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## Professional Organizing: FCS Preparation Ideal for Emerging Career Field

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*The profession of organizing may be a career choice for those with a degree in family and consumer sciences (FCS). This article describes how the discipline of FCS has relevancy and potential for the professional organizer career path. An undergraduate FCS student who was interested in professional organizing as a career collaborated with an FCS faculty/mentor to research this emerging profession and used the skills of a professional organizer to assist with the move of a university FCS department.*

Family and consumer sciences (FCS) is an integrative discipline that has been a springboard for careers not typically viewed as in the field. For those who wish to work as a professional organizer, for example, the FCS profession may be a logical choice of majors. The American Association of Family & Consumer Sciences' (AAFCS) career brochure states that one of the careers resulting from education in FCS is system analyst, which

could be another name for a professional organizer (AAFCS, 2000). According to the National Association of Professional Organizers (NAPO):

A Professional Organizer enhances the lives of clients by designing systems and processes using organizing principles and through transferring organizing skills. A Professional Organizer also educates the public on organizing solutions and the resulting benefits. Professional organizers help individuals and businesses take control of their surroundings, their time, their paper, and their systems for life.

Professional organizing is an emerging profession and is considered to be in its infancy. Its professional association, NAPO, was formed in 1985; they have established a code of ethics and announced a goal of certification for professional organizers by 2007. A study guide for the certification exam has been developed (National Association of Professional Organizers, 2005).

The skills FCS graduates learn are similar to those needed by professional organizers. FCS courses in universities typically include introduction

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to family and consumer sciences, family resource management, and classes to assist FCS student-learners in determining needs of clients in hospitals and retail settings as well as students, families, and children within a community. This is part of the requirement to become certified in FCS. For example, according to CFCS certification documents, (standard 6, Consumer and Resource Management-Application) competent FCS graduates should be able to "... analyze decision making, goal setting and resource management in multiple role situations" (AAFCS, 2004). NAPO presents a content outline that is similar to standard 6 as well as other core competencies found in many college FCS classes. The CFCS standard 6 is similar to standards III and V of the NAPA Certification Outline.

Table 1 lists the five content areas that are part of the Certification Outline for NAPO Certification. Only selected sections under the five major content areas are listed for illustrative purposes to show a parallel to FCS competencies.

It is the goal of the professional organizer to assist his or her client to better manage daily surroundings. This may include systematizing filing systems at home or business offices, and organizing garages, attics, pantries, and closets. Indeed, the mission statement of AAFCS—"to bring people together to improve the lives of individuals, families, and communities"—is reflective of NAPO goals.

A senior student majoring in FCS in a Midwestern university with a career goal of becoming a professional organizer and her academic advisor applied for a grant for a "Professional Organizing Research Project" from the university's internal grant funds reserved for undergraduate research projects. This particular FCS Department was in the process of planning a relocation to temporary space for at least 1 year while the university re-located the entire FCS Department. The grant application was accepted, thus the aspiring professional organizer/FCS senior student had an opportunity to prepare, assess,

and implement a plan for relocation of the FCS university department. The faculty and student research team consulted a working professional organizer and NAPO for information about this emerging profession. The project required that the student use all the core foundational areas for the NAPO certification exam and that she have an opportunity to network with current professional organizers. The grant money was used to pay tuition for the student/researcher to complete the not-for-credit courses offered through NAPO, earn a certificate of course completion, and learn the skills needed to carry out the planned move. Using NAPO's *Foundation of Professional Organizing*, the student used decision-making skills that were supported by her core courses in FCS. Knowledge gained by the student through the NAPO course and the core FCS courses were useful and resulted in a satisfying move to the temporary space as assessed by the satisfaction level of the FCS faculty. The competencies identified under NAPO's certification exam including *Preliminary Assessment*,

**Table 1.** Certification Outline for the National Association of Professional Organizers (NAPO, 2005)

<p><b>I. Foundation of Professional Organizing</b></p> <p>A. Understand fundamental elements and skills of organizing</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Space design and planning</li> <li>Decision-making</li> </ul> <p>B. Understand maintenance of organizational systems and routines</p> <p><b>II. Legal and Ethical Considerations</b></p> <p>A. Understand conflict of interest</p> <p><b>III. Preliminary Assessment</b></p> <p>A. Conduct the qualifying interview</p> <p>B. Evaluate the current situation</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Identify process and workflow</li> <li>Understand categorization</li> <li>Identify all individuals involved in the organizing process</li> <li>Identify each individual's readiness and commitment to the process</li> </ul> <p>C. Identify the cause(s) of the situation</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Understand participants' behavior and skills</li> <li>-Ability to communicate their needs</li> <li>-Time management skills</li> <li>-Categorization skills</li> </ul> <p><b>IV. Action Plan Development</b></p> <p>A. Identify action plan objectives</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Review assessment findings</li> </ul> <p><b>V. Action Plan Implementation and Project Management</b></p> <p>A. Review project objective(s) and goal(s)</p> <p>B., C., D.,</p> <p>E. Manage resources</p> <p>F. Manage costs</p> <p>G. Manage schedule</p>
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*Action Plan Development, and Action Plan Implementation, and Project Management* were put into action as the student was required to conduct interviews with faculty and staff (in preparation for the move), evaluate the current situation, identify action plan objectives (plan for space allocation in the temporary space), and review project objectives and goals in the assessment process (when the move to the temporary space was completed). Although the department's faculty and students were in a much reduced space, the student-planner helped the faculty use the space efficiently. Student interest in FCS during this period actually increased as indicated by the uptick in overall FCS major and minor student enrolling. Faculty in the department produced manuscripts that were accepted in peer-reviewed journals and FCS course enrollment remained at a steady level in the temporary spaces. A paper that described this project and an overview of professional organizers was written and presented by the student at the university exposition of undergraduate research projects in 2005. Upon graduation, the student included this project in her portfolio and she is now successfully employed as a professional organizer. Knowledge and skills learned through core courses in FCS and her portfolio were impressive, according to potential employers who interviewed her.

This study allowed the student to see the relevance of FCS to professional organizing and to collaborate with an FCS faculty member in carrying out a task that is parallel to those in the workplace completed by professional organizers.

FCS is a unique discipline in today's academic arena. When a student enters the FCS undergraduate program, he or she is exposed to many concepts, which are also the central foundation of a professional organizer's work. Knowledge and skills in FCS may include fashion trends, family habits, consumer issues, and interior design as well as consumer resource and management. These concepts provide organizers with the necessary information to meet the needs of clients. Students learn how to create individual plans and apply the knowledge of how the family may function, spend money, and consume goods. The organizer with an FCS background can use these skills to allow the client to reside in a fashionable, comfortable manner and to improve their environment through the process.

FCS core competencies are relevant to the practice of professional organizers. The FCS profession might consider a collaborative alliance with NAPO, which could open up additional career opportunities.

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