Family Science:
Professional Development and Career Opportunities
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Prepared by:
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Foreword
Family Science and the National Council on Family Relations: A Key to Your Future

Families are our most important resource. However, in some families the lives of its members are becoming more complex and vulnerable to environmental and social influences. In order to better understand and serve families, the academic field of family science has become increasingly popular with both students and service providers, who value family-trained professionals. As part of a student’s program of study, students learn to link family research and theory with family education, practice, and policy formation. This is not only the focus of academic training in the family sciences, but also the mission of the National Council on Family Relations (NCFR) as we work toward strengthening the well being of families. We hope that the information in this pamphlet will help students to contemplate and navigate their education in the family sciences, as well as encourage them to join the NCFR and to become a Certified Family Life Educator.

NCFR is particularly committed to its students and new professionals. They have an elected role in each of NCFR’s sections and are represented on the Board of Directors and the Program Planning Committee for the annual meeting. Student voices are important to us and we value student involvement. A few years ago I asked some of my graduate students who had attended their first NCFR conference for their reactions. They said they learned a lot, but more than that everyone was so friendly to them. Since many of us first joined NCFR as students and new professionals, it is our goal and pleasure to be supportive of you. A new professional recently told me that she liked being a NCFR member and attending our meetings, because NCFR was an “organization with a heart.”

Since NCFR promotes the professional development of researchers, educators, and practitioners, it provides many opportunities for students and new professionals to communicate with colleagues who have similar interests. Being an active member in NCFR helps students become involved in the profession; network with other students and professionals; and establish feelings of connectedness, commitment, and collegiality. We welcome all students and new professionals to the field of Family Science and NCFR. You are the “key” to our future.

Carol Anderson Darling, Ph.D., CFLE
NCFR President, 2001-2003
Family Science as a Discipline and Profession

Family Science

Family science¹, while a discipline in its own right, has its roots across many disciplines including anthropology, communication, law, political science, psychology, sociology, and family and consumer science. An NCFR Task Force convened in 1988 to explore the field of family science stated that it is a field of study where “the primary goals are the discovery, verification and application of knowledge” about families. While recognizing its interdisciplinary roots, family science has evolved into its own field of study with unique scholarship and diverse specialties.

Family Specialties

Family professionals specialize in a large number of areas that are as diverse as the families they serve. They may develop expertise in specific stages of life such as childhood, adolescence, adulthood, or older age. Sexuality, spirituality, health and wellness, adoption, family law, family policy, family life education, therapy and counseling, fatherhood, poverty, and immigrants are also specialties for family science professionals. College and university classes reflect this diversity and introduce students to an array of professional specialties. However, family professionals share one core area of interest and academic training: family systems.

Family science is grounded in family systems thinking, which recognizes the interrelationship between family members and their environment. Family scientists consider societal issues including economics, education, work-family issues, parenting, sexuality, gender and more within the context of the family. In addition, they also understand that individuals are not limited to a single family environment, but often co-exist between a variety of multi-dimensional, multi-layered family settings. They believe that societal problems such as substance abuse, domestic violence, unemployment, and child abuse can be more effectively addressed from a perspective that considers the individual and family as part of larger systems. Knowledge about healthy family functioning can be applied to prevent or minimize many of these problems. The skills gained through training in family science enable graduates to bring this unique family perspective to their professional work. In addition, the same knowledge and understanding of families can also be of use in strengthening their personal relationships.

¹ We have opted to use the term family science in this publication to describe the vast array of programs that train students to work in family research, practice, and policy. Programs like this include departments of family and consumer sciences, family studies, family science, child development, human development, and marriage and family therapy.
Family Science: Capitalizing on an Undergraduate Degree

Academic training in family science is only part what is needed to achieve professional success and career advancement. Success also is greatly determined by the skills acquired through a liberal arts degree. Family science students gain these abilities and useful experience in undergraduate programs that include rigorous academic training in family systems as well as the broad education achieved through the liberal arts pathway. Liberal arts graduates have the following desirable skills:

- **analytic skills**—the ability to take a big idea or a big problem, break it down into its parts, and understand how the parts work together and affect each other;
- **applied skills**—the ability to use theory and knowledge in a variety of settings and situations;
- **communication skills**—the ability to write and speak clearly, accurately, succinctly, and persuasively;
- **creative skills**—the ability to think “outside the box,” come up with new strategies, or put ideas together in novel and productive ways;
- **critical-thinking skills**—the ability to examine an idea or plan critically; hold it up against past experience and existing knowledge; and identify errors, flawed assumptions, or illogical thinking;
- **learning skills**—the ability to quickly assimilate new information, adapt to new demands, pick up new responsibilities, and broaden the scope of one’s thinking;
- **research skills**—the ability to quickly locate and summarize key information from an array of data and resources.

