

Housing and Society
Vol. 10, No. 2, 1983

An Education Note on:

THE FUTURE OF HOUSING EDUCATION: A CONCERN

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ABSTRACT

Housing programs, at undergraduate and graduate levels, have fallen far behind other areas of home economics in terms of the number of degrees granted. The result is that there is an inadequate supply of housing professionals at a time when the need is critical. This paper outlines some steps that could be taken to improve the situation.

INTRODUCTION

The American Association of Housing Educators traces its founding to the efforts of the Resident Instruction Section, Home Economics Division of the Association of Land Grant Colleges and Universities. The first conference on the Improvement of Instruction in Housing was held in 1957 with AAHE being formed at the University of Illinois Conference in 1966.

The early conferences and those held by AAHE served several purposes among which was to "promote recruitment of worthy students to advanced study of housing in order to increase the quality and quantity of professionals in the field." Because AAHE is rapidly approaching its 20th anniversary, the objective of this paper is to address that purpose. It is of concern in this paper, especially, with respect to the number of students currently studying housing.

How many of the universities in which we teach across the United States have or plan to develop family housing programs? How many undergraduate and graduate students are we preparing for roles in numerous emerging housing professions including teaching, research, and extension? How dedicated are we as housing educators to meeting the opportunities that lie ahead in educating our students and the public concerning contemporary housing issues, policies, or trends? Unfortunately, based on the data analyzed in this paper, the answers are not very attractive.

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THE CURRENT SITUATION

Housing programs fall far behind other areas in home economics in terms of the number of degrees granted. For the past ten years, fewer than one percent, on the average, of all degrees granted in home economics have been awarded in the area of Housing and Equipment (Table 1). There is an average of only two doctorates, 30 master's degrees, and fewer than 200 undergraduate degrees awarded annually.

Table 1. Number and percent of all degrees granted by level in Housing and Equipment in the United States and Puerto Rico from 1970 to 1981.

Year	BA, BS		MA, MS		Ph. D.			
Year	N	%	N	%	N	%	Total	%
1970-71	99	0.5	30	1.3	1	0.8	130	0.6
1972-73	260	1.2	32	1.3	2	1.2	294	1.2
1974-75	229	0.9	42	1.4	3	1.5	274	1.0
1976-77	182	0.8	21	0.7	1	0.4	204	0.7
1978-79	180	0.8	23	0.7	4	1.4	207	0.8
1980-81	303*	1.3	23	0.8	4	1.4	330	1.3

*Of this number 123 degrees were granted at Colorado State, Purdue, or at University of Wisconsin at Stevens Point in combined Housing and Interior Design or Environmental Design curricula and are actually students with major interests in design.

Sources: Harper, L.J. and C.E. Wateki, 1972; Harper, L.J., 1974, 1982; Harper, L.J., C.W. Bishop, and M. Spencer, 1978; Harper, L.J. P. Custer, and R. Purdy, 1980; and Harper, L.J., 1982.

Harper (1981), on whose data the research is based, states in her review of the status of home economics in higher education that housing is one of the "... least productive specializations as measured by graduates produced" (p 18). In addition, the numbers of graduates at all levels and the numbers of institutions granting degrees are not increasing commensurately with the increase in housing problems (Table 2). In fact, there has been a slight decrease over the past ten years, especially at the undergraduate level. Note that while the 1980-81 data for undergraduate degrees suggests an increase, three colleges combined Interior Design and Housing in reporting their data for 123 students. It is known that the majority of those 123 students are actually Interior Design majors.

While the American Association of Housing Educators estimates that there are approximately 35 home economics units offering graduate programs in housing, fewer than one-third of those programs granted master's or doctoral degrees at any time during the last ten years.

As depressing as this appears, it may be that the situation is getting worse. As administrators look for areas to be cut in their current budget slashing, housing programs, already at critically low levels may suffer even further reductions. Moreover, Interior Design programs, which tend to have large undergraduate enrollments as a result of the "glamor aspect" of the field and not societal needs or employment prospects, are receiving increased emphasis, often to the detriment of existing housing programs.

At the junior high school or high school level, the situation is even more dismal than at the university level (Wysocki, 1977). Of 270 home economics high school teachers representing both urban and rural areas, only 8 percent spent more than one-fifth of their time teaching housing (Wysocki, 1977). For the majority, housing was an insignificant part of the total home economics program and almost never a requirement. Of those who reported that they teach housing, very few were actually focusing on housing. Home decorating, furniture styles and construction, and color and design were the topics that are most likely to be offered.

Table 2. Number and percent of colleges and universities granting degrees by level in Housing and Equipment in the United States and Puerto Rico for 1970-1971 to 1980-81.

