

**Analysis to Determine Canadian, American, and Australian  
Agreement about Home Economics/Family and Consumer Sciences  
Professional Competency Domains**

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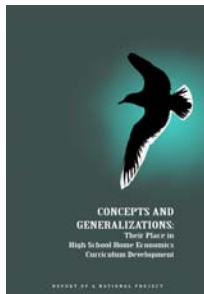
## **Abstract**

Despite several initiatives over the past decade, there is no widely recognized conceptual framework for family and consumer sciences (FCS) professional competency. Results are shared from a content analysis of seven Western documents depicting current thinking about competency domains to guide professional practice (Canadian, American, and Australian). Although 37 competency domains were identified, there was only a 22% agreement. It was found that different competencies were deemed salient in the early 2000's, compared with those from the 1990s. Low levels of agreement on competency domains were also evident within and between countries. These analyses led to a wide range of recommendations for future efforts to generate agreement on the intellectual core that sustains professional practice.

To guide its work, the profession has always recognized the need for competence on the part of its practitioners (American Home Economics Association [AHEA], 1974; Home Economics Teacher Educators of Pennsylvania [HETEP], 1976; Tate, 1973). All members must be aware of, contribute to, and employ a body of coherent ideas and principles that create the foundation of competent practice (Parker, 1987; McGregor, 2005, 2006). Yet, there is no internationally recognized conceptual framework for professional competence in the field. If people are not clear on the scope of their practice—the what to know, do, and think (i.e., core competencies and guiding principles), they cannot offer a morally responsible service to society (Parker).

The field of family and consumer sciences (FCS) in the U.S. has an extensive history of identifying competencies, unifying principles, and competency domains to guide professional practice. Initiatives in other countries, namely Canada and Australia, did not start until very late in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Selected historic highlights of the American initiatives will be shared to illustrate these formative years.

### Historic American Highlights



In 1967, AHEA published *Concepts and Generalizations: Their Place in High School Home Economics Curriculum Development*.

Affectionately known as “The Bird Book\*,” basic concepts of the field were outlined in an attempt to “identify the unifying elements of the field itself” (p. 7). Three unifying and interrelated principles

were identified: human development and interpersonal relationships, values, and management. “Taken together, they provide a conceptual framework which can give the learner a view of home economics which is whole and which can help him see the relationships” (p. 54). The 1974, AHEA publication, *Competency-based Professional Education in Home Economics*, nicknamed “The Tree Book\*,” identified a series of five different competencies and related criteria for preprofessional and professional improvement levels of practice: educational philosophy, professional role, program planning, educative process, and research. Two years later, in a state initiative, unlike the two previous national efforts, Home Economics Teacher Educators of Pennsylvania (1976) published *Competency-based Professional*

*Education for Home Economics Teachers*. Both the (a) educator role competencies and (b) home economics subject area competencies were outlined. (\* Publication cover used by permission of AAFCS, 2007)

In these early days, the construct of competencies was operationalized with a behavioral or action term and was generic and broad in scope. The intention was to provide guidance for practice. These efforts were not strictly behavioral, simplistic, or narrowly prescriptive as some critics of the competency movement feared at the time<sup>i</sup> (e.g., Fagan, 1980; Noddings, 1980).<sup>ii</sup> The approach they used did not inhibit professional creativity, innovation, or autonomy. But, neither did it result in a profession-wide agreed-to set of competencies. Table 1 summarizes work related to competencies, reflecting only the labels placed on the domains or principles and not the more detailed information available in the original documents.

**Table 1 – Core Domains and Principles Identified in Earlier US Documents**

<b>AHEA 1967 Bird Book</b>	<b>AHEA 1974 Tree Book</b>	<b>HETPA 1976 (for teachers)</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Human development &amp; personal relationships</li> <li>▪ Values</li> <li>▪ Management</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Educational philosophy</li> <li>▪ Professional role</li> <li>▪ Program planning</li> <li>▪ Educative process</li> <li>▪ Research</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Educator role for carrying out classroom responsibilities</li> <li>▪ Home economics subject area (content expertise)</li> </ul>

### **Purpose of Inquiry**

On the international front, the profession remains at the exploratory stage when it comes to officially and formally declaring a set of core competencies. Nonetheless, several country initiatives have been undertaken in the past decade to address what collection of core elements should constitute FCS practice. This study examines pertinent documents generated by these initiatives for patterns, congruency, and synergy. The assumption is that evidence of a high level of agreement across these initiatives reflects shared domains for establishing an internationally recognized core of professional competencies. Thus, the purpose of this inquiry is to share the results of a content analysis of seven initiatives from Canada,

the United States, and Australia with the explicit intent of examining the level of congruency between them. Chronological patterns across initiatives and within countries were examined. Implications of the findings for the future development of core professional competencies were explored.