Training Specific to Family Science

An undergraduate degree in family science is rooted in social science; students receive instruction in research design, data analysis, statistics, and theory. It provides students with an understanding of the relationships among research, theory, and practice and the ability to apply these concepts to family systems and family processes. Individual academic departments may vary in discipline and focus. Thus, potential students should explore the various disciplines in family science and select a department that meets their personal and career goals. A family science graduate academically is prepared for a career to work with individuals, families, or systems in human and social services, government, education, and communities.
Courses offered in family science programs may include Human Growth and Development; Marriage and Family; the Family in Cultural Perspective; Human Sexuality; Family Ecology; Family Relations; Family Resource Management; Familial Conceptual Frameworks; Family Research Methods; Family Policy; Family Stress; Ethical, Legal, and Professional Issues; and Family Systems.

Jennifer Ashcraft

Investigative Services Officer, State of Delaware, Family Court

EDUCATION

B.A. Messiah College, Family Studies

JOB RESPONSIBILITIES

Jennifer has been employed by the State of Delaware since 1995 and in the private sector prior to that. She has worked in child protective services, social services, and currently as an investigator in Family Court. She conducts pre-sentence and amenability investigations, primarily for juvenile felony-level offenses. Her job consists of interviewing defendants and their families, as well as gathering relevant background information from law enforcement officers, treatment providers, school officials, and others with knowledge of each defendant. She prepares detailed reports including sentencing recommendations, which she presents as testimony in Family Court.

POSITIVE ASPECTS OF JENNIFER’S WORK

Jennifer finds her job both very challenging and very rewarding. The work of an investigative services officer is fast paced, never boring, and provides a variety of experiences. Her education in family studies provided her with the unique perspective of viewing juvenile offenders within the context of a family systems environment.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR STUDENTS

Jennifer suggests that students “step out of their comfort zone” and try new things. In college, she would not have imagined herself working in corrections; today, she feels that she would have missed out on a very positive opportunity if she had never ventured into this realm of work.

She also emphasizes the benefits of getting hands-on experience through an internship or volunteer opportunities. Jennifer found her internship with Big Brothers Big Sisters an invaluable tool for networking and learning about workplace culture and norms.

Additional Experiential Opportunities

Undergraduate students often opt to strengthen their marketability by augmenting their major with a minor from a different department. A minor can add value to any undergraduate degree, because employers desire employees who have been exposed to multiple disciplines. Family science students might minor in business, political science, gerontology, Spanish, or criminal justice. A family science student with a minor in political science would have the academic preparation to
work in family policy; a minor in criminal justice would provide a family science student with the ability to bring a family perspective to the corrections field, like Jennifer does. Undergraduates should work with their advisor to develop a course plan to meet the student’s individual interests and professional goals.

Another way to improve marketability is to explore experiential learning opportunities such as internships, service learning, volunteering, and study abroad. Such opportunities merge students’ academic training, theory, and data with real world experiences.

Internships often are required in family science departments. They usually consist of 2-12 semester credits. Students are responsible for securing a placement and working approximately 40 hours per semester credit. Often, students secure positions with agencies or organizations that serve families, youth, or children. Following is a list of settings and positions where family science students have conducted internships:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Setting</th>
<th>Position</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Residential Center for the Aged</td>
<td>Gerontologist</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Child and Family Support Centers</td>
<td>Parent Educator</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Juvenile Detention Center</td>
<td>Correctional Counselor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Learning Center</td>
<td>Family Finance Educator</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hospice</td>
<td>Family Life Educator (FLE)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Battered Women’s Shelter</td>
<td>Program Assistant</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hospital</td>
<td>Child Life Specialist</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Experiential learning outside of the academic setting is an effective method of gaining vital skills and experience. Through these experiences students are able to sample potential specialties, explore workplace culture, and gain the experience necessary to build a resume. In addition, internships and volunteer positions enable students to develop a network of professional relationships that is useful when seeking employment after graduation.
The Graduate Path: Research, Teaching, or a Clinical Career?

A master’s degree or doctorate is necessary for a research position in family science, to teach at a college or university, or to practice in a clinical or therapy setting.

Master’s Degree

A master’s degree can take between one to three years to complete and usually requires between 30 and 60 semester credits beyond the bachelor’s degree. A professional with master’s degree is prepared for employment as a family life educator; extension agent; and positions of leadership in child, adolescent, and adult services, family social services, public policy, child care and early childhood education, and gerontology.

Students interested in a clinical career in marriage and family therapy (MFT) may practice and receive state licensure with a master’s level education. Master’s programs in marriage and family therapy usually take 2-3 years to complete. Training in marriage and family therapy prepares students to work from a systemic perspective with couples and families to overcome a variety of clinical problems including: depression, marital stress, anxiety, individual psychological issues, and parent-child interactions.