Year	BA, BS		MA, MS		PH. D.	
	N	%	N	%	N	%
1970-71	16	4.3	8	5.8	1	4.0
1972-73	22	6.1	7	5.0	1	4.0
1974-75	27	7.6	9	6.0	2	6.8
1976-77	22	6.1	10	6.4	1	3.4
1978-79	26	7.2	13	8.4	3	10.0
1980-81	26	7.4	8	5.1	3	10.3

Sources: Harper, L.J. and C.E. Wateki, 1972; Harper, L.J., 1974, 1982; Harper, L.J., C.W. Bishop, and M. Spencer, 1978; Harper, L.J. P. Custer, and R. Purdy, 1980; and Harper, L.J., 1982.

Home economics teachers feel inadequately prepared to teach in the area of housing (Murray, 1979). At the same time as they reported that they most need to be updated in the area of housing they reported that it would be the most difficult area in which to successfully accomplish the updating.

FUTURE ACTIONS

Who will be preparing qualified people to educate the public if we are not preparing our students for this role? The traditional position of housing as one of the basic needs and aspirations of American society still exists. It seems inconceivable that home economics, in which many of us teach and which claims to be concerned with the welfare of families and the quality of daily life would not be as concerned with housing as with the other basic needs.

What can be done?

Perhaps the first step is to recruit students at all levels, undergraduate and graduate, and earlier, if possible. In order to do that:

1. Housing courses such as socio-economic aspects of housing should be available to all university students, not just those in home economics. Such a broadly based course should meet the general education requirements of a university similar to introductory sociology, psychology, and economics courses.
2. Career opportunities should be made known to students. Knowing that jobs exist for those who have a major in housing could attract students. Some career possibilities involve housing management, working with local and state government agencies, banking institutions, social agencies and with not-for-profit corporations involved with areas such as historic preservation. An undergraduate major can be an excellent preparation for advanced work in urban and regional planning, law, architecture, and (of course) housing. Housing career options should be incorporated into introductory level housing courses and listings of schools offering advanced degrees in housing should be widely circulated.
3. Housing programs should have a broad focus that would appeal to a variety of students. Frequently, the emphasis has been on economic or design or social implications. What is needed is a balanced program because housing is affected by many factors.
4. In the vast area of housing, recruitment of more male students is important. Many of the housing careers are appealing to both sexes. This would not only bring more students into the housing field overall, but would also help to bring more males into home economics and help balance the female domination of the subject.
5. Housing programs should be coordinated with community groups and agencies, city planners, government officials (such as regional HUD and FmHA offices) lending institutions, and other individuals and firms that could lead to employment. Internships, field experiences, guest speakers, and other similar opportunities have been successful in serving two purposes, to help students learn about jobs and to help employers to become familiar with students.
6. College and university departments should seek well-qualified faculty members to teach housing courses. The one-person housing-home furnishings-household equipment-etc. program should become a thing of the past if housing is to be taken seriously. Course offerings should be expanded beyond the introductory level to include more specialized courses such as housing

finance, alternatives, the elderly and handicapped, housing regulation, and socio-economic effects of the housing environment. Ideally, there should be a major in housing available, second best would be a minor, or a concentration, or an emphasis.

7. Continuation and strengthening of the thirty-five or so graduate housing programs currently in existence is very important. Housing positions go unfilled every year due to the lack of qualified applicants with the appropriate degrees in housing. The graduate programs could fill that gap.
8. Strengthening the research base is a necessary step toward improving housing education. One way this can be done is through regional research efforts such as those going on in the South, North Central, and Western regions. Within colleges, team approaches combining research and extension staffs can accomplish more than one person working in isolation.
9. Housing-related workshops and short courses and in-service training are needed and desired by secondary school teachers and other professionals. Such courses can be offered in cooperation with local school districts, state departments of education, and others.
10. Finally, there is a growing need to offer community-based adult education in housing courses for consumers, builders, and others on such topics as: energy-efficient housing, creative financing options, housing options for the elderly, first-time home buyers, and the like.

THE OPPORTUNITY

As the 1980's proceed, new housing forms are emerging coupled with a greater emphasis on energy conservation and the necessary life-style adjustments. Government policies continue to change in regard to federally subsidized housing and in regulations governing manufactured housing and building materials. Mortgage interest rates remain high and first-time home buyers have great difficulty in purchasing homes. New mortgage variations have emerged further confounding decision making. Housing starts remain sluggish in many parts of the nation. Greater proportions of the population are renting multifamily housing and purchasing condominiums than in other decades. There are more single-parent families and more elderly households.

Indeed, many issues involving housing have resulted in a need for more professionals in the field who are trained to offer guidance in a humanistic approach for the people seeking suitable housing. Where housing is concerned, there is more educating to do today than at any time since the New Deal (Smith, 1981).

It is our challenge, as housing educators, to encourage our department heads, deans, state leaders, and other administrators to

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support and emphasize critically needed housing education programs.

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