Science (Foods & Nutrition); a Bachelor of Arts (Human Ecology); and a Bachelor of Science (Human Ecology). Home-economics-related degrees can also be obtained at Ryerson University, University of Guelph, and Nipissing University. Teacher Education programs at Western, Ontario Institute for Studies in Education/University of Toronto, and York University are post-degree programs and accept applicants with home-economics-related bachelor degrees who wish to qualify to teach Family Studies. Enrolments do not meet the demand for teachers (33, 37, and 25 respectively in 2009). Each university also offers additional qualification courses on-line (O'Shea, 2009). Both the Ontario Family Studies Leadership Council (OFSLC)⁶ and the Ontario Family Studies Home Economics Educators Association (OFSHEEA)⁷ promote enrolment in post-secondary programs as a goal to maintain the supply of family studies

⁵ For an overview of home economics courses offered in each province, see the following site prepared by a BC home economics teacher with support from THESA: <http://www3.telus.net/public/leiker/CURRICULUM.swf>.

⁶ <http://www.ofslc.org/index.php>

⁷ <http://www.ofsheea.ca/>

teachers. In schools, Family Studies is included in the Social Sciences and Humanities Curriculum. As a result of a recent curriculum review, there will be an increase in the selection of Family Studies courses from 13 to 22 (Crupi, 2009).

Prince Edward Island

In 1997, the University of Prince Edward Island eliminated the home economics option from the teacher education program when it became a two-year after-degree program.

New Brunswick

About the same time, the home economics option was eliminated from the teacher education program at the University of New Brunswick. The School of Food Science, Nutrition and Family Studies at the University Moncton, in combination with the Faculty of Education, offer a combined BA/BEd degree in Secondary Education specializing in Family Studies (in French).

Newfoundland and Labrador

A Newfoundland and Labrador report in 2000 reported that at least one Assistant Director of Personnel had difficulty in obtaining qualified teachers of home economics (Dibbon & Sheppard, 2001), but the Faculty of Education at Memorial University does not list home economics as a secondary teachable subject. There are still curriculum documents for home economics in this province, but no indication of the qualifications of teachers who teach the courses.

Nova Scotia

Nova Scotia reports indicate that demand is tight for Family Studies,⁸ and that shortages are anticipated up to 2015 (Province of Nova Scotia, 2007). The only teacher preparation program for Family Studies is at Mount St. Vincent University, and numbers of graduates are low (e.g., four in 2005) (Raoul, 2005).

Seven universities Canada-wide offer after degree program home economics/family studies teacher education programs (UBC, University of Alberta, University of Manitoba, OISE/UT, UWO, York, Mount St Vincent) and two universities offer concurrent programs (Saskatchewan and Moncton). The after degree programs which form the majority of the available teacher education programs are therefore dependent on future home economics/family studies teachers being able to obtain an undergraduate degree in home economics/family studies/ human ecology. This has become a problem in the past twenty years with the dismantling of many home economics programs. While some provinces continue to have the equivalent of a home economics degree, the Human Ecology degree programs in Alberta and Manitoba for example, other provinces have experienced various degrees of erosion and re-structuring. Potential home economics teachers do not necessarily have a common background: some may have degrees in family relations, applied nutrition, consumer studies, fashion design, or some other combination. Related concerns include replacements of retiring professors of home economics education, the continued marginalization and struggle for survival of small programs, and the effects of international recruitment of Canadian home economics/family studies teachers.

⁸ Family Studies is the umbrella term for Food Science, Family Studies, Home Economics, and Human Ecology.

The British Columbia context

Shortages of Home Economics teachers in British Columbia are not a new phenomenon. There is evidence of the problem occurring in the 1970s.⁹ The most recent crisis was recognized in the mid 1990s and continues today. In 2000, the British Columbia Teachers' Federation prepared a brief on *Teacher Supply and Demand in British Columbia* to present to the provincial government. It reported "Some districts report shortfalls in the following areas: Math, Science, Technology (industrial) Education, French, Special Education, **Home Economics**, ESL, Counseling" [emphasis added] (BCTF, 2000). About the same time, research conducted by Peter Grimmatt of Simon Fraser University and Frank Echols of the University of British Columbia stated:

We found shortages in all 12 districts we investigated. Shortages were particularly acute at the secondary level, where we found across-the-board shortages (that is, in each metropolitan, urban, and rural district) in Fine and Visual Arts, French, Chemistry, Physics, Mathematics, Business Education, **Home Economics**, and Technology Education [emphasis added] (Grimmett & Echols, 2000, p. 332).

As a result of their research, Grimmatt and Echols concluded:

We are concerned that unless there is careful planning for and a robust policy about issues of supply and demand, an individual without teacher qualifications will likely be placed in the classroom in the event of a serious teacher shortage, negatively impacting the quality of education and undermining the professional recognition of teachers (Grimmett & Echols, 2001, p. 9).

In 2006, a BCTF School Staff Alert titled *Evidence of teacher shortage appearing* (BCTF, 2006) included home economics in a list of full-time areas impossible to fill. The same year, the British Columbia Public School Employers' Association (BCPSEA) reported that while there was no general teacher shortage in the province, "shortages of difficult-to-fill positions are projected to continue. This will require detailed analysis and continuous assessment, as well as **specific strategies to address skill shortages**" [emphasis added] (BCPSEA, 2006, p. 1). The following year, the BCPSEA newsletter continued to discuss the problem that "finding teachers for difficult-to-fill position in rural and remote districts is an ongoing issue" (p. 1), and suggested that attracting and retaining older workers should be a priority (BCPSEA, 2007).

Concern about the shortage of teachers with substantive home economics background was evident in the THESA inquiry project:

"I worry about teachers with a lack of background because there is no Home Economics degree." (teacher with 25 years of experience)

An informal survey of human-resources personnel indicates that they are all concerned with filling home economics positions in their districts with qualified teachers, but this is not easy.

"I've tried to fill 3 home ec jobs in the past year. I had one qualified applicant for the lot. They were almost as tough to fill as tech ed jobs. However, we were

⁹ Brousson, D. 1973 Legislative Session: 2nd Session, 30th Parliament (Hansard, p. 1095). In May 1959, Philip J. Kitley was appointed Co-ordinator of Teacher Recruitment. Kitley was not able to report any "positive signs to a relief from the chronic teacher shortage" until 1969, but even then "critical shortages still remained in Commerce, Home Economics, Instrumental Music, Special Education, French, and some other subjects" [Public Schools Report, 1969/70, p. G45].

willing to live with an unqualified foods teacher, where we would cancel a metalwork course if we had no qualified teacher. I foresee a big shortage coming up soon....” (school district in South Central BC)

“We have found it nearly impossible to find qualified applicants for Home Ec positions. Where we have had interest, the applicants are nearly always from out of province. We aren’t anticipating a shortage—it’s already here!” (school district in Northern BC)

“We no longer have any qualified [home economics teachers] on our TOC list and have 2 jobs to fill for September 2009.” (school district in the Okanagan)

With no home economics degree, students attending the University of BC have three main options: obtain a Bachelor of Arts in the Department of Sociology with a Family Studies major, taking elective courses in Food Nutrition and Health; obtain a Bachelor of Science in Food, Nutrition and Health in the Faculty of Land and Food Systems, taking electives in family studies; obtain a degree that leads to another teachable subject like Physical Education, English, Science, or Art, and take a minor in home-economics-related courses, for example Food, Nutrition and Health, or Family Studies. Another option is to obtain a Bachelor in Fashion Design and Technology from Kwantlen Polytechnic University, with electives in family studies or food studies. This is not a simple, straightforward process, and inhibits potential students from becoming home economics teachers.

