A History of the Department of Human Sciences

The Department of Human Sciences at North Carolina Central University (NCCU) began in 1920 when a two year Domestic Science course of study focusing on dressmaking, was taught to female students. Domestic Science, as the profession was called in the earlier 20th Century was a small but integral program of the early National Training School and Durham State Normal School. Madeline Thompson was the first student to complete the domestic arts program, before the program transitioned into a four-year degree program.

The degree program in Home Economics evolved from a vocational Home Economics program at Winston Salem State Teacher’s College and was established at the then North Carolina College for Negros in 1939. For many years, NCCU housed the only program approved for the preparation of vocational home economics teachers at a Historically Black institution. The first students to complete the Bachelor of Science in Home Economics in 1939 were Sara Elizabeth Allen, Nancy Dianna Lewis, Doris Jay Stephens, and Marietta Elizabeth Wagner.

Diana Savage Dent was charged with leading the new Home Economics department and served as its chair from 1938 to 1960. Under her leadership the Home Economics program experienced rapid growth, moving from three classrooms in the Hoey Administration Building to its current home in the Dent Building in 1954. Ms. Dent was a charter member of the North Carolina Association of Home Economics and authored several texts concerning the profession.

In 1940 the Child Development Lab School opened under the name of the Practice Cottage and Nursery School. The child development center afforded students the opportunity to gain field experience on campus while offering NCCU and its surrounding community exceptional day care practices. Previously housed in several buildings on campus, the center was permanently relocated to the Dent Annex in 1973.

The department maintained a strong leadership base, after Ms. Dent retired in 1960. Lucy S. James, Marie C. Moffitt, and Josie A. Pittman comprised an interim committee that ran the department for the next school term. Marie C. Moffitt served as acting chairperson from 1961-1962, followed by Gwendolyn A. Newkirk, chairperson from 1962-1969. Newkirk was also the first black President of the American Home Economics Association, beginning her term in 1975. Imogene M. Ford served as acting chairperson from 1964 to 1965. Jean O. Cooper succeeded Gwendolyn Newkirk and served as chairperson from 1969 until 1974. In 1974, Gwendolyn T. Paschall was named acting chair and served until 1977. Human Sciences, presents a yearly lecture series in her honor. Dr. Beverly A. Bryant chaired the department from 1977 to 1998. Currently, Dr. Debra O. Parker, a former graduate, has served as departmental chairperson since July 1998.

Towards the end of the 20th Century, Human Sciences experienced a wealth of change. The Didactic Program in Dietetics (DPD) became accredited by the American Dietetic Association in 1982, the Child Development Associate (CDA) Credential Training Program was established in 1992, and the Dietetic Internship Program (DIP) gained accreditation in 1995. The Birth through Kindergarten degree program was established in 1996 and the Bachelor of Science degree in Hospitality and Tourism Administration in 1997. The name of the profession was officially changed from Home Economics to Human Sciences on October 23, 1995 as a way to encompass all that the field has to offer. On October 27, 1995, students, faculty, administrators, parents, alumni, and friends of the University celebrated this momentous occasion. Changing the name allowed the Human Sciences profession to empower individuals and to strengthen families and communities.

Today, the Department of Human Sciences offers competitive programs of study leading to Bachelor of Science degrees in Family and Consumer Sciences, Birth Through Kindergarten Teacher Education (B-K), and Family and Consumer Sciences Education. The Family and Consumer Sciences degree offers specializations in Child Development and Family Relations, Foods and Nutrition, and Textiles and Apparel Design. The graduate curriculum in Family and Consumer Sciences leads to a Master of Science degree in Family and Consumer Sciences. There are two masters programs, each requiring 36 semesters hours including thesis. The first plan leads to state licensure at the graduate level. Persons not pursuing state licensure follow the second plan and concentrate in one of three areas: Textile and Apparel, Foods and Nutrition, or Human Development and Family Studies.

The Department of Human Sciences remains one of the larger departments at North Carolina Central University, educating over 500 majors through face-to-face and distance education courses. Each year, all first year and transfer students participate in the Human Sciences’ Dimensions of Learning course, acclimating students to the college environment. The Department maintains accreditations with the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC); Commission on Accreditation for Dietetics Education (CADE); the North Carolina Department of Public Instruction (NCDPI); the National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education (NCATE). The Child Development Laboratory School is also accredited with Five Stars on the Five Star Rated Licensure Scale implemented by the state of North Carolina.
Student organizations include the Kappa Omicron Nu (KONu) Honor Society, the American Association of Family and Consumer Sciences (AAFCS), Fashion Inc, and the Birth-Kindergarten, Child Development and Family Relations, and Foods and Nutrition Student Groups. Students participate in professional organizations related to program areas, and attend monthly area meetings.

The Department of Human Sciences at North Carolina Central University intends to continue on its trailblazing past to empower individuals, strengthen families and enable communities. This is evident in the departmental motto which states, “Together we can achieve the extraordinary!”

Prepared by Debra J. Parker, Ph.D.
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