### **Conceptual Clarity**

Twenty years ago, Gentzler (1987) discussed the need to conceptualize the construct of competency for FCS. She contrasted competency against the related concepts of performance and authority. This paper adds the two concepts of standards and competency domains. For conceptual clarity, it is important that these concepts be distinguished from each other. People often use them interchangeably when, in fact, they have quite different meanings.

### **Performance**

To perform something is to begin an act and then carry it through to its completion. A performance is a task that is finished. The term evolved as a way to distinguish between promises made but not completed and promises that were completed. A performance carries no value attached to the quality of the action, just that something has been completed (Doll, 1984).

### **Authority**

People who are regarded as authority figures are likely to have a thorough and wide-ranging knowledge concerning a given field. They would be called an expert. They are an *accepted* source of information and expertise, skilled in “doing” attained by study, practice, and observation (Gentzler, 1987).

### **Standard**

A standard is a point of reference against which someone is compared and evaluated. This standard is established by an authority and is a rule for the measure of quantity, extent, value, or quality. The standard is the criterion on which a judgment or decision is based. Other words for standard include: benchmark, gauge, measure, touchstone, and yardstick (Dictionary.com, 2004; Hyperdictionary, 2004).<sup>iii</sup>

## **Competencies and Competence**

Although (a) performance means completing a task, (b) authority means others' acceptance of one's expertise to complete that task, and (c) standard means the criteria against which this performance can be evaluated; a *competency* is a demonstrated set of attitudes, skill, behaviors, and understandings evaluated against established criteria (AHEA, 1974). A competency is an application of *competence*. Being competent means having the necessary strengths, abilities, and capacities to act or develop in a particular way in one's chosen profession. If one is competent, one is well-qualified, knowledgeable, proficient, and able to deal adequately with any field-related situation (Gentzler, 1987).

A definition of competence should extend beyond the narrow conceptualization of performance-based learning.<sup>iv</sup> Instead of mastering a set of discrete skills or a collection of processes, competent professionals would be able to integrate them to address perennial practical problems in a creative and holistic manner (MacCleave-Frazier & Murray, 1983). Competencies thus encompass both: (a) ways of thinking and knowing (such as analysis, synthesis, interpretation, and critical reflection) and (b) transformation of thinking in response to diversity and change. This paper addresses the domains that members of the profession believe constitute the core of the profession. Competencies developed from these domains could prepare practitioners in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

### **Method**

This section describes the documents analyzed (the sample frame), and the methods and procedures of the content analysis process.

### **Document Sample**

Extensive efforts were made in the 1960s and 1970s, in the U.S. at least, to identify unifying principles and competencies for the field. In 1987, Gentzler drew from related fields and suggested eight core competencies for FCS. These included such things as: being critically reflective, participating in critical dialogue, being self-directed, and practicing in justifiable and morally defensible ways. Since then, several detailed initiatives have been undertaken to tease out the core competencies of the

profession. Seven of these initiatives were identified (three from Canada, three from the United States, and one from Australia).<sup>v</sup>

The final collection of documents is set out in Appendix A. The nature of each initiative will be described in the following text to provide a rationale for selection of each document for inclusion in this study. All of them carry the common thread of mental and intellectual preparedness for reasoning and conduct in a profession. The findings are organized by the three countries from which the documents were obtained.

**Canadian sample.** There were three documents available from the Canadian profession (which, as of 2003, no longer has a national association). The first document by Berry (1994) summarized the work of the Canadian Home Economics Association (CHEA) Reciprocity Task Force. She reported suggested guidelines for setting professional *standards of practice* so that home economists moving from province to province could more readily be registered under respective provincial laws. The task force identified five areas of practice standards, with some detail about relevant knowledge, skills, and attitudes.

In 1997, CHEA commissioned Drs. Doris Badir and Diane Kieren to compile a *principle document* for home economics/human ecology in Canada. They developed a mission statement, with a rationale and supporting documentation to guide the Canadian profession into the immediate future. They generated 11 principles with very detailed discussions of each one. The document provides a very rich profile of competency domains expressed as *principles of practice*.<sup>vi</sup>

The third document is more recent and stems from CHEA's effort to reshape itself and the profession for the 21<sup>st</sup> century. CHEA charged a *20/20 Competency Advisory Team* to frame a draft document for discussion that represented the current thinking in core competencies for home economics. Although the document was never finalized (CHEA closed down, and the Task Force disbanded), the nearly complete draft was analyzed in this study (Crown & Gervais, 2003). The Task Force created 11 *core competency standards* with details for seven of them. The other four domains were sufficiently self-evident to be included in this analysis.<sup>vii</sup>

**American sample.** Three documents from the United States were analyzed. The first document reflects deliberations of a 1998 Steering Committee for the Redevelopment of the Certification Test. This document was prepared as part of the work of a Competencies Task Force of the American Association of Family and Consumer Sciences (AAFCS) Certification Committee. The entire document contains eight (8) core competencies; with each one elaborated in point form (Mitstifer, 1998). This inaugural work informed the development of the current AAFCS Body of Knowledge discussions as reported in Baugher, et al. (2000).