As a result, numbers in home-economics teacher education at the University of British Columbia (the only university in the province offering home economics education) are low and the program is always vulnerable.

2. An overview of Home Economics education at the University of BC

From 1903, when the first home-economics classroom was set up in Victoria, to 1943, all home-economics teachers obtained their qualifications outside the province. The calls for home economics at the university level had been constant since 1912, when Alice Ravenhill, a noted British home economist and health educator, immigrated to Vancouver Island. She had been instrumental in the establishment of courses in household science at King’s College, University of London, but she was unable to overcome the formidable opposition of Evlyn Farris, a UBC senator and founder and former president of the University Women’s Club, who believed that practical training for women would impede their intellectual development and lower the value of philosophical learning. In 1919, John Kyle, Technical Organizer for the Department of Education, made an urgent plea for home economics at the university level, citing its establishment at the Universities of Alberta, Saskatchewan, and Manitoba, as well as such august institutions as Columbia University.

In 1929, a Chair of Home Economics was finally established at UBC, some claimed because the Minister of Education at the time saw it as an opportunity to discredit the university administration. Twenty-five young women were admitted; but by 1932 the university was in financial and political disarray and home economics was discontinued. The provincial Parent Teachers’ Federation continued to press for home economics, and an impressive number of organizations met with the Board of Governors in 1936. The board made a promise to give home economics priority over any other programs. A Department of Home Economics at the university

became a reality in 1943, mainly because it had to be dealt with before new programs for men could be established. In 1951, the status of the program changed as it became the School of Home Economics, part of the Faculty of Arts and Science. Without the lengthy and continuous campaign of various women and groups, a home economics program leading to a BHE degree would likely never have been established (Stewart, 1990).

The secondary-teacher education program has long been a part of the university; originally it was a department in the Faculty of Arts. In 1956, the UBC Board of Governors approved Neville Scarfe as Dean of the new Faculty of Education, and shortly thereafter the Vancouver Normal School was closed and elementary education located at UBC. Concurrent and post-degree programs were available for future home economics educators. In 1987, major revisions were made to the programs, with all potential secondary teachers required to complete a degree program in an appropriate field before making application to the Faculty of Education. During this time, the UBC Faculty of Education had continued to support home economics education, and in 1987 Linda Peterat was appointed as a tenure-track Home Economics Professor in the Math-Science Education Department. When the Department of Curriculum Studies was formed in 1994, it included Home Economics Education.

Signs of the instability of home economics at UBC emerged in 1985 (see Figure 1 for a timeline from 1985 to today) when the School of Home Economics was renamed the School of Family and Nutritional Sciences (FNS). It was moved from the Faculty of Science to the Faculty of Arts in 1986, and to the Faculty of Agricultural Sciences in 1997. The fiftieth anniversary of FNS was celebrated in 1993, but the celebration didn't last long. In 1998 the nutrition and dietetics professors moved to join the Faculty of Agricultural Sciences, and in 1999 FNS was dissolved. The remaining professors in Family Studies moved to the Faculty of Arts to form the School of Social Work and Family Studies. In 2001, a degree in Community Ecology was proposed by Agricultural Sciences to replace home economics, but it received little support. The last Bachelor of Home Economics degree (BHE) was awarded in 2002.

With no BHE, three other ways to enter the BEd post-degree program in Home Economics Education were approved by the University Senate: Bachelor of Applied Design, Bachelor of Arts in Family Studies, and Bachelor of Science in Food, Nutrition, and Health.

In 2007, the Dean of Education arbitrarily cancelled home economics education at UBC, citing low enrolment. The cancellation was done before the registration deadline and with no consultation from stakeholders. THESA members mounted a concerted protest that included emails and media publicity, and the program was reinstated. However, considerable damage was done, as the cancellation was widely publicized but the reinstatement was not. There are still cases of high-school counselors who advise high-school students that there is no more home economics at the post-secondary level.

“[To teach] PE I had to take a second teachable and I thought of what was interesting to me so I ended up picking nutrition and that corresponded with home ec, but I don't know if anybody would have ever told me or if I ever even knew that was an option. I think there are people out there in education who want to be teachers but still don't know [about home ec]. I don't know if they know you can go to university and study home ec.” (teacher with 3 years experience)

This incident served as a warning of the precarious state of the home economics education program at UBC, and helped propel the formation of the THESA inquiry into the future of home economics education in BC.

The vulnerability of the home economics education program increased with the retirement of the tenure-tracked professor of home economics education, Dr. Linda Peterat, in 2007. The position has been filled since then with a sessional instructor and a seconded teacher, with no commitment from the Faculty of Education to offer a tenure track position to maintain continuity and the world class reputation of the graduate program in home economics education. While the three makeshift ways to obtain a home-economics-related degree still exist, Family Studies once again moved faculties after a review of the School of Social Work and Family Studies from 2004–07 determined that Family Studies and Social Work were not a good fit. In 2008, Family Studies returned to the Faculty of Arts as part of the Sociology Department.

Figure 1. Home Economics at the University of British Columbia

1985	School of Home Economics renamed School of Family & Nutritional Sciences (FNS).
1986	Faculty of Education revised BEd to a post-degree, 12-month program. Diploma programs approved. FNS moved from Faculty of Science to Faculty of Arts.
1987	Linda Peterat appointed tenure-track Home Economics professor in Math-Science Education Department.
1993	FNS has 50 th anniversary at UBC.
1994	Department of Curriculum Studies formed and included Home Economics Education.
1997	FNS moved to Faculty of Agricultural Sciences.
1998	Nutrition and dietetics professors move to join the Faculty of Agricultural Sciences, leaving the School of FNS.
1999	FNS dissolved and professors in Family Studies moved to Faculty of Arts to form the School of Social Work and Family Studies.
2001	A degree in Community Ecology proposed by Agricultural Sciences to replace home economics, but not supported.
2002	Last BHE degree awarded. Three other ways to enter BEd in Home Economics Education in the Faculty of Education approved: B. of Applied Design, BA in Family Studies, BSc in Food, Nutrition, & Health.
2006	Review of School of Social Work and Family Studies 2004–07 determines that Family Studies and Social Work were not a good fit.
2007	Dean of Education arbitrarily cancels Home Economics Education at UBC; reinstated after THESA protest. Tenure track professor in Home Economics Education retires; not replaced.
2008	Family Studies becomes part of Sociology Department in Faculty of Arts. First off-campus offering of a Home Economics Diploma Program enrolls 29 students.

