

Strengthening the Human Services Curriculum in Family Science to Increase Intercultural Competency Skills and Build Career Opportunities

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Abstract

The academic program in the Department of Family, Youth and Community Sciences (FYCS) provides a broad-based education for careers addressing problems and risks in the lives of children, youth, and families through evidence-based interventions offered by government agencies, nonprofit organizations, and private companies.

In this presentation, we describe and discuss the effectiveness of the curriculum review process and the outcomes.

- The first goal is to describe the deliberative process that this department used to evaluate the strengths and gaps in its curriculum based on multiple stakeholders-- alumni, community experts, and faculty--and the outcomes of this process.
- A second goal is to offer recommendations for other departments undertaking such a process.
- A third goal is to begin a discussion on what other departments and faculty are doing in this area and solicit feedback.

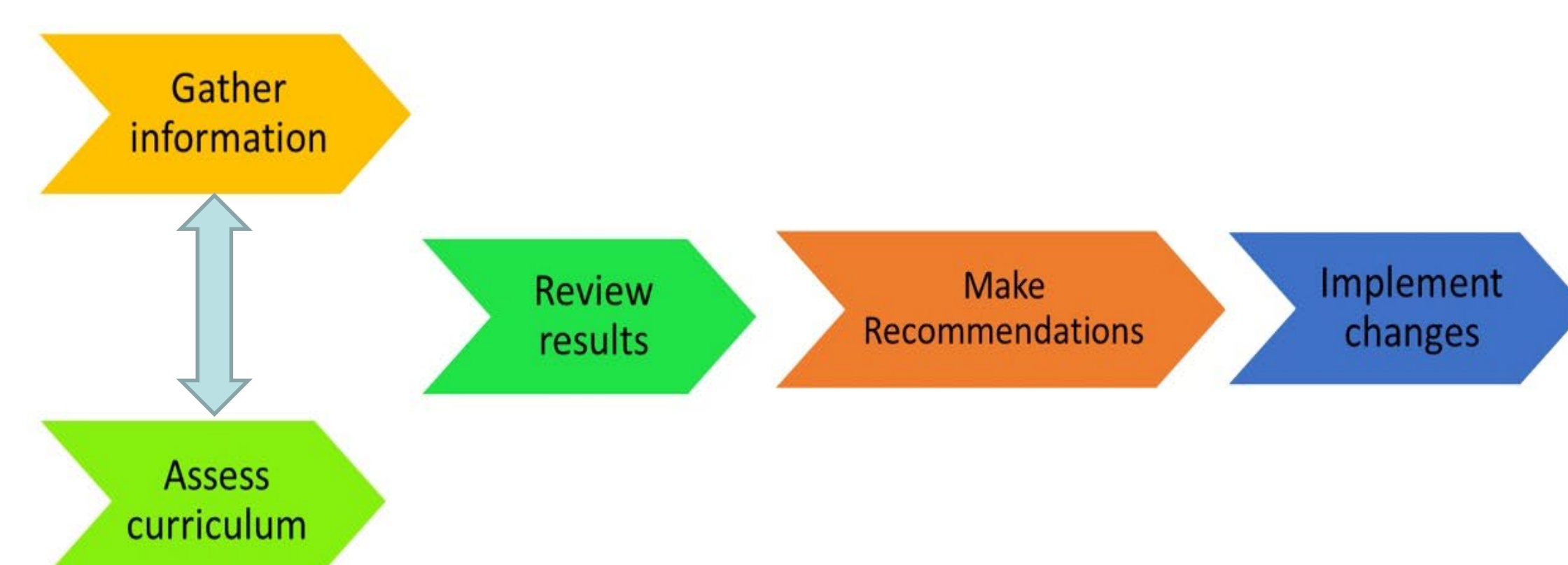
Background

Many family science graduates from this FYCS program (and others like it around the U.S.) work directly with families, providing human services to address complex issues such as child abuse and neglect, poverty, domestic violence, and mental illness.

Human services professionals must have knowledge of human development and behavior across the lifespan, an understanding of risk and protective factors, an array of intervention skills for working effectively with diverse clientele in difficult and traumatic situations, a systems perspective on families and communities, knowledge of community resources and collaboration skills, and other professional skills.

Our goal in undertaking the review was to systematically gather data from stakeholders that could provide an objective basis for making decisions about changes in the curriculum.