The second document reflects the deliberations of participants at a 1999 summit for higher education in FCS. This event was under the auspices of the Council of Administrators of FCS, with six other organizations (see Mitstifer, 1999). Four of the eight categories identified as impacting FCS higher education were analyzed in this study: (a) characteristic strengths of professionals, (b) basic competencies of expected graduates (under the section on external trends), (c) characteristics of leaders, and finally (d) critical components in FCS pre-service curriculum.

The third document is the current AAFCS *Body of Knowledge for FCS*.<sup>viii</sup> A dialogue among 20 representatives, from about 10 key professional organizations and committees, was held at AAFCS headquarters in January 2000. A group developed a philosophical framework for the future body of knowledge (Baugher, et al., 2000). What was of interest to this analysis is the section on “Process,” which includes a brief narrative as well as a list of 11 connecting *threads* deemed central to the work of the profession.

**Australian sample.** A document was also obtained from Australia (Home Economics Institute of Australia [HEIA], 2003). HEIA used the word *tasks* to refer to the work that a home economist will perform in the work place.

### **Data Collection Method**

One of the problems encountered while collecting data was the inconsistency of the terms used to convey the core elements of professional practice. Each initiative had a different term to describe the focus on the work - seven different terms :

- competencies,
- standards,
- competency standards,
- principles,
- threads,
- tasks, and
- characteristics and contributions of strong professionals and leaders.

A broad and encompassing descriptor was needed to identify the information housed in the seven documents. Owing to our interest in the development of core competencies for the field, the term *competency domain* was chosen. A competency domain is a key area in which a professional must have expertise and proficiency or a key area from which competencies can be drawn. For example, competencies and related criteria can be drawn from the *threads* of the *Body of Knowledge for FCS* document, the *tasks* of the Australian document, or the *principles of practice* in the Badir and Kieren (1997) Canadian document. The term seemed to be sufficiently inclusive for the content analysis.

The data were collected from the seven documents using a content analysis approach. A blank code chart was created with nine columns and 30 rows, initially. The left column represented each particular competency domain as it was found. The next seven columns represented entries for each of the documents analyzed in the study, and the far right column contained row totals.

The seven documents were coded for words and phrases. The coders captured information in the documents' main headings and any adjacent statements that expanded, in finer detail, the ideas shaping the domain noted in the main heading. Upon reading the first document, each domain was entered into the far left column (one per row), along with a checkmark. Upon reading the second document, a checkmark was placed beside any competency domain(s) already on the code sheet. Domains not noted before were added to bottom of the original list with a checkmark, resulting in a longer list of competency domains than the original 30 rows. This process was repeated until all seven documents had been coded once. The entire process was repeated twice more, each time starting with a blank coding sheet. The results were then collated and entered onto one coding sheet, presented in Appendix B.

The two most important criteria of quality for this content analysis were consistency and inclusiveness. The first criterion of consistency, or stability reliability, was established through triple coding. Similar to “test-re-test reliability,” it is a method designed to ensure that a coder consistently re-codes the same data in the same way over a period of time. This way, bias in the form of attention and perceptual changes and coder fatigue can be reduced (Holsti, 1969). A reliability coefficient can be calculated by dividing the number of coding agreements by the combination of disagreements plus agreements (Miles & Huberman, 1984). As a general rule, a reliability coefficient between 61-80% provides substantial strength of agreement between coding efforts (Stemler, 2001). Seventy-five percent (75%) stability reliability was achieved in this study, an inter-rater reliability coefficient that is considered substantial and indicative of meaningful results (Landis & Koch, 1977; Lindell, Eriksson & Strender, 2007). This triple coding also ensured that the second quality criterion of inclusiveness was met. It was important to include all competency domains across the seven documents. Any domains that may have been missed during the first round of coding were picked up in the subsequent rounds.

When the entire content coding process was complete, row and column entries in Appendix B were tallied. The results provided information on the scope and breadth of competency domains identified in the seven documents, and the level of agreement about what should comprise core professional elements.

### **What About Meaning?**

The authors recognize that this content analysis procedure decontextualized words and phrases from broader meaning systems or frameworks. The same word or phrase may have different meanings across different documents. Even with cultural exchange of ideas, the same word or phrase might be imbued with different connotations in order to be assimilated into existing systems of meaning and practice. Von Heyking (2006) also cautioned that researchers couldn't account for the range of meanings that readers might attribute to words in a text when conducting a content analysis. Nevertheless, it was considered important to identify recurring words or phrases as one way to explore commonalities across documents. For this initial analysis<sup>ix</sup>, the authors intentionally avoided imposing a meaning system from

one document onto another. Questions of meaning were temporarily suspended and words and phrases were coded only if they were explicitly present in the document. Similar to van Barneveld, Stienstra, and Stewart (2006), we adopted the position of a layperson, interested in commonalities across these documents but lacking “the expertise or experience to ‘read between the lines’” (p. 845).