Home economics education continues to be a part of the Department of Curriculum and Pedagogy in the Faculty of Education at UBC. Prior to her retirement, Dr. Peterat had established a strong graduate program in home economics, with master's and PhD degrees, and the department still receives numerous inquiries for these degrees. She also initiated the home economics diploma program, designed as professional development for home economics teachers, and as an opportunity for non-home-economics teachers to develop background in the subject area. She also worked with External Programs and Learning Technologies (EPLT) to

organize the first off-campus offering of a Home Economics Diploma Program in 2008. The diploma program is thriving in these times of home economics teacher shortages, enrolling over 50 students at present. Enrolment in the BEd in Home Economics Education has suffered from the lack of easy access to a home economics degree. Less than 25 students have enrolled each year for the past 20 years (see Figure 2). Publicity by the Teacher Education Office (TEO) increased the enrolment in 2009. Interest continues in the master's program, with 6 enrolled at present. Students are not being admitted to PhD programs because there is no tenure-track professor to supervise them.

Figure 2. Enrolment in Home Economics Education programs at UBC¹⁰

Year	Enrolment		
	BEd	MEd & MA	Diploma
1997	19	1	
1998	12	2	
1999	17	1	
2000	14	0	
2001	22	4	
2002	21	1	
2003	19	2	5
2004	18	0	5
2005	9	3	3
2006	14	2	11
2007	14	1	8
2008	13	4	23
2009	17	1	57

3. An overview of Home Economics in the BC school system

In 1903, the Local Council of Women in Victoria, BC equipped a home economics classroom, and the school board agreed to pay half a year's salary for a teacher. It helped that a woman, Margaret Jenkins, had been elected to the school board (women had the local vote but were prohibited from voting provincially and federally). The new subject of home economics was so popular that the Vancouver School Board hired its first home economics teacher in 1905, and by 1911 home economics supervisors had been hired in both Vancouver and Victoria to manage the growing programs.

The Putman-Weir Survey of the BC School System in 1925 stated that a "thoroughly competent woman" was needed to improve the standards of home economics teaching in the school until such time that a university course was instituted. Jessie McLenaghan became the first Director of Home Economics for the Department of Education in 1926, and quickly organized the curriculum, even producing a recipe manual for teachers within the first year that emphasized

¹⁰ BEd students may be either majors in home economics or may have a concentration in home economics and another teachable subject. Students doing part-time study in master's and diploma programs have five years to complete. They are only counted in the year they enrolled.

family-size recipes and had students work in family groups of four. By 1936, McLenaghan had managed to have home economics declared a graduation requirement.

The Chant Commission of 1960 recommended that home economics and other elective subjects be moved to the outer core, and science and math be given more emphasis. Home economics was also removed from the Grade 7 curriculum. The 1979 curriculum revision instituted a rigid product-oriented curriculum that was probably intended to replace the home economics inspectors who had controlled course content since McLenaghan's day.

Affirmation of the importance of home economics education occurred in the 1988 Report of the Royal Commission on Education (also known as the Sullivan Commission), *A Legacy for Learners* (for a timeline of events and consequences from this time on, see Figure 3). It recommended a broad, liberal, general education for K to 10, with Home Economics part of the common curriculum, and home-economics educators looked forward to increased opportunities, particularly at the elementary-school level. Home economics had not been formally part of Grades 1 to 7 since 1936.

A new graduation program was implemented in 1995, and required the completion of two credits of Applied Skills (which included home economics) and two credits of Fine Arts for graduation. A mandatory Career and Personal Planning (CAPP) K–12 program was also established. Some home economics teachers developed two-credit courses (one-half of a full course) and others modified their courses so that students could get two credits of Applied Skills and two credits of Fine Arts. Generally, Home Economics benefited from this “core” status, although the compulsory aspect resulted in one less elective choice. A number of home economics teachers moved to teach CAPP because several aspects overlapped with the family studies curriculum.

The new Home Economics curriculum document (referred to as an Integrated Resource Package or IRP) was finally released in 1998. An elementary home-economics curriculum document had been created but never signed off by the Ministry of Education. The hope and support for home economics education as expressed in the Sullivan Commission of 1988 was never fulfilled.

The election of Gordon Campbell's Liberal government in May, 2001, resulted in the declaration of education as an “essential service” and the elimination of the right of teachers to strike. The health-care collective agreement was stripped and funding for health care and education was tightened. Although the new government acknowledged that the future prosperity of the province was “dependent upon the education system's ability to produce a greater number of graduates able to assume careers in fields with predicted shortages” (Select Standing Committee on Education, 2004), it dealt a blow to home economics and technology classes by setting a district-average class size of 30. For pedagogical and safety reasons, the traditional cap had been 24 in these courses. Depending on the wishes of administration, some schools maintained the class size of 24 for home economics and others did not, with varying consequences.

The *Teaching Profession Amendment Act* (2003) required the BC College of Teachers to develop standards of practice. Standard # 6 has repercussions for home economics: “Educators have a broad knowledge base and understand the subject areas they teach. Educators understand the curricular, conceptual and methodological foundations of education and of the subject areas they teach” (BCCT, 2008). With no home economics degree, potential teachers of home economics have to cobble together programs to meet the subject area content knowledge requirement. It is increasingly difficult for pre-service teachers to meet this standard.

A new graduation program (Ministry of Education, 2003) was implemented in 2004, and changed the two-credit Applied Skills/Fine Art requirement to a four-credit requirement in either

AS or FA. At the same time, pre-requisites were no longer required for any course, Grade 10 was added to the graduation program, and CAPP was replaced by Planning 10 and a short-lived Graduation Portfolio (which resurfaced in a watered-down form as Graduation Transitions, a graduation requirement). Once again, home-economics teachers moved to teach Planning 10, which duplicated nutrition and health content covered in home economics without the practical applications and pedagogical teaching approaches recommended by prevailing research for lasting behaviour change in these topics.

In 2006, John Young, a Victoria school trustee, won a lawsuit about inequity and inequality of school fees that resulted in a provincial prohibition against charging school fees. The Ministry of Education indicated that no extra funding would be made available to cover the loss of fees. This ruling affected home economics programs that had previously relied on student fees to buy supplies such as foods lab supplies or textile projects. Depending on the school and district allocation of budgets, some teachers found it difficult to maintain the hands-on, practical applications that are central to home economics pedagogy. The issue of class size arose again in 2006, when Bill 33 was passed, limiting class size to 30 and no more than 3 students with Individual Education Plans, but providing no implementation funding. Concerns continued about safety and learning conditions, especially in home economics classrooms that were built for 24.

