

Town Hall Forum – October 25, 2013  
Keeping Families Strong  
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**Summary of the situation:**

- The President of the UofM launched his Academic Structure Initiative in January 2012. His stated goal is to improve and simplify the University's academic structure, in particular, to reduce the number of 'free-standing' faculties and schools and departments. Initially, this does not present a real problem to any professional practice or to employers seeking to hire graduates with the appropriate education.
- The President put his priority in clustering of Faculties into one large Faculty of Health Sciences. This faculty would eliminate current faculties of medicine, dentistry, nursing, and pharmacy bringing these educational programs into the new faculty as 'professional' Colleges. None of these professions lose their unique identity in this structure. The schools of Dental Hygiene and Medical Rehabilitation would also join this new Faculty of Health Sciences. The School of Dental Hygiene remains as a school structured within the College of Dentistry while the school of Medical Rehabilitation is elevated to professional College status. Again, neither of these professions lose their unique identity.
- But what of Human Ecology? This Faculty finds itself in the "Structural issues and opportunities" section of the proposal. But not as a professional College. It would lose its identity. Human Ecology has been treated as a secondary citizen in this proposal.
  - IF a proposal to create a College of Public Health within the Faculty of Health Sciences – two departments – Family Social Sciences and Textile Sciences might join this College. No professional identity and disassociated from one of its departments – Human Nutritional Sciences.
  - Should no such proposal be advanced – these 2 departments would join the departments of Family social sciences and Medical Microbiology within the Faculty of Health Sciences – no professional identity and any unique professional home economics characteristics would soon disappear entirely.
  - The department of Human Nutritional Sciences would somehow link with the Faculty of Health Sciences but would actually be clustered with Faculty of Agricultural and Food Sciences. No professional identity as Human Ecology and disassociated with the multi-faceted aspects of the profession.
- Now, I understand this proposal was advanced to the Senate earlier this month. The Senate was asked to approve the proposal in principle and to recommend it to the Board of Governors. But I am not privy to what the Senate's response may have been.
- Dean Sevenhuysen was good to give me an update – He indicated that No Final Decisions have been made by the Human Ecology Faculty Council, the Senate, or the Board of Governors.
  - At present, each department continues to discuss academic restructuring with potential partners and each uses a draft proposal that describes new structure suited to the department.
  - And, the Senate has been asked to suspend the undergraduate programs resulting in a degree of Human Ecology and a degree in Textile Sciences.

- The Dean indicates that academic courses and programs that can support the Home Economics profession are being drafted. By letter he has invited MAHE to discussions to ensure the program meets professional needs.

**At the same time, there are other important considerations:**

- The practice of home economics is regulated by the Province as per *The Professional Home Economists Act*. By this Act, the practice of home economics is defined and deemed to be of importance to Manitobans.
- The demand for home economics teachers in middle and high schools is growing
- The Faculty of Education has the demand for graduates qualified to teach home economics and family studies in the school system. Faculty of Education requires a graduate to have his/her 1st degree from the Faculty of HEC.
- The Department of Education recently announced that the revision of the home economics school curriculum will be financed and resourced – the demand for a modernized curriculum is growing.
- Student enrollment in the current faculty is steady demonstrating ongoing student demand.
- Human ecology graduates are being hired into a vast array of jobs as employers see the value of the breadth and scope of home economics education to many of today's occupations, businesses and community organizations.

**Some closing comments:**

- But the past cannot be denied.
- The value of home economics education at the university level should not be questioned.
- We resolve that – Home Economics is a professional practice. The practice is valued by society – no different than other professions such as medicine, dentistry, law, social work or others. No one in the field is arguing with the University's autonomy to restructure itself to meet its goals of economic savings, efficiency or modernization.
- Human Ecology has proven over the long haul – it is not a stagnant educational field nor is it a stagnant profession.
- The current Faculty has made awesome linkages and connections across the university, other universities and Red River College. This can and should be enhanced to ensure human ecology graduates receive the foundational education and research opportunities that are needed in today's society. I suspect a closer association amongst its own departments is much needed as well.
- But, the University has no right to dismantle the program of Human Ecology study, to 'disappear its identity' by not giving it College status, name and unique program of study; the result being to disadvantage the practice of home economics – the focus on the family, the household unit - in society.
- Human Ecology deserves at least the same respect as other professions with this clustering process.

**And the outcomes from the Forum:**

- Individual efforts in talking to employers, co-workers, decision-makers
- Use social media extensively - Facebook and Twitter networks. (On Saturday, we started a twitter feed - #SaveHomeEc)

- 'letters' to the University leadership – President Barnard, Chancellor Harvey Sector, UofM Senators, Board of Governors, Council of Post Secondary Education (COPSE).
- 'Talk' and garner support from our partnerships, organizations and agencies of like-minds and common goals.
- HESO could network across the current faculties within the Faculty and across to the Faculty of Education students.
- Strategize and launch a PR campaign – one that asserts the value of home economics to society, as problem solvers, the solution to well families and individuals, the teachers of thousands of students and their families - perhaps hire a PR firm.
- Work towards accrediting home economics program of study
- Reach more high school students with career option planning
- Consider approaching another university in Manitoba at which home economics might be better served.
- Reach out to political leaders to inform them so they understand the issue.