### **Results of Content Analysis**

The results of this content analysis will be addressed under three headings. The level of congruence of competency domains across all seven documents will be reported under general results. Then, chronological patterns across countries will be explored, followed by chronological patterns within countries.

#### **General Results**

An analysis of Appendix B reveals that, in total, 37 competency domains were identified in the seven documents, an average of 16 each. A total of eight (8) domains were encountered five to seven times (22% congruency): public policy, human ecology and family ecosystems, interdisciplinary and integrative (holistic), ethical and social responsibility (including justice), research, management, and communication. Only one of these eight domains was mentioned by all seven sources, public policy.

Twenty two percent is a low level of agreement on what constitutes the core of the profession. This finding suggests that the large majority of ideas (78%, n=29) are not agreed upon, being mentioned four times or less. Of these 29, five domains were noted four times: problem solving, community development, the history/philosophy/mission of the profession, respect for diversity, and creative thinking. Seven of the competency domains were noted three times: advocacy, basic needs of families, human development, reflective practice, leadership, collaborative teamwork, and critical thinking. The remaining 17 competency domains were noted twice or less (46%).

Of these 17 domains, seven (7) were noted twice: change management; knowledge of specialization areas; systems of action and practical, perennial problems; a global perspective; technology; providing advise to industry and government; and program planning and development. Ten

competency domains were mentioned only once: professional socialization and identity, international development, a value focus on family life, entrepreneurship, environment, critical science approach, moral and ethical development, spiritual development, wellness, and understanding self and value system.

The level of agreement among ideas might be greater than indicated in this analysis. The coding method was only able to discern identical occurrences of terms or phrases. Yet, related but different terms appeared across documents. One example, “systems of action and practical, perennial problems” appeared in both the 1997 Canadian document and in the 1998 American document. The broader and super ordinate domain, “critical science approach,” appeared in the earlier 1990 American document, but was absent in the other two American initiatives.

### *Chronological Patterns Across Countries*

The data also revealed some intriguing chronological patterns. A different collection of competency domains was evident in the decade of the nineties compared to the 21<sup>st</sup> century, the 2000s. This change occurred even though only three years had lapsed between initiatives. Also, there seemed to be five distinct time frames within the decade. The year 1994 stands alone, as does 1997. There are only five domains that both of these time periods have in common (23% agreement): human ecology, interdisciplinary, basic needs, professional development, and public policy. Some might conclude that 23% agreement is indicative of a very firm core of competencies that persisted over time while others may yearn for stronger agreement over something so fundamental as the core of our practice.

The 1998 and 1999 documents (both joint US initiatives) have nine competency domains in common (37% agreement): human ecology, interdisciplinary, public policy, professional development, the mission, research, ethical and social responsibilities and creative thinking. This level of congruency means that, although only a year apart, there still was no agreement on almost two-thirds of the domains. Of note is the finding that the 1999 document proffered 13 new domains while not reiterating five noted only a year earlier.

Also revealing are the competency domains that were left behind, and the new ones that emerged as the decade unfolded into the new century. An analysis of the data revealed that four earlier competency domains simply did not appear in the more recent thinking about what should be at the core of the profession: creating a professional identity, involvement in international development, valuing the focus on family life, and systems of actions and practical perennial problems.

On the other hand, some very interesting competency domains began to appear at the beginning of the new century: reflective practice, a global perspective, the environment, the critical science approach, moral and ethical development, spiritual development, wellness (instead of well-being), and understanding oneself and one's personal value system. Several domains also disappeared and reappeared again in the new century: advocacy, community development, change management, and basic needs.

There is some parallel between the American and Canadian initiatives in 2002-2003, notably on the conventional domains often cited for FCS (n=8, 29% agreement): human ecology and family ecosystems, interdisciplinary and integrative, management, communication, community development, public policy, reflective practice, and ethical and social responsibility.

Finally, the Australian components correlated relatively well with the 1999 and 2002 North American documents, noticeably on 10 domains (33% agreement): problem solving, management, communication, community involvement, public policy, diversity, research, social and ethical responsibility, creative thinking, and collaborative team work.

### **Chronological Patterns Within Countries**

As a caveat, only the Canadian and American documents can be examined for chronological patterns. Because there was only one Australian document analyzed, there was no evidence to gauge any passage of time between one initiative and another in that country

**Canadian profile.** The documents from Canada reflected efforts that spanned a decade (see Appendix B). The 1994 and 2003 competency collections are quite close to each other (47% in agreement), compared to 1997 initiative (27% agreement). And, there is only 27% agreement between the

2003 and 1994 initiatives, with even less agreement between the 1997 and 2003 initiatives (22% agreement).