Figure 3. Implications of events and decisions from 1988

Date	Ministry of Education	What happened
1988	Report of the Royal Commission on Education, <i>A Legacy for Learners</i> (also known as the Sullivan Commission), is released. Recommendations were for a broad, liberal, general education for K to 10, with Home Economics part of the common curriculum.	This report offered much hope for Home Economics and Home Economics educators felt that it was an affirmation of the importance of home economics and looked forward to increased opportunities especially at the elementary level. Home Economics, along with other “Practical Arts”, Physical Education and Technology Education was the first subject to undergo revision with the recommendations of the Sullivan Commission in mind. Unfortunately none of this came to pass. An elementary curriculum document was created but never signed off by the Ministry of Education. The secondary curriculum revision took 10 years.
1995	Requirements for graduation, Graduation Program, changed to include 2-credit Applied Skills and 2-credit Fine Arts for graduation. Applied Skills is new term for Practical Arts, includes Home Economics. A mandatory Career and Personal Planning K–12 program was established.	Some home economics teachers developed 2 credit courses (all home economics courses are electives and are usually worth 4 credits). Some modified their courses so that students could get both 2 credits of Applied Skills and 2 credits of Fine Arts. Because 2 credits of Applied Skills were required for graduation, Home Economics benefited from “core” status. In schools where this was implemented as an additional compulsory course students had one less elective that impacted home economics. Also the “personal planning” portion covered content in the Family Studies curriculum which influenced enrolment in that course. Some home economics teachers moved to teaching this course.
1998	New Home Economics curriculum document, called an Integrated Resource Package, finally released.	

Date	Ministry of Education	What happened
2001	Election of G. Campbell's Liberal government in May 2001. Education declared "essential service," and right to strike of teachers taken away in August, 2001. Healthcare collective agreement stripped.	Funding for health care and education is tightened. Affects some home economics programs as budgets are frozen or even reduced.
2002	<i>A Future for Learners</i> (2002), Report of Select Standing Committee on Education, concludes education system was over-regulated and encumbered by collective agreements. <i>Public Education Flexibility and Choice Act</i> (2002) sets class size of 30 as average across districts, not individual classes..	Institutes province wide bargaining. +30 salary category becomes province-wide. Diploma Program in Home Economics satisfies the requirements. Could be part of the reason for increased enrolment in UBC diploma program. Previously, many school district contracts had capped home economics and technology education classes at 24, as most home economics labs were built for classes this size. Because the term "average" was used some schools have maintained the class size of 24 for home economics, others have not. Larger classes present safety and pedagogical concerns for home economics teachers.
2003	<i>Teaching Profession Amendment Act</i> (2003) required College to develop standards of practice	One of the standards of practice (2008) has direct implications for home economics, "6. Educators have a broad knowledge base and understand the <u>subject areas</u> they teach. Educators understand the curricular, conceptual and methodological foundations of education and of the <u>subject areas</u> they teach." Without a home economics degree concern is expressed about how home economics teachers are to obtain sufficient background knowledge in the subject area.
2004	New requirement for graduation, Graduation Program 2004, implemented. 4-credit AS/FA credit is removed. Only 2 credits in either AS or FA required for graduation.	Potential impact on enrolment in senior home economics courses.
2006	Lawsuit won by John Young, Victoria School Board trustee, about inequity and inequality of school fees, results in provincial prohibition against charging school fees. Ministry of Education indicates that no extra funding is available to cover loss of fees.	In order to implement a program of "hands-on" practical application that is central to Home Economics pedagogy, funds for supplies are necessary. Many schools depended on fees to maintain programs (particularly foods) and many schools did not increase home ec budgets when fees were disallowed.
2006	Bill 33, limiting class size to 30 and no more than 3 students with Individual Education Plans, but providing no extra funding to implement it, is passed.	Continued concern about safety and learning conditions, especially in home economics classrooms that were built for 24.

4. Looking back—The beginning of Home Economics Education in Canada

Home economics began in the late 1800s as a response to world-wide change and development. The agrarian way of life that had sustained untold generations with food, clothing, and shelter was gradually giving way to industrialization, resulting in migration to cities and large-scale emigration abroad. The social issues of family life, health, hygiene, and the rights of women and children became critically important.

The establishment of home economics as part of the general school curriculum in Canada is largely attributed to the lobbying and organization efforts of women like Adelaide Hoodless in Ontario in the 1890s. She actively promoted home economics education as part of manual training, and managed to obtain funding for the Macdonald Institute in Guelph, Ontario, in 1903, the first Canadian education facility for preparing home economics teachers.

The reasons women at the turn of the nineteenth century advocated so strongly for home economics at both the public-school and university level may be summarized around three themes:

a. **To improve general health and hygiene.**

Scientific advances in disease control and prevention increased the perception that with education, the general public could control their own health and living conditions. The death of Adelaide Hoodless' young son from drinking tainted milk impelled her to work for improved sanitation for all Canadians. The health and hygiene of Canadians and new immigrants were foremost concerns as the young Dominion of Canada struggled to develop an identity that reflected its fundamental imperialistic attitude. Other catastrophic events such as the Boer War, that showed the British working classes were seriously undernourished and physically unfit to serve their country, added credibility to the study of home economics.

b. **To recognize women's rights to education and participation in Canadian society.**

Along with the crumbling of Victorian attitudes towards women as the weaker sex, the first wave of feminism helped most Canadian women to attain the vote in 1918, and be recognized as persons in 1929¹¹. There was a vision that education should be and could be for women, and that the work of the family was as important as work for pay. Home economics was an attempt to legitimize the importance of household matters to the workplace and Canadian society.

c. **To promote worthy home membership.**

Early home economics had a strong moral component, beginning with its American founder, Ellen Swallow Richards, who proclaimed it as the art of right living. In addition to sanitation and health, home economics was the means of teaching appropriate cultural values and contributing to the harmonious organization of family and society.

These arguments continue to support the worth of home economics in public education in the contemporary context.

¹¹ Voter discrimination did not end, however, until Aboriginal women gained the vote in 1960, along with Aboriginal men.

5. Why Home Economics education continues to be a vital subject area for today's students

Home economics education is the **only subject area that focuses on everyday life and meeting basic needs**. In home economics, students learn practical and critical thinking skills that equip them to handle the increasing complexities of daily life. Consider the following indicators of the need for home economics education for all students in British Columbia:

Increased concerns about healthy eating habits of Canadians¹²

According to the World Health Organization, the impact of obesity and overweight on non-communicable diseases such as cardiovascular disease, Type 2 diabetes, and cancer threatens to overwhelm healthcare systems. Projections indicate that the current generation of children might be the first who have shorter life expectancies than their parents (Belluck, 2005).

As a result, there have been many calls for nutrition education. However, focusing on nutrition knowledge transmission alone is not the answer (Pollan, 2007; Reynolds, 2002). A literature review (Lang & Caraher, 2001) on the teaching of food and cooking skills determined that mastery of these skills is necessary for a full understanding of what constitutes a healthy life and to empower individuals to take control over their diet and food intake. Without practical, first-hand experience in preparing foods and learning about nutrition, choice and control are diminished and dependence on processed and fast food emerges (“Teaching food skills”, n.d.).