A master’s degree can be either a step toward a Ph.D. or an end in itself. Some master’s degree programs offer a coursework option that does not include a thesis. The non-thesis option prepares students for leadership roles in social service administration and direct work with families. Other programs are more heavily concentrated in research and include a thesis, which are more appropriate for students who are considering going on for a Ph.D.

Ph.D.

The Ph.D. requires at least four or five years of study beyond the bachelor’s degree. It requires that the student contribute to the knowledge of the field by completing an original research project called a dissertation. A doctoral program prepares students for careers through extensive training in research methodology and statistics; theory and conceptual frameworks; content related to family systems; and the skills to communicate this knowledge through writing, presenting, and teaching.

A Ph.D. in the family sciences can lead to careers in research, to college or university teaching, to leadership positions in public or private institutions, or to a variety of governmental positions. A Ph.D. in marriage and family therapy prepares students for a clinical career working with individuals and families or in an academic setting.
Sharon M. McGroder, Ph.D., CFLE

Independent Consultant

EDUCATION
B.S. University of Rochester, Political Science and Economics
M.S. University of Rochester, Public Policy
Ph.D. Penn State, Human Development and Family Studies

JOB RESPONSIBILITIES

Sharon’s first career was in public policy. After she obtained her master’s degree, she worked for the Office of the Assistance Secretary for Planning and Evaluation (ASPE), U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, eventually being promoted to the position of Senior Policy Analyst. At ASPE, she was involved in projects related to child care and Head Start and realized the relevance of family research and its link to public policy.

Armed with the knowledge that family research influences policy, Sharon considered several doctoral programs before she selected the Human Development and Family Studies program at Penn State. Upon completion of her Ph.D. she moved back to Washington DC and worked at Child Trends conducting and overseeing research related to welfare, poverty, and family and child well-being.

Sharon has always been very cognizant of work-family balance. She currently works part-time as an independent consultant, conducting research, providing technical assistance on integrating physical and mental health screenings and services for low-income preschool-age children, and exploring ways to provide family life education in her community. Working part-time as an independent consultant enables her to select the work projects that matter most as well as to spend ample time with the people that matter most: her husband and two children.

POSITIVE ASPECTS OF SHARON’S WORK

Sharon is a life-long learner. She loves learning new things about families and how children develop. As both an independent consultant and a parent, she is able to disseminate family research to a range of interested parties: policy makers and parents in her car pool.

Sharon believes that her education in the family sciences has made her a better parent, spouse, and person. Lastly, she said, “working with people who know so much is intellectually stimulating.”

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR STUDENTS

Sharon believes that the timing of career and life cycle events are critical to the success of the balance between work and family. She suggested that students remain open to the possibility that they may want or need to work differently than the typical 9-5-from-graduation-to-retirement employment option. Ultimately, Sharon recommends, “follow your gut and it will all work out.”
Selecting a Graduate Program

When students decide to attend graduate school, they have a choice of over one hundred graduate programs in family science and family therapy at various universities and colleges throughout the United States and abroad. Students may wish to consider the following criteria when selecting the graduate program that best meets their professional and personal needs.

**Faculty** A graduate department’s reputation rests heavily on the reputation of its faculty. In some disciplines it is more important to study under someone well known than it is to study at a college or university with a prestigious name. Become familiar with publications of research in your discipline. Find articles in professional family journals, like *Journal of Marriage and Family* and *Family Relations: Interdisciplinary Journal of Applied Family Studies*, to discover where the authors teach.

**Students** What type of students enroll in the program? What are their mean undergraduate grade point average (GPA) and test scores? What are their academic abilities, achievements, program completion rates, and levels of professional success upon completion of the program? What is the experience of students in the program?

**Resources** Is the institution financially stable? What kind of financial support can the program offer? How complete are the library collections, computer resources, and other facilities? Are assistantships and fellowships available?

**Program Curricula and Services.** Are job placement and student advisement services available? What is the student/faculty ratio? Are there opportunities for internships?

**Environment**

The size or the setting of the academic institution may be important to potential students. Students can choose from small, medium, or large institutions in rural or urban environments. Climate, recreational possibilities and opportunities to work may also be important considerations. Graduate students may also need to balance their education with their family responsibilities; they may select a graduate program based on location or proximity to home and family.

**Financial Considerations**

Students who are interested in graduate study should not immediately be discouraged by a lack of finances. They should investigate and apply for all types of aid for which they may be eligible. Students should not reject a school because it is expensive until they have learned what financial aid is available.

