Education for Life

Family and Consumer Sciences changes lives by focusing on what people need most

CHARLOTTE GRAY (BS HE ’86) teaches Family and Consumer Sciences at Wentzville Holt High School near St Louis. Her classroom is filled with stainless steel tables and stools. Students learn culinary arts skills using professional grade appliances. Students wear lab coats or chef’s coats rather than aprons. She teaches from a computer and projector much more than from a textbook. New information relevant to students’ lives is discovered and distributed faster than textbooks can be updated. The curriculum includes units of instruction on entrepreneurship, careers in culinary arts and hospitality among other familiar topics such as quick breads or kitchen tools. “A lot has changed in the classroom in the 25 years that I have been teaching Family and Consumer Sciences,” Gray observes. “The world around us has changed even more.”

Dean Emerita Bea Litherland Smith agrees. “We are a nation that does not understand basic economics at either household or Congresional levels. Obesity and related diseases are epidemic. Family structures are shaky, and far too many children are raised in socially toxic environments. The need to prepare future citizens in the basic family and consumer sciences is written on the front pages of our daily newspapers,” Smith says.

Family and Consumer Sciences Education is a collaborative program between the College of Education and Human and Environmental Sciences that focuses on the greatest concerns, needs, and expenditures in people’s lives. In 1901, university records indicate that Hattie Margaret Anthony was the first home economics education graduate at Mizzou. In her time, the focus of the program was about addressing important concerns related to the home. Students learned about home sanitation, child care, meal management and other skills needed to become technical experts in managing a home.

Today, Family and Consumer Sciences emphasizes the process of decision-making in a complex world, health and wellness, financial literacy, and other every-day human problems. The curriculum stresses critical-thinking skills, standards-based competencies, and process skills. FCS students and faculty share their research, innovation, and knowledge with teenagers who will benefit in the short and long term from the interactions. “A solid educational rooting in family and consumer sciences at middle school and high school levels can prevent family pathologies that lead to expensive and intractable problems,” Smith says. Dean Stephen Jorgensen, a family scholar, strongly agrees and demonstrates tangible support through program funding.

The program also is important because there is a shortage of certified FCS educators. “In recent years, 50 or more Missouri teachers retire each year and the entire state of Missouri graduates about 10 new professionals to replace them,” says Victoria Shahan, director of the Student Services Office at HES. “In the fall of 2011, 27 students were enrolled as Family and Consumer Sciences Education (FCS Ed) majors. This spring seven students are completing their student teaching internships. We cannot meet the current demand for FCS teachers, but we are producing highly qualified teachers to prepare the next generation of high school and middle school students.” The Mizzou graduates might be small in number, but you can bet they’re fulfilling their potential out in the real world. Hattie Margaret Anthony would be proud.

FCS MISSION STATEMENT:
To prepare students for family life, work life and careers in family and consumer sciences by providing opportunities to develop the knowledge, skills, attitudes, and behaviors needed for:

• Strengthening the well-being of individuals and families across the life span
• Becoming responsible citizens and leaders of family, community, and work settings
• Promoting optimal nutrition and wellness across the life span
• Managing resources to meet the material needs of individuals and families
• Balancing personal, home, family, and work lives
• Using critical and creative thinking skills to address problems in diverse family, community, and work environments
• Functioning as providers and consumers of goods and services
• Appreciating human worth and accepting responsibility for one’s actions and success in family and work life
• Successful life management, employment, and career development