

Designing Newsletters to Recruit Family and Consumer Sciences Education Majors, Our Future North Carolina FCS Teachers

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Newsletters to inform students about family and consumer sciences (FCS) education and teaching were developed by a teacher educator at a Southern regional university. The newsletters provided general information about the university and department, classes FCS majors would complete, and future job prospects. The newsletters also featured some of the current students and recent graduates who were new teachers. Newsletters were distributed to high school FCS teachers and students to provide information about the FCS education major. The newsletters were well received by teachers as evidenced by their positive feedback.

The family and consumer sciences (FCS) teacher shortage has been clearly documented, both in North Carolina and across the country (AAFFCS, 1999; Bartley & Sneed, 2004; Bull, Uerz, & Yoakum, 2000; Lee, 1998; Miller & Meszaros, 1996; Mimbs, 2000; Pickard, 2005; Tripp, 2006; Werhan & Way, 2006). Ironically, high school FCS enrollments in North Carolina continue to increase, and this increased enrollment has created a demand for even more FCS teachers (J. Meeks, North Carolina Department of Public Instruction, personal communication, September 10, 2010). Unfortunately, the numbers of students who major in FCS education and plan to teach has declined in recent years (Bartley & Sneed, 2004; Scruggs, Leslie, Scott, & Weber, 2000). In North Carolina, only about 20-30 FCS education majors graduate annually (J. Meeks, North Carolina Department of Public Instruction, personal communication, September 10, 2010)--numbers which will never provide the number predicted to be needed. Some of the current vacancies are being filled by substitute teachers or lateral entry teachers. Sometimes these arrangements work out satisfactorily, but more often than not, these educators leave the classroom as they are unprepared for the challenges of teaching. The result may be that some secondary FCS programs in North Carolina will be closed if qualified FCS teachers are not located (J. Meeks, North Carolina Department of Public Instruction, personal communication, September 10, 2010).

Meeting the FCS teacher shortage is critical because middle school and high school FCS programs provide some of the earliest and best opportunities for students to learn about the importance of families, child development and parenting education, and establishing healthy lifestyles. Because the current shortage of FCS teachers threatens the future of secondary FCS programs, there is a definite need to study this critical problem and recruit students into this area. Previous studies conducted by this author have indicated that young people are generally not motivated toward teaching family and consumer sciences for a number of reasons (Lee, 1998; Lee, 1999). Surprisingly, pay is not usually one of these; instead students generally report that classroom discipline problems deter them most from considering a career in family and consumer sciences teaching. In addition, some perceive that teaching family and consumer sciences involves teaching only subjects such as cooking and sewing. While this appeals to a few, it deters many who share that they want a more challenging career. Also, most high school

students are not aware of the current shortage of secondary family and consumer sciences teachers, and therefore, the excellent employment opportunities (Lee, 1999).

In addition to current and accurate information, a crucial factor in recruiting students is recognizing their need for belonging (McGlynn, 2003). A welcoming approach and cultivation of a sense of community are extremely important when inviting students to consider majoring in family and consumer sciences education. In a past effort, recruitment brochures were developed to utilize at large gatherings such as career fairs or college family day. These brochures effectively informed large groups of students about an FCS education major and FCS teaching. However, a more personal and welcoming tool is needed for individual recruitment efforts.

Considering the ongoing FCS teacher shortage, it is clear that we need to recruit interested young people to consider an FCS teaching career. We need to provide them with accurate, relevant information about family and consumer sciences education, as well as appeal to their need for belonging and desire for community. One effective, versatile, and cost-effective method of providing such information in this way is through a series of newsletters (Shackelford & Griffis, 2006; Shepherd & Roker, 2005). These can be more personal than brochures and can hopefully lead to further contacts and communication.

The purpose of this project was to develop and distribute a series of newsletters to inform targeted high school students of the benefits of majoring in family and consumer sciences education. Hopefully these students might ultimately become family and consumer sciences teachers. Specific objectives were to:

- Develop a spring and fall newsletter for high school students who were possibly interested in becoming family and consumer sciences teachers. The newsletters would inform students about the family and consumer sciences education major, as well as the career of family and consumer sciences teaching. They would also contain appropriate, helpful, and interesting information about the department, university, and college life in general.
- Send the newsletters to selected family and consumer sciences teachers in the western half of the state to distribute to students who might be interested in becoming family and consumer sciences teachers.
- If possible, secure feedback and contact information which would enable additional recruitment efforts to be employed (i.e., correspondence with students, visit to schools, etc).

Following a review of selected literature related to effective development and use of newsletters (Jensen, 2007; Mathieu, 2007; Meharg, 2009; Shackelford & Griffis, 2006; Shepherd & Roker, 2005; Stansfield, 2007), two newsletters targeting high school students were planned. A fall newsletter was sent to schools in October while a spring newsletter was mailed in March. The purpose of both was to inform students about FCS education as a major at Appalachian State University and FCS teaching as a career. The fall newsletter provided general information about Appalachian State University, followed by information about the Department of Family and Consumer Sciences. It also included information on the kinds of classes FCS classes students would complete, information related to job prospects, and featured some of the current students and recent graduates. The spring newsletter offered further information about classes in the major, as well as extra-curricular and leadership opportunities. It also contained pictures and information about current students in the program. Both newsletters were funded by the

Katherine B. Lyons Family and Consumer Sciences Endowment. They were developed using the Microsoft Publisher software and printed through the Appalachian State University Technology Department's graphic arts and imaging program at a cost of .75 per copy.

A packet containing a cover letter and five newsletters was sent to FCS departments in 85 schools in the northwest and western regions of the state. The cover letter informed FCS teachers about the newsletters and requested that they distribute them to students who might be interested in becoming FCS teachers, specifically high school juniors and seniors who were planning to attend college and perhaps major in FCS education. Teachers were also requested to send students' contact information to the researcher if possible; however, only a few names were provided to the researcher.

The feedback from secondary teachers and students has been very positive. At least two incoming freshmen students reviewed the newsletters last year in one of their FCS classes and initiated personal communication with the FCS teacher educator at Appalachian State University. Those two individuals are now in the FCS Education program at Appalachian State University and are preparing to become FCS teachers in North Carolina. In other cases, teachers wrote to say they had posted the newsletters in their classrooms and made announcements about them to their students. Further results from the newsletters will be difficult to assess, but hopefully they have initiated interest and inquiry into family and consumer teaching. On a personal note, the enrollment of students majoring in FCS Education at Appalachian State University has doubled in the past year. While this certainly cannot be attributed solely to these newsletters, this project could indeed have contributed to the ongoing efforts to promote FCS teaching as a desirable career with ample opportunities for employment.

The current newsletters and process have been replicated by other teacher educators to recruit potential students to FCS teaching. The process of seeking feedback from the teachers and students will hopefully prompt increased dialogue among FCS teacher educators and FCS secondary teachers, as well as initiate further appropriate relationships with potential majors.

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