

Home Economics Can Lead To Bright Career

By Milton Jordan
Remember when studying home economics meant you learned to cook, do a little sewing and few other things, all designed to make you a better wife and mother? Well, times have changed.

Today, NCCU's Home Economics Department still teaches some cooking and sewing, but they've added a lot more. The goal now is to turn out women, and even a few men, who can successfully handle a broad range of careers.

There were about 200 students in the department this past school year. About 15% of them were men.

Depending upon one's concentration, a home economics degree from Central can lead to a career in dietetics, food service management, county extension services, consumer education, retailing and fashion design, fashion buying, fashion illustration, textile research and development, as well as consumer services for textile products.

But getting from the classroom to one of these careers is no easy job. "One of the first things that a person majoring in the textiles and clothing program here should understand is that they will have to leave Durham to build a career," said Ms. Duanne Hoffer, who teaches in the department. "For many of our students, leaving home is a major obstacle. But realistically, they're not going to find jobs in their career areas unless they go where the industry is — New York and Atlanta — and sell themselves effectively."

But all this is a lot easier said than done, even when a student is willing to leave home after graduation to pursue a career, and many of Central's home economics majors are reluctant to leave home. "Some of our students get jobs with county extension agencies," explained Mrs. Viola Leake, who teaches in the department. "These are usually people who are not willing to venture too far afield."

For those home ec grads who just won't leave home no matter

what, they sometimes find jobs as service managers with local stores, according to the professors. But they're missing the real money in the "home ec" industry, especially in fashion design.

"It's a lot of hard work, and calls for a lot of sacrifice," said Mrs. Leake, who worked in the fashion design industry in several major cities before coming to Central. "The real secret to making it in design is to be able to sell yourself and your ability to design clothes for the market. A lot of new designers are so creative that they can't make any money because they can't design marketable fashions."

According to the teachers, there are a lot of steps between the degree in home

economics, with a concentration in fashion design, and big money that can be made in the industry.

First, they say, success in this highly competitive field requires a special type person.

"There is no safe and easy way to success," Ms. Hoffer said, "and making it requires talent, personality, aggressiveness and a willingness to take chances."

The chances begin with furthering one's education.

Ms. Regina Walden, a junior in Central's home economics department, concentrating in fashion design, explains: "What I intend to do after I graduate is attend one of the top fashion design schools in New York for two years, get some experience and build my

portfolio." A portfolio is a must, according to the professors, because people fresh out of school must be able to show what they can do if they hope to get their foot in the door of the industry.

A lot of this practical side of fashion design begins while the students are still at Central because each year the design majors, and several others produce a department fashion show, featuring outfits designed and tailored by students. Students also model the outfits.

"The idea for the show," Ms. Hoffer said, "is to give the students here an opportunity to showcase their talents and skills."

And so, in the Central home economics program, one gets the theory, the foundation

upon which to build a solid career. One also gets some practical experience, albeit limited. All that is remaining is for each student to leave Central with a plan for success.

Dr. Yvonne G. Bryant who teaches textile sciences in the department explains:

"You have to be willing to sacrifice a lot of your social and personal needs to your career development," she said. "You should be careful not to be encumbered with too many responsibilities early in your career, such as marriage or even buying a house. You must be prepared to travel light, and be where the action is, even if that means pulling up and taking another position somewhere far away from where you are now."



GETTING READY FOR THE FASHION SHOW—Ms. Duanne Hoffer (with the pencil in her hand) and several students in the NCCU Home Economics Department get ready for their annual fashion show recently. The fashion show

allows students to showcase their skills in fashion design, tailoring and other skills taught in Central's Home Economics program. Ms. Hoffer is an instructor in the department. Photo by Silas Mayfield

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