**Some sources of aid for graduate students:**

*Grants and Fellowships.* These awards are usually granted to students with the requirement that they maintain minimum GPA standard. Grants usually are provided to those with financial need. Fellowships are prestigious awards given selectively. Financial need is not taken into consideration for fellowships.
**Teaching & Research Assistantships.** These awards are given to recipients in exchange for a service to the university. Assistantships enable students to participate in family research and teaching. Graduate assistants develop relationships with faculty and staff; assistantships are an excellent method to become further engaged in the academic environment.

**Student Loans** There are many types of financial aid available to help offset the rising costs of higher education. The U.S. Department of Education offers a variety of student financial aid programs accessible via the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA). For more information go to: www.fafsa.ed.gov

Students seeking information on potential graduate programs have a key resource. A published guide entitled *Graduate and Undergraduate Study in Marriage and Family: A Guide to Bachelor’s, Master’s, and Doctoral Programs in the United States and Canada*, describes graduate and undergraduate family programs, lists faculty, and shows program accreditation and professional certification, such as the designation of Certified Family Life Educator (CFLE). Students and family professionals may order the *Graduate and Undergraduate Study in Marriage and Family* through the National Council on Family Relations (www.ncfr.org) and it may be available in university libraries or career counseling centers.

Undergraduate professors and advisors are available to guide students through the process of identifying and selecting a graduate program. Departments differ in specialties, areas of focus, environment, and student support and guidance. The selection of a graduate program that offers the “best fit” may be worth a visit or two to compare schools. The Internet also is a useful tool; it allows students to “virtually visit” a college or university through its departmental website and compare faculty, curriculum, and specialties. When a visit is not possible, students will benefit from communicating with the advising office or Department Chair via email or the telephone.

Undergraduate students considering graduate school should begin the process of planning in their junior year or early in their senior year. Nontraditional students should begin the planning process approximately twelve to eighteen months prior to the date they anticipate beginning school. Admission to graduate school can be very competitive. Students may wish to apply to several programs to increase their odds of acceptance. After the initial research and selection of family departments, prospective students will need to complete the application process which usually includes an application form, letters of recommendation, and a personal statement summarizing goals, reasons for choosing family science, and reasons for applying to each respective program. Often, departments require that students take the nationally recognized Graduate Record Examination (GRE,) which measures verbal and quantitative skills. Like any exam, students should study for the GRE.
Kelly M. Roberts, M.S.

**Director, Oklahoma Marriage Initiative Service Delivery System**

**EDUCATION**

B.A. University of Central OK, Communication Education,

M.S. Oklahoma State University, Family Relations and Child Development
focus in Marriage and Family Therapy

**JOB RESPONSIBILITIES**

Kelly’s first career was in sales and marketing. In her second career she was a
speech and communications teacher. Through her experiences teaching and
working with students Kelly noticed that increased family services helped to
build stronger families. She realized she wanted to work in a capacity that
directly improved family strengths.

Kelly explored masters programs in the family sciences and selected Family
Relations and Child Development at Oklahoma State University. In her current
position as the director of a state-wide marriage initiative service delivery system,
Kelly is responsible for program planning, implementation, evaluation, budget,
contact with coordinators, development, workshops, the website team, and
much more.

**POSITIVE ASPECTS OF KELLY’S WORK**

When asked what excites her about her work Kelly said, “my job holds me
keenly interested; it enables me to realize the fruition of our vision through
research, managing, and teaching.” She believes that her work is a perfect
marriage of her personal and professional values, beliefs, and goals.

**RECOMMENDATIONS FOR STUDENTS**

Kelly was originally recruited to work on the Oklahoma Marriage Initiative
because of her background. Her research as a master’s student was related to
marriage initiatives; it gave her the social science background that was required
to link research to practice in her current position.

Kelly suggests that students be true to themselves. When asked what
recommendations she had for students Kelly said, “One of the greatest lessons
that I have learned is to be true to yourself. If you do not know what that is, take
the time to do the work to get to know what that means. You can take a lot of
time chasing a dream that is not your own.”
Family Science: Career Opportunities

Career Opportunities for Graduates with a Bachelor’s Degree

As new professionals, family science graduates have specific training in family systems. This special knowledge enables them to bring a family perspective to their chosen career, regardless of the employment sector. Family science graduates are guided by their life experiences, areas of interest, and the employment environment.

Upon completion of the undergraduate degree, job applicants are often surprised to discover that employers may focus less on an applicant’s transcript and GPA and more on the personal attributes of the applicant. Specifically, supervisors are interested in employees who are problem solvers, relate well to other people, and have experience or interest in that particular field. Family science undergraduates may garner their interests and experiences to access one of the entry level position in the employment sectors listed in table 1.