Home Economics Foods and Nutrition courses provide the only opportunity for students to learn about nutrition and healthy eating through the ‘hands-on’ food preparation that is recognized as more effective in changing behaviour than knowledge transmission.

The impact of poor parenting practices

Parenting is the most important job because it determines the character of our children and the quality of our society. Yet few people get any training for it. An alarming number of children are at risk of being abused, neglected or otherwise poorly cared for by inadequately prepared parents. Findings from Canada's National Longitudinal Survey of Children and Youth (Chao & Willms, 2002) reveal that parenting practices have significant effects on a child's social and cognitive outcomes and on the likelihood that a child is vulnerable in some way. Parenting Education for school-age children and teens addresses these concerns in several ways by

¹² The dramatic increases in overweight and obesity among Canadians over the past 20 years have been characterized as an epidemic (Raine K.D. Overweight and obesity in Canada: A population health perspective (http://secure.cihi.ca/cihiweb/products/CPHIOverweightandObesityAugust2004_e.pdf). In 2007, based on Statistics Canada's Community Health Survey using self-report data, 16 percent of Canadians aged 18 or older were obese and 32% were overweight. The percentage of Canadians who are overweight or obese rose dramatically between 1985 and 1994–95, but appears to have stabilized more recently. According to the Chronic Disease Prevention Alliance of Canada, 26% of youth in Canada between the ages of 2 and 17 years are overweight or obese, and since 1978, obesity rates for this age group have more than doubled and the combined overweight/obesity rate has increased by 70% (<http://www.cdpac.ca/media.php?mid=226>). Obesity is linked to a number of chronic health conditions, including diabetes, high blood pressure, asthma, heart disease, and cancer. (Calle, E., Rodriguez, C., Walker-Thurmond, K., & Thun, M. (2003, April). “Overweight, obesity, and mortality from cancer in a prospectively studied cohort of US adults.” *New England Journal of Medicine*. 2003. April 24. 348(17):1625–38.)

working to interrupt the cycle of poor parenting before young people become parents. (Prepare Tomorrow's Parents, no date) Preparing youth to become caring, competent parents may be the single most effective way to prevent child abuse and other violence, increase mental health, advance school preparedness, and achieve academic success for future generations. As Nel Noddings wrote:

“...if one has children of one's own, caring deeply and effectively is a lifelong commitment. We must educate for this commitment...The study of children should be an important topic in secondary education, and...practice in caring for and teaching younger children should begin in the upper elementary grades. Surely the care of children should be a central topic in the education of all students” (Noddings, 1992).

Home Economics Family Studies courses are the only provincial curriculum that offers parenting education.

The impact of financial illiteracy

Informed money management plays a vital role in raising the quality of life for individuals and families. In June 2009, the Honorable Jim Flaherty, Minister of Finance, announced the establishment of Canada's Task Force on Financial Literacy to help create a cohesive national strategy to support initiatives across Canada aimed at improving financial education. Citing the effects of the current turmoil in financial markets on the financial future of all Canadians, Flaherty declared that financial literacy, as displayed through a strong understanding of the principles of prudent financial management, is an essential life skill (Task Force on Financial Literacy, 2009).

Consumers are better positioned to make informed financial decisions that affect their livelihood when they understand the financial products and services, and options that are available to them. But competency in managing money appears to be a skill that doesn't come naturally to everyone. Unless a person is exposed to the practice of money management, he/she is less likely to understand how it works and its long-term benefits. It is easy to develop poor spending and financial habits, resulting in significant negative consequences such as a poor credit rating, denial of credit, rejection for a checking account, and personal bankruptcy, to name a few. While financial vocabulary is important, research in literacy education shows that students must have the opportunity to engage in “real or simulated” literacy events that over time become literacy practices (Cimbaro, 2008). Financial literacy must be more than simple recitation of facts.

Home Economics courses provide many opportunities for students to practice and gain competency in making financial decisions that apply to food, clothing, shelter and family living choices that people must make over the life-span.

The increasing complexity of family life

Most Canadians now live in dual-income and single-parent families rather than the traditional male-breadwinner family. One in four Canadians reports that his or her work responsibilities interfere with the ability to fulfill responsibilities at home (Duxbury & Higgins, 2005). Workers who experience difficulties meeting family commitments often find it difficult to give their best at work, and have a higher rate of absenteeism and stress-related health issues (CMHA, 2008). The strengthening of families is essential for a strong nation and national economy: loss of productivity due to family issues can lead to multi-billion-dollar losses for Canadian businesses.¹³

Home economics is the only school subject that addresses work and family life balance.

Increased concern about global citizenship and environmental health

Global citizens are willing to think beyond boundaries of place, identity and category, and recognize all human beings as their equals while respecting humanity's inherent diversity. Within their own sphere of influence, global citizens seek to imagine and work towards a better world (UBC, 2005).

No parts of the earth are isolated anymore. Cultural diversity and global interdependence are facts of life. Our economy is global and what happens around the world deeply affects all of us. Global issues are manifested locally; for example, the one billion people world-wide who experience food insecurity include 17% of British Columbians¹⁴ (Kendall, 2005). Environmental sustainability has increasingly become an international agenda as the basic necessities of life such as water, food, and safe living conditions cannot be taken for granted and the implication for the most vulnerable populations cannot be ignored. In every study of environmental health, low-income, minority, and aboriginal families are singled out for being at higher risk. Consumers are often unaware of their own responsibility for making sustainable choices. While products are readily available from around the world, consumers need to be aware of the conditions under which these products are produced, who is being affected, and the environmental impact. "Developing a sense of environmental responsibility which goes against the consumerist culture and the tyranny of the short term is one of the family's most crucial tasks" (Vogt, 2008). "It is not only a matter of personal empowerment, it's good global citizenship" (Nixon, 2008).

All home economics courses provide opportunities for students to develop a sense of global citizenship in the wise use of human and material resources.

¹³ Absences related to family and work life conflicts alone are estimated to cost Canadian society about \$3.5 billion each year, while presenteeism, or the phenomenon of being at work but not working at one's full capacity for health reasons, has been shown to lead to heightened psychological stress and loss of productive work: 83 per cent of Canadians report showing up for work while sick or exhausted an average of six times in the past year [Canadian Mental Health Association 2008 report. Retrieved July 10, 2009 from http://www.cmha.ca/data/2/rec_docs/1776_CMHA%20-%20May%201%20Release%20and%20Backgrounder%20-%20FINAL.doc. Productivity losses due to mental illness cost Canadian businesses an estimated \$33 billion a year: Global Business and Economic Roundtable on Addiction and Mental Health. Retrieved July 10, 2009 from: http://www.mentalhealthroundtable.ca/aug_2004/Depression%20cost%20-%20Nat%20Post%20.pdf

¹⁴ The rate for children and youth is 12%. Child poverty rate remains high. Retrieved July 10, 2009 from <http://www.britishcolumbia.name/news/child-poverty-rate-remains-high/>

6. Looking back—The evolution of Home Economics education

The following phases describe the evolution of home economics as a school subject in Canada. They demonstrate how the subject area, like other subject areas, has continually responded to prevailing cultural and educational philosophies.

