

**Family and Consumer Sciences Education Students’
Assessment of their Understanding of the North Carolina
FCS Programs of Study and FCCLA Organization:
Update after the COVID-19 Pandemic**

Cheryl L. Lee

Appalachian State University

After taking the Introduction to Family and Consumer Sciences (FCS) Education course at Appalachian State University, undergraduate students completed a self-assessment regarding their knowledge, awareness, and abilities related to the North Carolina FCS secondary programs of study and the student organization, Family, Career and Community Leaders of America (FCCLA). Students rated themselves as being most knowledgeable about the middle school, foundational, and beginning specialized FCS courses, while feeling less prepared to teach the upper-level career-based courses. Regarding FCCLA, students reported being more knowledgeable about FCCLA resources and capable of developing an effective program of work for their chapters. Students were least confident in their knowledge and understanding of the FCCLA Students Taking Action with Recognition (STAR) events and the national programs. This study is an update of a similar one completed in 2019 just before the COVID-19 pandemic.

Keywords: Student assessments; family and consumer sciences curriculum; college teaching; Family, Career and Community Leaders of America

Introduction

The purpose of this study was to determine family and consumer sciences (FCS) education students’ assessment of their understanding of the North Carolina FCS secondary programs of study and the Family, Career and Community Leaders of America (FCCLA) student organization after completing an upper-level course, *Introduction to Family and Consumer Sciences Education*. This study is a follow-up study to one first completed in 2019 just before the COVID-19 pandemic. The study’s main limitation was its small number of participants, although additional data collection was planned. Since the 2019 study, several changes related primarily to course delivery have occurred. This document serves as a five-year update of the original study and frames the discussion from the early part of the post-pandemic era.

Background

Past studies have found high satisfaction among FCS teachers, (Bartley & Sneed, 2004; Godbey, & Johnson, 2011; Lee, 2013; Mimbs, 2000; Mimbs, 2002; Tripp, 2006; Tripp & Hollarn, 2016; White & Tripp, 2009), and more recent studies support this as well (Arnett-Hartwick, 2020; Moen et al., 2023; Pulay & Tripp, 2022). While this is encouraging to FCS teacher candidates, studies also reveal that FCS teachers face unique challenges (Arnett, 2012; Arnett-Hartwick, 2020; Davis, 2010; Lee, 2013). Acquiring and maintaining a sound understanding of the various high school FCS courses of study, as well as developing the ability to effectively facilitate the FCCLA student organization, are two such challenges for FCS education pre-professionals.

Considering the various FCS career pathways, it is challenging for FCS teacher candidates to develop a comprehensive understanding of all the high school FCS courses of study. In their study, Dainty et al. (2011) found that FCS teachers felt their educational preparation in curriculum development might have been more effective. Likewise, Arnett (2012), after surveying beginning teachers, noted the challenge of being expected to teach in all FCS areas, sometimes with insufficient content knowledge or experience. Using the Delphi method, Davis (2010) sought to determine FCS content and experiences that were priorities for FCS teacher candidates. An understanding of content in the areas of consumer economics, resource management, family and human development, foods and nutrition, apparel and textiles, housing and interior design, child development and parenting, as well as knowledge of curriculum development and instructional strategies were among priorities identified by Davis (2010).

Developing the ability to effectively advise a high school FCCLA student organization is another priority for FCS education pre-professionals (Davis, 2010). However, several FCS teachers do not facilitate FCCLA chapters because they find the organization complicated and confusing, and they do not know how to implement a chapter (Alexander et al., 2015). Similarly, Dainty et al. (2011) reported that FCS teachers felt they were not well-prepared to advise an FCCLA chapter. In the author's opinion, FCCLA provides incredible leadership opportunities for students and should be an integral part of every high school FCS education program.

Developing an understanding of both the FCS areas of studies and FCCLA is an expectation for students in an upper-level FCS course at Appalachian State University, *Introduction to FCS Education*. The purpose of this course is to provide students with an introduction to the North Carolina programs of study in secondary FCS, as well as the student organization, FCCLA. This three-hour course includes the following: (1) a review of the history and organizational structure of career technical education; (2) a survey of the North Carolina FCS secondary programs of study; and (3) a study of effective procedures for organizing and advising an FCCLA chapter.