In total, 27 domains were identified in the Canadian documents. Where there is overlap between all three Canadian initiatives, this overlap is in the conventional areas of home economics, as understood for decades. With each consecutive initiative, more and more competency domains were identified as the decade unfolded. More than half of the domains addressed after 1994 (56%) were new ideas. The newer ideas tended to relate to a growing sense that the profession must embrace the impact of living with globalization, the new economy, and an information/knowledge society. It must value diversity, ethical and social responsibility, international development, reflective practice, leadership, and a focus on practical, perennial problems.

**American profile.** The initiatives in the U.S. spanned five years (compared to a decade in Canada). Thirty-one (31) competency domains were identified. These three efforts had different but complementary thrusts: (a) certification as a FCS professional, (b) strengthening FCS higher education programs, and (c) creating a profession-wide body of knowledge. One might expect that work related to certification, socialization into the profession, and professional practice would be closer in agreement. But, this was not evident in the results (see Appendix B). Furthermore, one might assume that, in such a short time frame, there would be relatively high congruency between these domains, since five years is not a lot of time for change to unfold. Instead, the results show that only six domains appeared in all three documents (19% agreement): human ecology and family ecosystems, interdisciplinary and integrative, public policy, professional development, social and ethical responsibility, and creative thinking. Nine domains appeared twice (29% agreement). Combining these counts as 15 domains noted 2-3 times results in 48% agreement.

Even more telling is the lack of congruency in the United States between the core competency domains suggested for higher education programs (Mitsifer, 1999) *and* those suggested for certified practice (Mitsifer, 1998). Logic suggests that these would be nearly identical because the programs

would have to be designed to prepare graduates who would then apply to be certified. Instead, there is 37% agreement between these two initiatives.

### **Discussion**

The lack of congruence across these seven initiatives should not be entirely surprising. Different versions of FCS or home economics have always existed. For example, East (1980) described four competing models for home economics: management, applied science, inductive reasoning, and education for women. Over the years, dimensions of these models have been integrated, creating even more versions of FCS. Pendergast (2001) contrasted the British and American influences on home economics in Australia and noted that different versions of the profession existed both within and across countries.

Lack of agreement was also indicated when many competency domains appeared only once in the seven documents. It was exciting to see these particular domains, yet disappointing to see so little agreement about their salience to the profession. Those crafting the documents may have assumed that these domains are now entrenched, are not needed, or they may have been unfamiliar with them. Morals, ethics, social responsibility, critically challenging mainstream ideologies, working internationally, and taking care of one's spirit and personal value system *are* leading-edge ideas in the profession. Perhaps that explains why they are on the margin of these recent initiatives, instead of at the core.

Some of the congruency among words and phrases may have been missed in this content analysis. Words that appeared in some documents, but not others, may have reflected the same conceptual framework in the minds of those framing the documents, suggesting a disguised or overlooked congruence. Another type of coding or analysis would be necessary to discern these patterns in the data, perhaps a thematic analysis. Some of the original documents included criteria or statements of evidence for each competency. Since this feature was not consistently apparent across documents, these criteria or elaborating statements were not coded in the analysis. Future initiatives may want to refine the coding instrument to catch this layer of content.

Remember that the authors of the initiatives drew on seven different labels to refer to aspects of professional practice. A greater degree of congruency would make it more likely that respective initiatives

would relate better with each other's thinking. For example, if people are focusing on tasks, they may not see the relevance of reading a document about principles. Someone eager to develop standards may not solicit valid ideas labeled as threads. Others truly wanting to tease out competencies may dismiss a parallel initiative on characteristics of strong professionals. This lack of intellectual connection could stymie any global effort to develop a profile of a professional core.

On a more optimistic note, although 22% is a low level of agreement across competency domains, it is still substantial enough to serve as a starting point for international dialogue. It might be interesting to see how the shared domains are connected to the unshared domains. Unrecognized compatibility across domains might be brought to light if someone were to engage in this level of analysis. Within the profession, it was encouraging to identify some shared domains between the American and Canadian documents, and between Australian and North American documents. A dialogue to create a common core might begin with these commonalities.

The changes over time in competency domains revealed in this analysis raise interesting questions. What might account for these changes? Using a feminist poststructuralist lens, Pendergast (2001) believed that the field's location in a gender regime of power and knowledge was responsible for repression and the constant search for legitimization (see also Pendergast & McGregor, 2007). Possibly, the field is also responding to vast global changes that have impacted all aspects of society and everyday life. Are other professions also undergoing change? How might the degree and magnitude of change in FCS compare to that of other professions?