Table 1 Career Opportunities in Family Science

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>SETTING</th>
<th>EMPLOYMENT OPPORTUNITIES</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Business, Consumer &amp; Family Resources Services</td>
<td>Employee Assistance Specialist,</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Corporate Day Care Administrator,</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Consumer Protection Agencies,</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Family Financial Counseling &amp; Planning,</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Family Resource Management,</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Food Assistance Programs,</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Child and Family Poverty Research,</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Research on Work and Families,</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Family Business Consultant.</td>
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<td>Community-Based Social Services</td>
<td>Youth Development Programs,</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Adoption Agencies,</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Foster Care Programs,</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Teen Pregnancy Counselor,</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Family Preservation Worker,</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Welfare Assistance for Low-Income Families,</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Vocational Rehabilitation &amp; Job Training,</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Adult Day Care Providers,</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Gerontology Programs.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Early Childhood Education</td>
<td>Day Care Centers,</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Head Start Programs,</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Montessori Schools,</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Child Development Consultant.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Education</td>
<td>Public School Teaching in Family &amp; Consumer Sciences (Certification),</td>
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<td></td>
<td>University Teaching &amp; Research in Family Science Departments,</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Family Life Education,</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Sexuality Education,</td>
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<tr>
<td>SETTING</td>
<td>EMPLOYMENT OPPORTUNITIES</td>
</tr>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Faith-Based Organizations</td>
<td>Clergy, Family Mentor, Family Life Educator, Parent Educator, Youth Worker.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Family Intervention</td>
<td>Individual &amp; Family Therapy, Case Manager for Family Treatment Plans, Crisis &amp; Hotline Services, Court-Mandated Parent Education Programs, Divorce Mediation, Abuse Protection Services, Drug &amp; Alcohol Prevention Counselors, Residential Treatment Programs, Victim/Witness Support Services.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Health Care &amp; Family Wellness</td>
<td>Public Health Programs &amp; Services, Hospital Family Support Professionals, Nutrition Education &amp; Counseling, Prenatal and Maternity Services, Holistic Health Centers, Long-Term Care Administrator, Hospice Programs.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

ADAPTED FROM HOLLINGER (2002)
Career Opportunities for Graduates with an Advanced Degree

A master’s or doctorate in the family sciences prepares students for careers in leadership positions in administration, education, research, or a clinical practice as a marriage and family therapist. A background in family systems, family science methods, theory, and practice enables students to master the skills needed for a successful career in a variety of employment sectors.

Administration: There are many opportunities for a family science graduate with an advanced degree to work in a leadership capacity in government agencies, non-profit organizations, and businesses. Potential employment settings include:

- Social service agencies: such as mental health agencies, child protection agencies, women’s clinics, health promotion agencies, domestic violence centers.
- Family policy: think tanks, lobbyist for national organizations, advocacy work.
- Business: human resources, training, counseling, or family and employee mediation.
Entrepreneur: family life educator, consultant to established businesses as a trainer, counselor, writer, or problem solver.

Education: Desire to help others is often one reason people go into the family sciences and education is one way to make a difference. There are many opportunities available to master’s and doctoral level family science graduates in the education sector. Family life educators (FLEs) educate families by providing family members with skills and knowledge necessary to strengthen family life. Family life educators work in various settings including social service agencies, both the for-profit and the non-profit sectors, extension service, religious organizations, military, and consulting and self-employment.

A large number of family science graduates teach family science. Teaching opportunities are available in high schools, community or 2-year colleges, and 4-year colleges and universities. A Ph.D. is usually required to teach at a college or university. A master’s degree is usually sufficient to teach at a community or 2-year college. Each state has specific requirements for teaching at high schools and 2-year colleges.

Tammy L. Henderson, Ph.D., CFLE
Assistant Professor, Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University (Virginia Tech)

EDUCATION
B.A. Louisiana State University, General Studies
M.S. Louisiana State University, Human Ecology
Ph.D. Oregon State University, Human Development and Family Studies

JOB RESPONSIBILITIES
As an assistant professor at a research university, Tammy teaches family courses, conducts family research, and supervises graduate and undergraduate students. Her primary area of interest is family law and public policy. She is specifically interested in the effects of policies and laws on families. In addition to teaching and research in the area, she provides her graduate family law class the opportunity to attend the annual NCFR Public Policy Conference in Washington DC. Tammy’s graduate students visit their Members of Congress, participate in the conference, and have the opportunity to view firsthand that family research is the link between policy, law and families.

POSITIVE ASPECTS OF TAMMY’S WORK
Tammy feels lucky to work in academia. She stated, “It is a privilege to be able to study, learn, and watch students master the research process.” Tammy’s education has provided her with a multi-disciplinary focus that offers limitless opportunities. She believes that “the sky is the limit” and through her education she has developed the skills required to succeed in any sector of the job market.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR STUDENTS
- Enjoy your work
- Find your niche

continued next page
Find mentors at varying stages in their career
Find others who value your work
Be patient with your development
Take full advantage of the interdisciplinary aspects of our field (i.e., business, economics, consumer sciences, interior design, and technology)
Let multiple disciplines inform your thinking about individual and family development
Advocate with conviction, using research, best practices, and theory to ensure the quality of your work
Remember that your entire life – professionally and privately - reflects your convictions. Consequently, it is important to know why you believe what you do and to defend what you believe.
Plan to balance work and life.