In the 2019 study conducted prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, most FCS Education majors who took this course were traditional-aged, residential students. In addition to attending face-to-face classes, they completed guided observations at the secondary level to develop awareness of the various roles played by the FCS teacher, as well as to distinguish among the various courses. They also participated as judges in the FCCLA *Students Taking Action with Recognition* (STAR) events at the state meeting. However, those field experiences were deleted during the pandemic and have not been reinstated, in part because the demographics of current majors has changed. Recently, more FCS Education majors are non-traditional in age, many with families and employed full-time. To meet enrollment challenges and to better serve this

new population, the FCS Education major, including this course, has moved to an online format and now attracts majors across the state.

Students in the 2019 study rated themselves as being most knowledgeable about the middle school, foundational, and beginning specialized FCS courses, while feeling less prepared to teach the upper-level career-based courses. Regarding FCCLA, students reported being more knowledgeable about FCCLA resources and promotion of FCCLA to the community; in addition, they felt capable of developing an effective program of work for their chapters. While students felt they had a sound understanding of FCCLA STAR events, they did not feel the same about their understanding of the FCCLA national programs. With the passage of five years, the COVID-19 pandemic, and the course being offered in an asynchronous online format, will current students, many of whom are distance students, identify strengths and weaknesses like those in the earlier study? The purpose of this study was to obtain current data on students' self-assessment of their knowledge, awareness, and abilities related to the secondary FCS programs of study and FCCLA.

Methodology

At the present time, *Introduction to Family and Consumer Sciences Education* is a three-hour asynchronous online course at Appalachian State University. As in the previous study, students continue to review the secondary FCS areas of study and FCCLA resources; develop a curriculum file for the various program areas; and complete weekly applications and summative exams. The asynchronous online class presents the course in weekly modules, each addressing a different concept. Each module typically contains the following:

- Instructor notes/videos introducing the module/topic and explaining the learning activities
- PowerPoints/recorded lectures related to the topic
- Additional relevant resources
- Discussion forum in which students respond to an issue-based prompt, as well as to each other
- Weekly applications in which students apply and reflect on relevant course concepts

At the beginning of the semester, students accessed a course syllabus which included the course description, course objectives, class assignments, and a schedule listing the various topics to be addressed each week. Throughout the semester, students carried out the class activities and assignments that were required.

After gaining an overview of the history and organization of career technical education, students began their study of the North Carolina FCS areas of study for secondary students. Students were allowed to join the state's FCS professional learning center to access available FCS curriculum guides. They completed guided reviews of the middle school, foundational, and entry level specialized courses: Exploring FCS; Principles of Family and Human Services; Food and Nutrition 1; Child Development; Apparel & Textile Production 1; and Interior Design Fundamentals. In addition, as the entry level specialized courses were addressed, further information regarding upper-level courses in that area was also provided. For example, as Food and Nutrition 1 was reviewed, information regarding Food & Nutrition 2 and Food Science & Technology was also presented to increase students' awareness of additional courses in that career pathway.

Along with the guided reviews, students developed an electronic resource file for each of the basic courses they reviewed. The purpose of this assignment was to help the students clarify the content for each of the introductory and specialized FCS courses by selecting appropriate teaching resources for those courses. The resource file could then be utilized during the student teaching experience.

The second part of the *Introduction to FCS Education* course focused on the FCCLA organization. Using resources from the FCCLA website, students studied FCCLA traditions, organization, membership, funding, adviser's role, student leadership, communication, public relations, and FCCLA national programs and STAR events. Each week, students completed an application related to the course content for that module/topic. For example, the following application was completed for the FCCLA STAR events module:

Assume that as a family and consumer sciences teacher you teach the following courses: Food & Nutrition I and Child Development. You want to encourage your students to participate in a related STAR event. Develop a PowerPoint presentation (for your students) that provides an overview of these 2 events: Nutrition and Wellness and Focus on Children. Include in your presentation:

- *an overview of the event*
- *a summary of procedures*
- *evaluation of the event*
- *examples of appropriate ideas/projects for the event*

Also include in your presentation the above information about one additional event of your choice that you want to share with your students.