What about the low level of agreement around competency domains across documents from the same country? The level of congruency was greater between the 1994 and 2003 Canadian documents than between either of these documents and the 1997 document. By way of some explanation, these three initiatives had different agendas: (a) to ensure national standards to facilitate labour mobility (1994), (b) to map out a set of principles to take the profession into the new millennium (1997), and (c) to establish core competencies to underpin an initiative to certify home economists in Canada (2003). Perhaps the 1994 and 2003 initiatives are similar because they were both striving for *standards*, while the 1997

initiative developed *principles*. This finding is very useful for future initiatives because it shows that standards and principles are, indeed, related but not the same.

Taken collectively, analysis of the three Canadian documents suggested a lack of agreement about what should comprise core competency domains for the profession. Reflection about core elements is still ongoing, and seems to be getting broader in scope. The continuation of this national dialogue is compromised at the moment due to the absence of a national coordinating body. The authors know of a recent initiative that created a website for the Canadian Home Economics Foundation (CHEF), <http://www.homeeconomicsfoundation.ca/> Among other features, this site will house a depository of 35 years of back issues of the *Canadian Home Economics Journal*. Access to this body of knowledge will make it much easier for future conversations about core competencies to continue.

When comparing the American documents, it was found that close to two-thirds of the competency domains for certification were not in agreement with those for higher education. Perhaps there needs to be critical dialogue between the professional associations and administrators of higher education to ensure better congruency between pre-socialization preparation and certification in the field. If the universities are not designing programs to enable graduates to be certified as a professional and if the association's body of knowledge is not congruent with the other two efforts (currently, only 48% agreement), then graduates run the risk of having inconsistent preparation for principled practice. The elders in the profession owe new members a higher standard of orientation than what currently exists. The final section of the paper offers many suggestions for how greater congruency might be achieved in the field.

### **Recommendations**

Several promising recommendations were triggered by this analysis. They deal with issues of consistency, rationales for changes and emergent domains, the necessity of additional domains, manageability and relevancy, coordination between professional associations and higher education, future research, and future conversations about consolidating domains into a synergistic whole.

### ***Develop Consistent Descriptors***

The authors were struck by the inconsistency of terms used to refer to facets of professionalism that deal with quality, consistency, and integrity of practice. The labels included: competency (the state of being qualified or able to perform), standards (a benchmark against which to gauge performance), competency standards (the skills and knowledge required for a person to operate effectively in the workplace), principles (explanatory rules that reveal relationships), cross-cutting threads (ideas that weave back and forth across a number of things), tasks (a difficult undertaking), and characteristics and contributions of strong leaders (strong meaning effective, powerful, and dynamic). Adoption of a broad and inclusive descriptor such as *competency domain* might facilitate a dialogue across differences and similarities.

### ***Monitor Ebb, Flow, and Re-Emergence of Competencies and any Rationales for Change***

The flux of competency domains appearing and disappearing suggests that future efforts to develop professional competencies give serious consideration to the relevancy of prior and emergent domains and the thinking behind them. This strategy is recommended because these competencies do not yet seem to be securely anchored in the collective psyche, despite the persistent rhetoric of visionaries in the field. Nurturing professional competency necessitates exposure to leading edge thinking within and outside the field (McGregor, 2005, 2006). Future work on core competencies needs to cultivate this exposure if the profession wants to be on the vanguard of change. To fully understand changes over time, committees need to be encouraged to include a rationale for any changes made and to provide comparisons with historic documents.

### ***Consider Additional Competency Domains***

What is even more telling are the competency domains that did not make it into any of the documents. Given the demands placed on professionals as they practice in a complex, dynamic, and chaotic time, the authors suggest additional competency domains for consideration by those who continue this work. Future conversations around core competencies might expand to embrace new domains such as

leadership theory, transdisciplinary inquiry, transformative approaches, human rights, environmental sustainability, and peace, among others.

### ***Keep Collection of Competency Domains Manageable and Relevant***

Hager (1993) reported that a typical profession involves no more than 30-40 key intentional actions (this study found 37) and that actual practice will often simultaneously involve several of these competent actions. Furthermore, professionals should always take into account the varying contexts in which they are operating, and then take competent action appropriate for the situation. Finally, professionals should also know how to integrate the 30 or so intentional actions (competency domains) with their personal characteristics and qualities, a form of philosophical congruency (Gentzler, 1987). This approach is a way to ensure that the profession as a whole is neither fragmented nor too rigid. For these reasons, future initiatives should keep the collection of competency domains manageable and relevant for the times.

### ***Cultivate a Relationship Between Professional Associations and Higher Education Institutions***

Remember that this study discovered only 37% agreement about the core competencies comprising FCS practice between university administrators and the professional association in the United States. To ensure consistency in how practitioners are prepared at university and during post-university inservice, it would be helpful to foster collaborative relationships between those espousing the core competencies (likely professional associations) and those preparing people for careers in the profession.