1900–1925—Hands-on life skills

Home economics was introduced into schools about the same time as the progressive education movement was a prominent influence. Progressive education, “a many-sided effort to use the schools to improve the lives of individuals” (Cremin, 1961), dominated educational philosophy. John Dewey, its best known proponent, advocated active learning through doing, not merely passive absorption. In Canada, the McDonald-Robertson movement took up the slogan of educating the whole child, “head, heart and hand” (Robertson, 1907), and sponsored manual training schools for boys beginning in 1900 and household education for young women. The social efficacy of learning by doing, applying the theoretical to the practical, was stressed. Improvement of homes and home life was the goal.

1926–1961—Social efficiency

Home economics as a school subject survived the difficult years of economic depression and war. The commercialization of food and clothing production, the explosion of advertising, women’s involvement in the war effort—all contributed to the view of home economics as a means to create economical home-making and positive family life. As the progressive movement in education gave way to Taylorization (Tozer, Violas, & Senese, 2002), the factory model began to be applied to home economics, emphasizing scientific management (Frederick, 1913). While scientific home management was viewed as a way to dignify the subject, it was not enough to combat the triumph of science (e.g., the race for space), and in many jurisdictions home economics was pushed to the margins, as it was seen as less important than math, physics, or chemistry.

1961–1990s—Consumer decision-making and practical reasoning

Home economics continued to focus on scientific management and technical skill development but began to put those in a broader social-political context of participation in a democratic society, family institutions, and the economy. The second feminist wave created a backlash to home economics as more radical feminists characterized it as an attempt to keep women at home and out of the workforce. Others viewed home economics as a “basic challenge to pedagogical practices and forms of knowledge in schools” (Peterat, 1989), because of its emphasis on practical problem solving¹⁵ (Reed, 1979), the practical application of critical theory, and its responsiveness to daily life issues. The use of critical theory also counters the assumption that all problems can be solved by science and technology as the dominant mode of reasoning (Brown & Paolucci, 1979).

¹⁵ Practical problems include those that are procedural and those that are uncertain. The latter are adjudicated based on preferences (prudential and moral) as well as procedures.

7. What is Home Economics education today?

Currently, the International Federation of Home Economics (IFHE) defines home economics as: “a field of study and a profession, situated in the human sciences that draws from a range of disciplines to achieve optimal and sustainable living for individuals, families and communities.” As a curriculum area, home economics “facilitates students to discover and further develop their own resources and capabilities to be used in their personal life” (IFHE, 2008).

As a school subject in different contexts and in different grades, home economics may be oriented as an applied academic subject, as a product- or technology-producing course, as career education, as independent-living skills, as health education, as parenting, or as family life education. Home economics has at times suffered characterization as “sewing” and “cooking,” but as reported recently in the *Globe and Mail*, “Forget baking cookies and sewing skirts. Today’s home economists have turned their attention from caring for the family to tackling community issues such as poverty, obesity, and food safety” (Dube, 2009). The emphasis has changed from a technical, skill-development, scientific approach to one that includes critical thinking and social responsibility. Global perspectives, social justice, and sustainability are underlying conceptual threads as home economics acknowledges the incompatibility of the scientific paradigm with post-modern plurality and with inequities in the global marketplace. Home economics educators have been encouraged to adopt ecology as a unifying theme, broadening the “home” in home economics to the “world as our home” and “economics” as the judicious use and stewardship of resources (Vaines, 1994; Smith, Peterat, & deZwart, (2004); Smith, 2008).

Home economics makes a **unique contribution** to the education of young people in that it focuses on the nature and challenges of our **daily lives** in relationship to other peoples, social systems, and material resources.

Locating social justice issues in hundreds of daily personal habits and decisions empowers and conscientizes us to make radical changes—beginning with “basics” like the food we uncritically consume several times a day. These basics, given their immediacy and concreteness in our daily lives, are essential to bringing about change simultaneously globally and close to home (Suri Prakesh, 1995).

The curriculum centers on questions such as “what should be done about...”: maintaining health, securing housing, acquiring appropriate clothing, caring for children, ensuring food security, making ethical consumer decisions, and so on. It is unique in teaching about foods and nutrition, parenting, human relationships and development, resource management, consumerism, clothing and textiles, housing and aesthetics, and integrating these topics and decisions about daily life with the well-being and fair treatment of people and the environment.

Home economics maintains the **educative and preventative mission** of its early roots. It helps young people to optimize living in their current familial and personal relationships and to plan well for their future relationships and families. It aspires to increase the resourcefulness of people and help them to live satisfying, sustainable and quality lives caring for themselves and others. Home economics provides young people with the opportunity to consider daily living problems beforehand, contributing to development of self-reliant attitudes and abilities and a sense of social responsibility. The skills and knowledge developed in home economics are useful to students not only in their personal and family lives, but also in securing and holding

employment in business, industry, and the professions, and participating as active citizens in a democratic society.

8. The current state of Home Economics education in British Columbia—A summary

In the one hundred years since home economics was introduced into the British Columbia school system, it has become part of most secondary-school programs and many middle-school programs. Many home economics teachers also give leadership to courses such as Planning 10, Health and Careers 8 and 9, Cafeteria and Culinary Arts programs, and Tourism.

Home Economics courses are electives

Presently in British Columbia, home economics is an elective course of education for both girls and boys, emphasizing personal decision-making, career and management skills, and personal and family development. The Home Economics curriculum¹⁶ (Instructional Resource Package or IRP) was most recently revised in 2007, and has been divided into three specific documents with content specified according to the following curriculum organizers:

Home Economics: Foods and Nutrition 8 to 12

- Food Preparation Foundations
- Food Preparation Techniques
- Nutrition and Healthy Eating
- Social, Economic, and Cultural Influences
- Career Opportunities

Home Economics: Textiles 8 to 12

- Textile Foundations
- Constructing Textile Items
- Applying Creative Processes
- Factors Affecting Textile Choices
- Career Opportunities

Home Economics: Family Studies 10 to 12

- Child Development and Parenting
- Adolescence
- Adulthood
- Families in Society
- Interpersonal and Family Relationships
- Housing and Living Environments

Home economics in middle schools (grades 6 and 7) and Cafeteria Training are not included in the 2007 IRP. While home economics is a popular course in middle schools, teachers must draw from the prescribed learning outcomes for Grade 8. A wide range of BAA courses developed by