At the end of the semester, students completed a self-evaluation of their awareness, knowledge, and abilities regarding secondary FCS programs of study and the FCCLA student organization. Ten FCS education students completed the self-evaluation instrument. The survey asked students to evaluate their awareness, knowledge, and competence related to the secondary FCS program of studies and FCCLA. Students were asked to rate themselves using a 3-point Likert-type scale (3 = "I have definite readiness or awareness in this area;" 2 = "I have some readiness or awareness;" and 1 = "I am still weak and uncomfortable in this area").

In addition to the self-evaluation, students also evaluated the online *Introduction to FCS Education* course by rating the helpfulness of specific course elements using a 4-point scale, (4=very helpful; 3=helpful; 2=somewhat helpful; and 1=not helpful).

Results

Descriptive statistics were utilized to determine the mean scores of students' responses. Regarding their awareness/knowledge of the secondary FCS programs of study, students were most confident in their understanding of the following courses: (1) middle school Exploring FCS (mean = 2.80); (2) the specialized courses (Food and Nutrition 1, Child Development, Interior Design Fundamentals, and Apparel & Textile Production 1) (mean = 2.53); and Principles of Family and Human Services (comprehensive course for early high school students) (mean = 2.50). Students were less confident in their understanding of the history, organization, and status of career technical education in general (mean = 2.30). They were least certain regarding their

knowledge of the career type courses (Early Childhood Education, Culinary Arts, etc.) (mean = 2.25).

Regarding their understanding of FCCLA, students reported being most knowledgeable about the resources available to advisers (mean = 2.80), as well as feeling confident in their ability to develop an effective program of work for their chapters (mean = 2.70). Students also reported feeling capable of promoting FCCLA to students and the community (mean = 2.60) and facilitating the development of student leadership skills (mean = 2.60). Students reported being somewhat clear regarding their understanding of the overall organization of FCCLA at the district, state, and national levels (mean = 2.30). They were less confident in their knowledge of the facts, history, and traditions of FCCLA (mean = 2.20). Students were least confident in their knowledge and understanding of the FCCLA STAR events (mean = 2.10) and the national programs (mean = 1.90).

Students also evaluated the *Introduction to FCS Education* class by rating the helpfulness of specific course elements. On a 4-point scale, (4=very helpful; 3=helpful; 2=somewhat helpful; and 1=not helpful), all students reported the following as very helpful:

- arrangement of the online course in weekly modules (average score = 4.00)
- weekly instructor notes and videos introducing and explaining the module (4.00)
- consistent emails from instructor over the semester (4.00)

Other highly rated elements of the online *Introduction to FCS* course were the following:

- PowerPoints with recorded lectures (3.67)
- Weekly application assignments (3.67)
- FCS Curriculum File project (3.67)

The weekly discussion forums in which students responded to an issue-based prompt and to each other and the essay exams were rated lowest (both 3.00), although still viewed as helpful.

Discussion and Conclusions

As noted earlier, previous studies have found high job satisfaction among FCS teachers. Possessing a sound knowledge of the FCS areas of study and FCCLA should also position current FCS teacher candidates for similar career satisfaction and success.

After completing the *Introduction to FCS Education* course at Appalachian State University, students reported that they were most knowledgeable about the middle school, foundational, and beginning specialized FCS courses, while feeling less prepared to teach the upper-level career-based courses. Findings from this study mirror the findings from the 2019 study as once again, students reported being more knowledgeable regarding the courses that beginning teachers are more likely to teach in their first positions. This aligns with the instructional emphasis in the *Introduction to FCS Education* course. Students appeared to recognize the value of reviewing the FCS curriculum guides as indicated by some of their open-ended comments:

Overall, I feel pretty good about teaching family and consumer sciences after reviewing all the curriculum guides! There are of course still things that I need to work on and learn, although I feel confident that my improvement plans will help with that. I have increased awareness of the North Carolina programs of study

from taking this class!”