### ***Conduct Further Content Analyses of this Data Base Using Other Lens***

The possibility that words from the same conceptual framework (e.g., critical science approach) were differentially located across documents due to different assumptions, paradigms, and worldviews suggests that an alternative form of content analysis be considered. What might the results be if the documents were analyzed using various conceptual frameworks as a lens, in addition to the chronological approach employed? It might interest some to know that Dr. Janet Reynolds has published think-pieces about authentic pedagogy in home economics, works that were not included in this analysis because the authors were not aware of them (they were not self-identified by Australian contacts or other informants),

and because they are under the guise of pedagogy instead of philosophical orientation or competencies (Reynolds, 2002, 2003, 2006). Had they been included, the results may have been quite different.

### ***Consolidate Initiatives into an Integrated Whole – Further Conversations***

Finally, this study reported on seven totally separate initiatives that strived to tease out a set of core competencies, principles, or elements for the profession. With this analysis as a starting point, these initiatives might be pulled together into an integrated whole to inform any future efforts to conceptualize professional core competencies. The broad descriptor of *competency domain* created a space to begin a dialogue across differences and similarities. Conversion of these domains to related competencies (some might call this collapsing the domains into a more manageable system, as recommended by Hager, 1993) might further enhance international congruency in the profession, assuming this is the desired approach to FCS practice. A big part of this work will be further consolidation of the competency domains into fewer and more focused domains (ideally, five to 10 domains that contain 40 or more core competencies). The *apparent* lack of consensus between initiatives and countries may simply be attributed to the current use of lists, instead of a richer model comprising core domains and related competency statements with criteria.

### **Conclusions**

Professional competence entails a convergence of abilities, insights, and knowledge to create a core or foundation from which people approach their practice. Competencies may lie dormant until they are stimulated, challenged, and experienced (Shields & Williams, 1988). This paper serves to stimulate thinking about professional core competencies and principles for FCS.

Although repertoires of core competencies are not curriculum documents, they are an explicit statement of what, why, and how of the profession. These competencies serve as powerful guides to providers of higher education and lifelong, professional development education. A well-designed collection of competencies provides everyone with a much sharper, *accountable* focus for practice (Hager, 1993). Paying attention to state-of-the-art thinking about core professional competencies also falls

within the scope of professionalism (McGregor, 2005, 2006). Such efforts enable people to provide competent and morally defensible service to society - the mark of a true professional (Brown & Paolucci, 1979; McGregor, 2005).

This inquiry indicated that more intellectual work is needed to achieve agreement about what constitutes the core of the profession. Indeed, the fragmented nature of our approach may reflect (a) that most people in the field are practitioners not philosophers and (b) that modes of communications between and among home economists and family and consumer scientists in various countries were not as available when these documents were generated as they are now. We anticipate that the ongoing International Federation of Home Economics (IFHE) Think Tank Committee will generate additional insights into this issue. Their work, and the results of this study, should contribute to the profession's progress toward this intellectual endeavor. The 2008 centennial celebration for IFHE, in Switzerland, may be a good place for this dialogue to continue, especially coming on the heels of the philosophical meeting (*Rethinking Home Economics*) facilitated in Helsinki, Finland in June 2006 by Dr. Kaija Turkki.

Why should we bother? Of what benefit are these and similar efforts to the profession? Development of a solid professional core will help reverse the fragmentation created by overspecialization in the field over the past few decades (Brown, 1993; McGregor, 2004, 2006; Vincenti, 1990). If the field continues with the current level of incongruency, the public will remain confused about what we do. East (1980) and Fusa (2004) envision home economics (FCS) as a focus on the home to improve humanity. A solid professional core means a more sustainable profession on a global scale, a deeper assurance of consistency in practice, a stronger ability to ride the currents of change, and a far-reaching sense of solidarity.

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## Appendix A - Profile of Seven Professional Competency Documents Explored Using Content Analysis

<b>Canada</b>		
Ruth Berry (representing the work of the CHEA Reciprocity Task Force)	<i>Guidelines for Setting Minimum the Standards for Practice of Home Economics</i>	1994
Diane Kieren and Doris Badir (commissioned by CHEA)	The Human Ecology/Home Economics Mission Task (a collection of <i>principles</i> )	1997
Betty Crown and Nicole Gervais editing for the CHEA 20/20 Competency Advisory Team	<i>Professional Competency Standards with a Family Life Management Competencies Appendix</i>	2003
<b>United States</b>		
Dorothy Mitstifer editing for the Committee on Competencies for Certified Practice (called the "Think Tank")	<i>Unique Competencies Across Specializations</i>	1998
Dorothy Mitstifer editing for the Steering Committee of CAFCS	<i>A synopsis of FCS in higher education: An open summit on the future</i>  (Identified categories of factors, including characteristic strengths of professionals, characteristics of leaders in higher education, and significant contributions of professionals)	1999
Shirley Baugher, et al. (2002) (representing participants at a 2000 AAFCS Dialogue on the Body of Knowledge)	Body of Knowledge for Family and Consumer Sciences  Crosscutting and specialization <i>threads</i>	2002 (supercedes web & Journal version (Anderson & Nickols, 2001)
<b>Australia</b>		
Home Economics Institute of Australia	Home Economics - The World of Work ( <i>tasks</i> to be preformed during career)	2003