Figure 1. Steps in the FYCS Human Services curriculum review process



Methods

The two purposes of these data collection efforts were:

1. To better understand the curriculum in relation to human services
2. To determine gaps between the curriculum content and (a) national standards for human services education, (b) human services community experts including employers input about expected proficiencies in new hires, and (c) alumni input about employment following graduation.

Gather Information

- The guiding question for this step of the process was, “What do FYCS graduates need to know to be prepared for and do well in employment in the field of human services?”
 - Review of the literature and national standards
 - A survey of alumni who had graduated in 2010-2016.
 - Community expert discussions
 - Faculty survey

Faculty, Community Experts, and/or Alumni - Gaps

Administrative: Effective delivery of direct services to clients or groups (faculty survey)

- Managing organizations through leadership and strategy
- Supervision and human resource management
- Planning/evaluating programs, services, and operational functions
- Developing budgets and monitoring expenditures
- Grant and contract negotiation
- Legal and regulatory issues and risk management
- Managing professional development of staff
- Recruiting and managing volunteers
- Constituency building, networking and other advocacy

Client-related values and attitudes: Principles of professional practice in working with clients (faculty survey, community experts, and alumni survey)

- Least intrusive intervention/least restrictive environment
- Client self-determination
- Confidentiality of information
- The worth and uniqueness of individuals
- Belief in change
- Interdisciplinary team approaches to problem solving
- Appropriate professional boundaries
- Integration of ethical standards
- Rights and Responsibilities of clients and families
- Professional/ethical behavior with peers

Faculty, Community Experts, and/or Alumni - Gaps

Intervention and direct services: Functioning as change agents in direct services and interventions with clients and client groups (faculty survey, community experts, alumni survey)

- Strategies to achieve maximum autonomy and functioning
- Influence of social class, economic disparities, etc.
- Conditions that influence individual and family well-being
- Direct services and interventions for specific clients
- Investigation of client health
- Group facilitating and counseling
- Location and use of appropriate resources
- Education and early intervention prevention
- Use of consultation
- Intercultural communication
- Identifying participant strengths/supporting development of coping
- Decision making practices
- Case Management
- Intake interviewing
- Individual Counseling
- Trauma
- Trauma informed care
- ACE's
- Trauma on child brain development

Information management: Appropriate integration and use of information such as client data, statistical information, and record keeping. Information management skills include obtaining, organizing, analyzing, evaluating and disseminating information. (community experts and faculty survey).

- Recording, organizing, and assessing information
- Compiling, synthesizing, categorizing information
- Disseminating routine and critical information
- Client confidentiality and data
- Using Technology
- Elementary community needs assessment
- Basic program evaluation
- Utilizing research findings and other information
- Spreadsheets and databases
- Library/Internet research and analysis skills

Outcomes Overview

- Revised the practicum course to include midterm and final evaluations for the site supervisor to reflect on student's performance and professional preparedness and practicum experience survey for students to reflect on their overall experience.
- New initiatives in trauma informed care including an Extension area focused on trauma informed care and an undergraduate course on children, trauma, and resiliency.
- Mental Health First Aid training offered to students, faculty, and staff.

Implications and Recommendations

The results across all three sources of information indicate that graduates need a stronger knowledge base along with practice experience for working with clients when they enter the workforce.

We propose that this additional background can be acquired through well-structured service-learning experiences, courses that emphasize working with clients, and other skills development opportunities.

Recommendations

1. Continue to emphasize the importance of practicum for direct services experience. Consider ways to connect specifically with human services agencies/organizations to ensure direct client contact as much as possible.
2. Continue to offer the new course on trauma and trauma-informed care and encourage student enrollment through marketing.
3. Develop a new course focusing on practice skills for generalist human services settings.
4. Plan the Human Services course to avoid overlap with the practice course and enhance the human services course for less addressed aspects of human services content identified by the curriculum survey.
5. Review and update the list of courses offered in other departments that may contribute to direct services/practice skills development and include these in the list of courses for the human services specialization.
6. Continue to offer Mental Health First Aid training to undergraduate majors.
7. Consider the CAST curriculum for the future, possibly as a long-term undertaking involving an assessment of what existing and new courses might be needed in FYCS and on campus and understanding the implications for the existing curriculum.
8. Encourage human services students to minor in nonprofit organizations in FYCS.
9. Discuss as a department how courses may already address information management consider and how content could be covered in relation to human services.