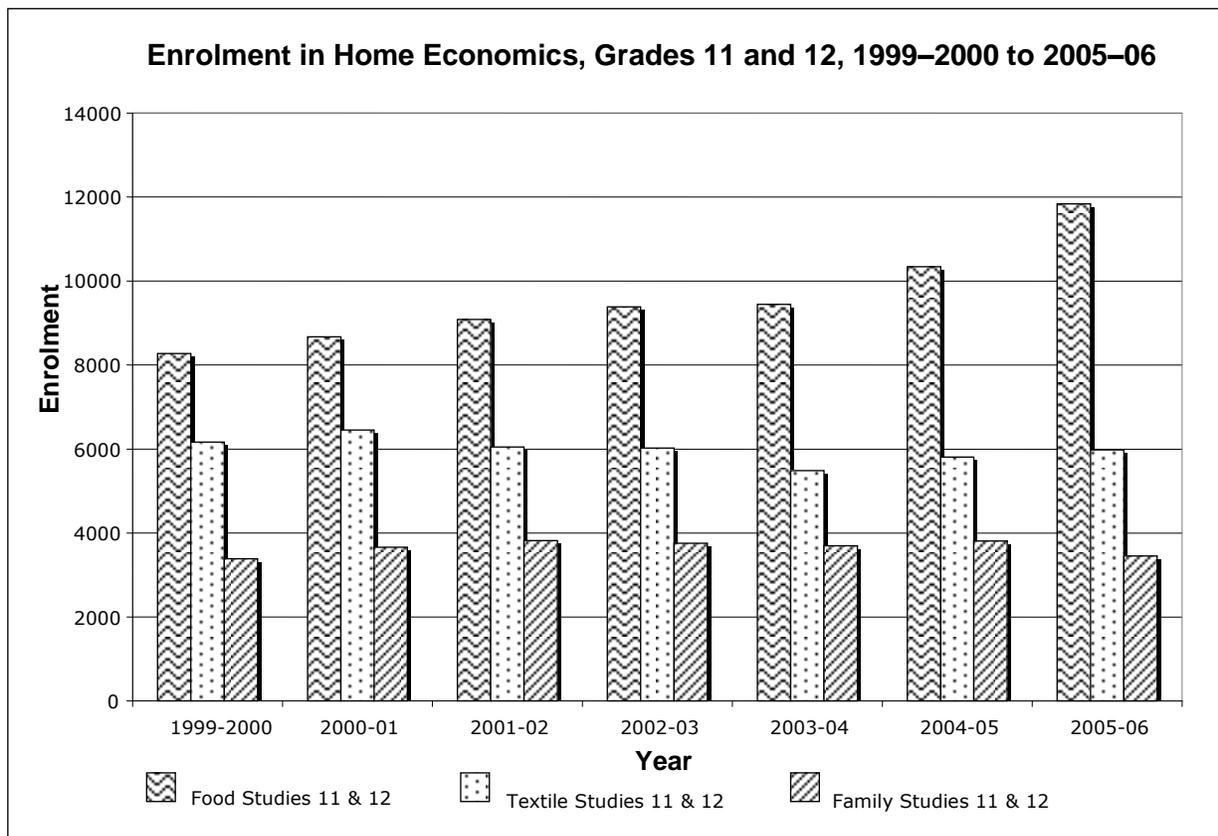
¹⁶ Ministry of Education website: http://www.bced.gov.bc.ca/irp/irp_appskills.htm

home economics teachers are offered in schools throughout the province (e.g., Fashion Design and Technology, Child Development, International Cuisine, Independent Living).

Home Economics courses are growing in popularity

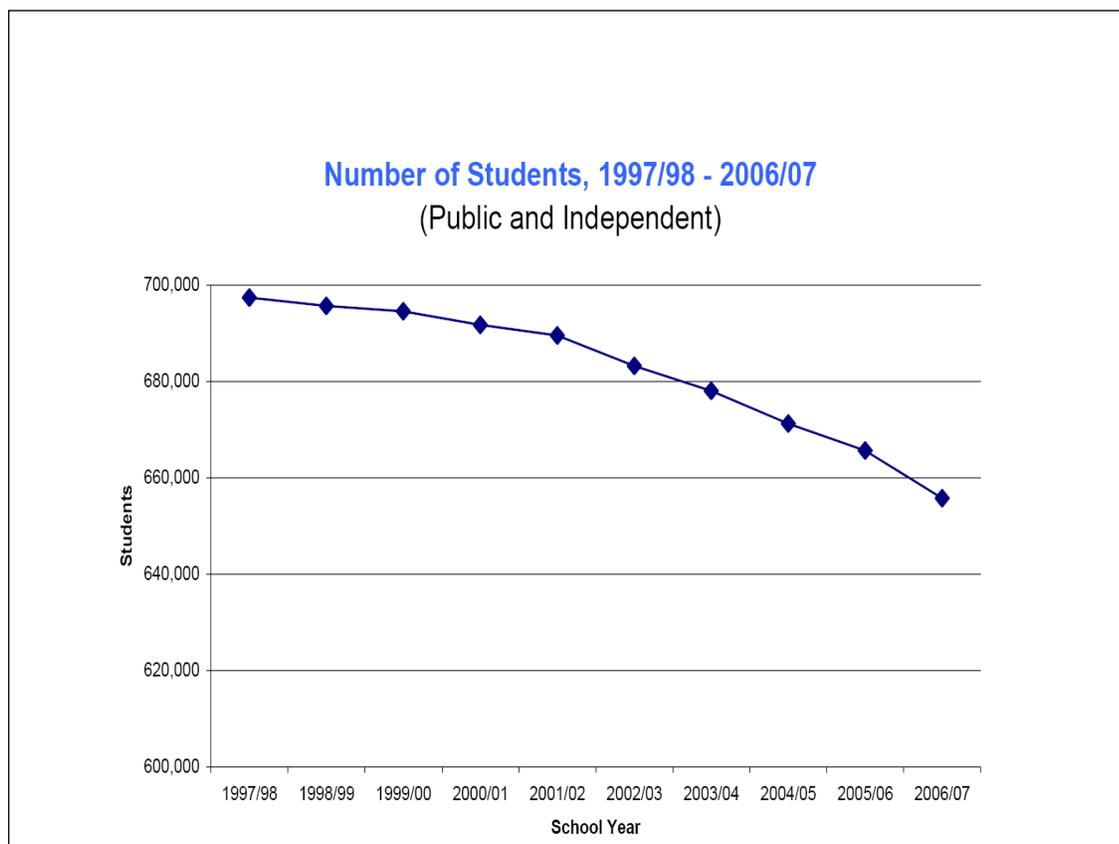
School enrolment in British Columbia is declining but the number of home economics students in British Columbia appear to be holding its own or better. Figure 4 shows that in the seven-year period from 1999 to 2006, enrolment in Family Studies and Textile Studies has been fairly stable, while Food Studies has been steadily increasing. Figure 5 shows that this has happened despite general declining enrolment in schools.