**Appendix B - Results of Content Analysis of FCS Competency Documents (color shading is used to reveal patterns)**

Competency Domain	1994 Berry for CHEA	1997 Kieren and Badir for CHEA	2003 Crown and Gervais for CHEA	1998 Mitsifer for Committee on Competencies for Certified Practice	1999 Mitsifer for CAFCS Steering Committee on Higher Education	2002 AAFCS Body of Know- ledge	2003 HEIA Australia	Total
	Canadian			United States			Australian	
human ecology and family ecosystem	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y		6
interdisciplinary and integrative	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y		6
problem solving and decision making	Y		Y	Y			Y	4
management	Y		Y		Y	Y	Y	5
communication	Y		Y		Y	Y	Y	5
advocacy	Y		Y		Y			3
community development and involvement	Y		Y			Y	Y	4
basic needs	Y	Y				Y		3
public policy	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	7
change management	Y				Y			2
professional development and life long learning	Y	Y		Y	Y	Y		5
human development	Y					Y	Y	3
history, mission and philosophy of profession		Y	Y	Y	Y			4
specialization knowledge		Y					Y	2
creation of professional identity (socialization)		Y						1
international development		Y						1

reflective practice		Y	Y			Y		3
value focus on family life		Y						1
systems of action and practical, perennial problems		Y		Y				2
value diversity		Y			Y	Y	Y	4
research and scholarship		Y	Y	Y	Y		Y	5
ethical and social responsibility		Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	6
leadership			Y	Y	Y			3
creative thinking				Y	Y	Y	Y	4
collaborative teams			Y		Y		Y	3
critical thinking			Y		Y	Y		3
global perspective					Y	Y		2
entrepreneurship					Y			1
technology					Y	Y		2
environment					Y			1
critical science approach					Y			1
advice to industry, government and NGOs					Y		Y	2
moral and ethical development						Y		1
spiritual development						Y		1
wellness						Y		1
understand self and one's personal value system			Y					1
program planning and development			Y				Y	2
Total (average of 16 each)	12	15	17	11	22	19	14	110

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## Endnotes

<sup>i</sup> Within the current accountability movement (No Child Left Behind) in the U.S., competencies have become associated with long prescribed lists or fragments of information and standardized testing. Although many U.S. professionals may understand the term competency in this context, such a connotation is different from the one intended for this article.

<sup>ii</sup> As we write this, IFHE is engaging the work of a Think Tank Committee tasked with preparing a position paper to purposely “address issues of lack of convergence around the core... of the profession” (Donna Pendergast, Chair, personal communication, June 01, 2005). These results are expected sometime in 2007.

<sup>iii</sup> An exciting example of standards within the FCS field is the recent National Standards for Family and Consumer Sciences Education, set in 1998. The standards include both academic and occupational content for developing curricula and programs for middle school and high school students (Vail, Fox & Wild, 2000).

<sup>iv</sup> Doll (1980) emphasized the importance of distinguishing competence from performance. Persons could be competent but, for any number of reasons, fail to demonstrate their capacities through their actual performance. Yet, a person cannot perform adequately without the necessary competence.

<sup>v</sup> Key informants from around the world were e-contacted for information about any initiatives they were involved with related to setting out core principles or competencies for the profession. A snowball sampling approach was used wherein each person contacted was asked to name other relevant contacts. Professionals in Norway and the United Kingdom responded with their mission statements. These are not included in this analysis because they did not deal with competencies. If documents exist in other countries, documents that describe competencies or principles for the field, they remain unpublished, still in the development stage, or the relevant key informants inadvertently were not approached.

<sup>vi</sup> It is only available from the original authors, the authors of this paper, or the CHEA archives (current Archivist is Joanne Mackie [Hjemackie@castle.on.ca](mailto:Hjemackie@castle.on.ca)).

<sup>vii</sup> This document is also available only from the original authors, the authors of this paper, or in the CHEA archives.

<sup>viii</sup> We acknowledge that even this “Body of Knowledge” document may change depending on the outcome of the 2006 and 2007 AAFCS Board Meetings. Details for proposals for change are available at [Hhttp://www.aafcs.org/res/Transforming/Rec\\_for\\_ActionMay2006.pdf](http://www.aafcs.org/res/Transforming/Rec_for_ActionMay2006.pdf) *H Transforming AAFCS: A new era of action*. For instance, the association is moving to form Communities of Practice. McFall (2006) explains that this initiative will mean that the body of knowledge will be stewarded by communities of practitioners rather than a few people in select organizations.

<sup>ix</sup> This inquiry is the first phase of a larger, ongoing study.

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