At the beginning of the course, I remember thinking how uncomfortable I would feel teaching the middle school course. I can now say, after a semester of learning and studying, that I would feel much more comfortable teaching the Exploring FCS class, but I still have so much more to learn.

At this time, I would not feel comfortable teaching any advanced course. However, after reviewing the curriculum guides, I do have some awareness of the content and learning experiences of those more advanced level courses.

I feel very capable and ready for whatever my future teaching career has in store for me. While I am very nervous, I am also very excited. I feel as though this class has prepared me for teaching the family[and] consumer sciences classes.

Going into this class I had no knowledge of family and consumer sciences, except for the basics. I have thoroughly enjoyed this course and learning about the FCS classes I never experienced in high school. I now have a much better understanding of the FCS classes I might teach as an FCS teacher.

Concerning their understanding of FCCLA, some students reported having little awareness of the organization before taking the *Introduction to FCS Education* class, in part because there had been no active FCCLA chapter at their high schools. However, as in the 2019 study, most reported that they felt confident regarding their ability to locate relevant FCCLA resources that would assist them in effectively advising a chapter.

I feel OK about advising an FCCLA chapter, although I still have a lot to learn. But after taking this class, I know where to locate all these resources and find out the information I may have questions about.

I feel very strongly that I am aware of the resources available to FCCLA advisers. I can readily locate the new chapter and new advisor handbooks. I've never been involved in FCCLA as I would like for my future students to be. I plan to improve on this by picking a student teaching placement that has a strong FCCLA chapter so that I can learn from that FCS teacher/FCCLA adviser.

In the 2019 study, it appeared that students' direct involvement with the STAR events at the state meeting enhanced their understanding of those events. However, with the elimination of that field experience, students in the present study appeared to be less knowledgeable regarding those and less confident in facilitating students' participation in the competitive events. Adding that field experience back to the course seems like a simple solution. However, as previously mentioned, many of the current majors are non-traditional distance students with families and full-time jobs, making that decision more complicated.

Overall, both the 2019 and current pre-professionals were less confident in their understanding of the FCCLA national programs and the overall organization of FCCLA

at the district, state, and national levels. However, even in most of the lower-rated areas, students from both studies had some readiness or awareness.

Additional comments from current students revealed their desire for opportunities to shadow FCS teachers to enhance their understanding of the various FCS courses, as well as to gain insights related to being an FCCLA adviser. Students also suggested that field experiences at a middle school would enable them to determine if that setting might be a potential fit for them. Students desired more information on the specifics of helping their future students prepare for an FCCLA STAR event, and they expressed the need to learn more about FCCLA national programs. Finally, students desired more information on using social media to promote FCCLA.

Students' evaluation of the specific elements of the *Introduction to FCS Education* class provided helpful feedback for future course revisions. Given the importance of clear communication and interaction, the inclusion of a welcoming message and video continue to be included at the beginning of the course. In addition, along with the instructor notes for each module, a short video by the instructor has been added to provide a more personal introduction to each module/chapter. As the online class continues to be comprised of several non-traditional students with families and/or full-time jobs, the course maintains its asynchronous format; however, more opportunities for optional online meetings are offered. In addition, each module continues to offer forum discussion to enable students to respond to relevant issues and each other. Instructor emails are sent consistently to check in with students and provide clarification when questions arise. Hopefully these revisions will help "personalize" the course and its concepts for students, as well as build a more effective online learning community.

Limitations

Like the 2019 study, this study's main limitation was its small number of participants. In addition, the changing student demographics limited comparisons between the students in the 2019 study and the current study. However, additional data will continue to be collected. In the meantime, these findings and students' comments will be considered as revisions to the online course continue to be made.

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About the Author

Cheryl L. Lee is a professor in the Department of Media, Career Studies, and Leadership Development at Appalachian State University in Boone, North Carolina.

Citation

Lee, C.L. (2024). Family and consumer sciences education students' assessment of their understanding of the North Carolina FCS programs of study and FCCLA organization: update after the COVID-19 Pandemic. *Journal of Family and Consumer Sciences Education 41(1)*, 62-70.