Figure 4: Enrolment in senior Home Economics courses in BC public schools¹⁷



¹⁷ This information is incomplete in that it shows only 4-credit secondary courses. Many schools offer 2-credit courses and/or 4-credit Board Authorized and Approved (BAA) courses. The latter are specialized courses, with those in Home Economics often titled Fashion Design and Technology, Fashion Merchandizing, Culinary Arts, Food Art, Textile Arts and Crafts, Child Development, Baking, etc.

Figure 5. Enrolment figures for BC schools, 1997–2007



Source: Ministry of Education 2006/07 Summary of Key Information. Retrieved from http://www.bced.gov.bc.ca/reporting/levels/prov_key.php. Note that this also includes private schools, many having home economics programs that would not have been included in Figure 3.

When the two figures are compared, it can be claimed that enrolment in home economics courses is increasing. This increase has occurred in spite of 2004 Graduation requirements that dropped the requirement to complete two credits of Applied Skills (Home Economics, Technology Education, or Business Education), in addition to two credits of Fine Arts, and replaced it with 4 credits in either Applied Skills or Fine Arts. This increase means that demand for home economics teachers in the province will likely continue to be strong.

The number of compulsory courses in a secondary student's program limits the number of electives that students can take. Consequently home economics/family studies education reaches a minority of students in the schools of Canada and therefore has not reached its potential in contributing to the development of students and in strengthening families in Canada.

Decline in post-secondary Home Economics programs

As mentioned previously, a Bachelor of Home Economics degree program is no longer available in British Columbia. Currently there are three makeshift ways to enter the BE. program in Home Economics Education as a major in home economics at the only university, UBC, where a home economics education post-degree program is offered: Bachelor of Applied Design (most commonly Fashion Design and Technology from Kwantlen Polytechnical University); Bachelor of Arts in Family Studies from the Department of Sociology at UBC; and Bachelor of Science in Food, Nutrition, and Health from the Faculty of Land and Food Systems at UBC.

Severe Home Economics teacher shortage

The shortage of qualified home economics/family and consumer science/human ecology/household technology teachers in British Columbia is not an isolated phenomenon. It is occurring in many countries, for example, the United States, Australia, New Zealand, Scotland and Britain. While the shortage of Home Economics teachers in the province has been predicted for many years (BCTF, 2000), no programs have been put in place to address the need, and we are now close to a crisis. Because the majority of the home economics/family studies teacher education programs in Canada are after-degree programs, they are dependent on future home economics teachers being able to obtain an undergraduate degree in home economics/family studies/ human ecology. When undergraduate degree programs are eliminated, students who wish to gain admission to home economics teacher education programs have to cobble together courses that do not always provide them with a satisfactory background for teaching home economics. When the path to teacher education is not clear, enrolments in BEd programs are affected. Currently in BC, only UBC Vancouver has a home economics teacher education program and this often limits the access to students from outside the lower mainland.

Stressful working conditions

The two main courses in home economics, textile studies and food studies, involve the maintenance of textile and food labs and management of resources. Home economics teachers spend a good deal of time out of class purchasing and organizing supplies.

“I have for years used my own vehicle and time to price-compare for the benefit of the school; are all future teachers willing to do this and should it be expected of them?”

“The cost of materials is steadily climbing, but budgets are relatively static, meaning less hands-on experiences for students. I spend a great deal of time finding community partnerships to stretch my budget, i.e., catering for PAC events, making salsa for the hot-lunch program, donations of fruit/vegetables from local gardens, donations of material...”

“My concern is about money. With the price of food going up and no way to charge fees...I don't feel that I am able to let the students use the best ingredients (i.e., organic, fresh produce, 0 trans fat, and low-sodium products) that fit under the “Healthy School Initiative.” The only way that I can come up with is to do practical lab maybe once a week. This will not work, since most of the students want hands-on cooking experiences.”

(Comments from THESA survey, 2009)

The removal of class-size limits means that often 30-plus students are in facilities that were built for 24, causing anxiety for teachers related to monitoring student safety. It is also not unusual for home economics teachers to have two, and up to four, courses scheduled in one block. Such unattractive working conditions often lead experienced home economics teachers to seek other employment opportunities, exacerbating the teacher supply crisis. Those who remain display a passion for the field and a determination to work with students despite the working conditions, but burn-out is always a concern.

9. Conclusion and recommendations

In the past twenty-five years, home economics has been buffeted by policy changes at the post-secondary and governmental levels, which has shaken any preconceived notions about the permanency of its status as a school subject. At a time when public interest in home-economics content areas is burgeoning, and home economics enrolment in secondary schools is growing, we face a shortage of home economics teachers and a dearth of educational opportunities for preparing future teachers in this area. Therefore, the Teachers of Home Economics Specialist Association (THESA) makes the following recommendations.

THESA

This research has implications for **THESA (Teachers of Home Economics Specialist Association)**, and a possible course of actions that members can take to improve home economics education in the province:

- Lobby to maintain and promote existing home economics-related degrees at UBC.
- The number of universities in the province has increased in the past few years to eleven public and four private institutions. Explore with them the potential of offering undergraduate degrees suitable for home economics teacher education preparation.
- Currently, UBC is the only university with a home economics teacher education program. Work with other universities offering secondary-teacher education, encouraging them to develop home economics teacher education.
- Lobby for the development and promotion of alternative certification programs such as the Home Economics Diploma Program at UBC, where qualified teachers can obtain credentials in Home Economics.
- Promote teaching home economics as a viable career option with high-school students.
- Inform high-school counsellors of the opportunities in home economics teaching and the ways to become a home economics teacher.
- Provide mentoring services, resources, and in-service opportunities in order to retain beginning home economics teachers in the profession.
- Promote the value of current home economics courses at the high-school level, to demonstrate how they address current social needs, in order to avoid the erosion of home economics courses when other courses are added on or given compulsory status (e.g., nutrition education, consumer education, parenting education).
- Provide mentorship and resources to encourage and retain home economics teachers in the profession.
- Inform and educate members about working-conditions issues (for example, WCB and mileage).

Ministry of Education

- Make at least one Home Economics Food Studies course mandatory for graduation.
- Make the Module of Family Studies on Child Development and Parenting mandatory for graduation.
- Provide funding for home economics programs to compensate for loss of school fees.
- Develop an IRP for home economics in middle schools.

Ministry of Advanced Education and Labour Market Development

- Provide targeted funding for a tenure-tracked professor in the Faculty of Education at the University of British Columbia.
- Support new universities to develop undergraduate-degree programs that are home-economics related.

Faculty of Education, UBC

- Hire a tenure-tracked professor whose responsibilities will include home economics education, and who will provide leadership for diploma, master's and PhD students in home economics education.

British Columbia Teachers' Federation

- Continue to support specialist teachers.
- Continue to lobby for class-size considerations in applied-skills courses.
- Initiate a dialogue about the status of core and elective subjects.
- Address working-conditions issues in order to encourage and retain home economics teachers in the profession.

School districts

- Continue to hire teachers with Home Economics specialist qualifications (home-economics-related degree, diploma in Home Economics).

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