Marriage and Family Therapy: Marriage and family therapy is a distinct professional discipline with graduate and post graduate programs. Marriage and family therapy considers the family to be the focus of treatment. Family therapists believe that a family’s patterns of behavior influence the individual and therefore many family members may need to be a part of the treatment plan. The unit of treatment isn’t just the person – even if only a single person is interviewed – it is the set of relationships in which the person is imbedded.

Melissa A. Vogel, M.S., LMFT, LCPC, CFLE
Licensed Marriage and Family Therapist
Licensed Clinical Professional Counselor
EDUCATION
B.S. Utah State University, Family and Human Development
M.S. Utah State University, Family and Human Development
JOB RESPONSIBILITIES
Melissa has a Marriage and Family Therapy practice in frontier south eastern Idaho. She specializes in individual, couple, divorce and remarriage, child, adolescent, and parenting challenges, as well as rural family issues. Her clients are referred through court, the Department of Health and Welfare, schools, doctors or self-referred.

Melissa also teaches family life education through classes and workshops. She brings a lifespan perspective to her workshops by offering parenting classes specific to each lifecycle stage: parents of adolescents, parents of school-aged children, parents of infants, including parent support groups and divorce education.
POSITIVE ASPECTS OF MELISSA’S WORK

“I never get bored teaching parents. They typically feel undersupported and are eager to learn. I encourage parents to mentor and teach each other,” says Vogel. Melissa’s clients are often court ordered and involve child protection services. When they come to Melissa they are typically angry and mistrustful, both of her and her role within the system. She feels rewarded when she sees her clients gain skills, confidences, and make positive changes in their family. It is common for ordered families to continue both clinical work and classes long after they are no longer mandated.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR STUDENTS

Melissa suggests that a college degree is the minimum standard for professional success; she encourages students to start seeing themselves as professionals while they are in school and to connect with professionals and professors. Melissa recommends that students distinguish themselves from the crowd by identifying a specialty while in school and developing their resume with additional training and volunteer work. “It is critical to stay involved with NCFR and current on research” states Vogel. “Your survival depends on keeping your learning curve steep after graduation and being as adaptive as possible.” Lastly, she believes that family science is an emerging field and new professionals need to be strong self-starters prepared to promote their discipline as they develop their careers.

Research: Conducting research is a common career goal for family scientists. An advanced degree in family science prepares students to contribute to the field by expanding the current body of knowledge. Researchers seek answers to questions such as the following:

1. How does economic stress influence marriage?
2. How does religion influence fathers’ relationships with their children?
3. How does job satisfaction influence marital quality, and vice versa?
4. What factors might improve health among family caregivers?
5. What family dynamics promote adolescents’ enrollment in college?
6. How do race, immigration, and public policy intersect in the southwest U.S.?

Family scientists conduct research in a variety of employment settings, including universities, state, federal, or local public agencies, businesses, research institutes, advocacy organizations, or in the non-profit sector. In most universities and 4-year colleges, researchers also are required to teach. Some institutions place more emphasis on teaching or on research; therefore family scientists searching for work in an academic setting should be sure to explore their own preferences and the expectations of the institution.
The Certified Family Life Educator

The National Council on Family Relations sponsors the only national program to certify family life educators. The Certified Family Life Educator (CFLE) program encourages applications from all professionals with course work and experience in family life education including formal teaching, community education, curriculum and resource development, health care, military family support, and ministry. Certified Family Life Educators have a minimum of a bachelor’s degree and many CFLEs have advanced degrees.

Family life education (FLE) is the educational effort to strengthen family life through a family perspective. The objective of family life education is to enrich and improve the quality of individual and family life. FLE emphasizes processes to enable people to develop into healthy adults, to help people work together in close relationships, and to facilitate the ability of people to bring out the best in others. While various professionals assist families, it is the family life educator who incorporates a preventive and educational approach to individual and family issues.

Family life education includes knowledge about how families work; the inter-relationship of the family and society; human growth and development throughout the life span; both the physiological and psychological aspects of human sexuality; the impact of money and time management on daily life; the importance and value of education for parenting; the effects of policy and legislation on families; ethical considerations in professional conduct; and a solid understanding and knowledge of how to teach and/or develop curriculum for what are often sensitive and personal issues.

Certified Family Life Educators are proficient in the following ten Family Life Content Areas:

- Families in Society
- Internal Dynamics of Families
- Human Growth & Development
- Human Sexuality
- Interpersonal Relationships
- Family Resource Management
- Parent Education & Guidance
- Family Law & Public Policy
- Ethics
- Family Life Education Methodology

Certification recognizes a proven background and understanding in each of the ten family life content areas and the ability to effectively teach within one or more of these areas. While CFLEs may work specifically in one discipline, such as parent
education or marriage enrichment, their understanding of the many areas that affect today’s families enables them to be more effective in their efforts to educate and work with individuals and families. The Certified Family Life Educator designation recognizes the educational, preventive, and enriching nature of their work.

**Certification**

There are TWO levels of certification: Full and Provisional

**Full Certification**

Full certification is available to those with the minimum of a Bachelor’s degree and two year’s experience in family life education if the degree is family-related; five years of experience if the degree is non-family-related.

**Provisional Certification**

Provisional certification is available to those with a Bachelor’s degree and course work in all ten family life content areas, but without the minimum two years’ experience. Applicants can seek Provisional approval through the Regular Application process or, if graduates of a NCFR-Approved program, they can apply for Provisional approval using the Abbreviated Application Process.

Provisional CFLEs can upgrade to Full status once they have earned the equivalent of two years of work experience in family life education.

**Abbreviated Application Process**

Provisional Certification is available through the Abbreviated Application Process to students who have graduated with at least a bachelor’s degree from an academic institution that has been approved by the Academic Review Committee. Students enrolled in approved programs demonstrate their competencies in the ten Family Life Content Areas by taking comprehensive courses that are based on the CFLE Standards and Criteria. After graduation, students applying through the Abbreviated Process complete three easy steps to receive the designation of provisional CFLE.

1. Application Form
2. Checklist
3. Reduced application fee

Over 75 academic programs have been approved to offer the CLFE designation to graduating students. Visit www.ncfr.org for a list of approved schools.

**The Regular Application Process**

Applicants can apply for Full or Provisional certification through the Regular Application process. The Regular Application process involves documentation of background and experience through a portfolio review. Applications submitted under the Regular Application process are reviewed by the Certification Review Committee.
Applicants applying for Full certification through the Regular Application process provide documentation of:

- **Academic Preparation**
- **Professional Development**
- **Work Experience**

in each of the ten content areas.

Applicants applying for Provisional certification through the Regular Application process provide documentation of Academic Preparation only.

**Benefits of Certification**

Certification offers many benefits to individuals and furthers the profession of family life education:

- Increases credibility as a professional by showing that the high standards and criteria needed to provide quality family life education have been met
- Validates experience and education
- Adds credibility to the field of family life education by defining standards and criteria
- Recognizes the broad, comprehensive range of issues that constitute family life education and expertise in the field
- Acknowledges the preventive focus of family life education
- Provides avenues for networking with other family life educators both locally and nationally

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**David Pruden, M.S., CFLE**

*Private practice as a court mediator, domestic relations mediator, and family life educator*

**EDUCATION**

B.S. University of Utah, Sociology and Psychology  
M.S. Utah State University, Family and Human Development  
Ph.D. Candidate Utah State University, Family and Human Development

**JOB RESPONSIBILITIES**

David has worked exclusively with family issues in private practice for 12 years. In his practice he sees families who are involved in family court, often they are referred through the judicial system for divorce mediation, parent education, co-parenting and communication strategies, or couples counseling. David does not treat families with pathologies, but those with problematic issues that can be resolved through mediation, education, and by strengthening communication.

In addition to his private practice, David teaches family life education, specifically, parenting and fathering, through workshops and seminars. He uses sports metaphors, such as coaching, to teach parenting models that fathers’ can feel comfortable adapting.
David also teaches undergraduate classes in family and human development at Utah State University.

**POSITIVE ASPECTS OF DAVID’S WORK**

David is concerned that society does a poor job of preparing people to be good parents and partners. He believes that most parents want to do a good job of parenting and that most parents are hungry for growth and learning. David’s work enables him to make a difference in the lives of the families that he serves. He helps fathers have better relationships with their children; helps parents to effectively co-parent; helps single parents build a support system; and helps families learn to communicate. David relates that, “I feel JOY seeing families grow and learn.”

**RECOMMENDATIONS FOR STUDENTS**

When asked what advice he has for people contemplating or just beginning in the family field David said, “I believe in the CFLE designation. The broader concepts of CFLE provide students with the foundation to continue their education, formally or informally, in whichever specialty they choose.” He recommends that students take advantage of practicum or internship opportunities that are available; they are invaluable in gaining real world experience and expand one’s education.

**FLE Career Opportunities**

Family life educators have the ability to bring their comprehensive family training to many employment sectors and job classifications. Often, FLEs work in the following venues:

- **Practice** - teaching, education, program or curricula development,
- **Administration** - leadership or management, organizing, coordinating, and
- **Promotion** - public policy, lobbying, advocating for system change and awareness.
Ethical Principles and Guidelines for Family Scientists

The Ethical Principles and Guidelines for Family Scientists were drafted by the Family Science Section of NCFR and adopted by the NCFR Board of Directors at its 1998 spring board meeting. The approach of providing general principles with illustrative guidelines was implemented because the guidelines are meant to be educational and sensitizing rather than a legalistic code with enforcement potential.

PURPOSE: These ethical principles and guidelines were developed to inspire and encourage family scientists to act ethically; provide guidance in dealing with often complex ethical issues; and provide ethical guidance in areas that family scientists may overlook; enhance the professional image and status of family scientists by increasing the level of professional consciousness.

Family scientists are respectful of all individuals, do not unethically discriminate, do not develop intimate personal relationships in their role as family scientists, are sensitive to the complications of multiple role relationships, protect the confidentiality of their students or clients, and do not engage in sexual harassment.

Ethical Guidelines:

1.01 Family scientists are respectful of others, show sensitivity to the dignity of all humans, and avoid all forms of exploitation.

1.02 Family scientists are not unethically discriminatory on the basis of gender, sexual orientation, age, marital status, race, religion, national origin, ethnicity, disability or socioeconomic status. We recognize that discrimination occurs in our society, and when done wisely for positive purposes it may be appropriate. For example, we may allow a student with a vision impairment to sit on the front row of the classroom.

1.03 When attempting to influence the behavior or attitudes of students or clients, family scientists should not use methods which involve undue influence, such as coercion or manipulation.

1.04 Family scientists segregate intimate personal relationships from their role as family scientists. Therefore, they do not develop inappropriate intimate personal relationships with students, clients, or research subjects.

1.05 Family scientists are sensitive to the complications in dual or multiple role situations and are ethical in those roles. For example, family scientists may teach classes in which a son or daughter is
enrolled. Others may have professional colleagues in a workshop where some form of personal evaluation is an expected outcome.

1.06 Family scientists protect confidentiality in their professional role as family scientists whether it be in teaching, service, public speaking, writing or consulting activities. For example, if family scientists share information with students about others, the confidentiality of those involved should be protected. This can be done by changing identifying information, creating composite cases or summarizing information.

1.07 If information is shared with a family scientist that mandates reporting (such as child abuse or the possibility of extreme harm) such information is to be reported to the appropriate authorities. Whenever possible, individuals should be informed in advance of the family scientist’s need to report.

1.08 Family scientists avoid sexually harassing all persons with whom they come in contact in a professional or personal setting. Sexual harassment involves unwelcomed intimate and sexual advances, requests, or other conduct of a sexual nature which is used as grounds for providing benefits or services for terms of or conditions of employment, or for the purpose or effect of unreasonably interfering with an individual’s learning or work performance or creating an intimidating, hostile, or offensive learning or working environment. Such things as inappropriate hugging, touching, or language are considered harassment.

1.09 Family scientists who belong to other professional organizations with more elaborate or role specialized guidelines should abide by them. For example, professional family therapists should use the ethical guidelines of AAMFT and medical doctors should utilize the ethical guidelines of the AMA.
About NCFR

Organized in 1938 by Rabbi Sidney E. Goldstein, sociologist Ernest W. Burgess, and attorney Paul Sayre, NCFR has over 4,000 members in the United States and abroad. NCFR, the oldest multidisciplinary family organization in the United States, is a non-profit organization of professionals who work in the multi-faceted areas of the family field. It is the only professional organization focused solely on family research, policy, and practice. NCFR is highly regarded as an authority for information on a broad range of family concerns.

NCFR Mission

The National Council on Family Relations provides a forum for family researchers, educators, and practitioners to share in the development and dissemination of knowledge about families and family relationships, establishes professional standards, and works to promote family well-being.

NCFR provides a variety of benefits for its members. Notably, NCFR sponsors an Annual Conference of juried, cutting-edge research papers, methods, and practices including research updates for practitioner sessions, and awards for research and services conducted in the family field. The Annual Conference typically brings together over 1200 professionals and students in the family field and presents over 200 papers, presentations, and poster sessions.

NCFR publishes two scholarly journals: Journal of Marriage and Family and Family Relations: Interdisciplinary Journal of Applied Family Studies. For 64 years, Journal of Marriage and Family has published seminal work on and about families from a rich cross-disciplinary mix of scholars. It is a journal without equal in family science, presenting innovative theory and research and sparking critical debate. From its inception, Journal of Marriage and Family has led the way in research by developing new areas of inquiry.

First Published in 1951, Family Relations: Interdisciplinary Journal of Applied Family Studies presents the latest in applied research, program evaluation, and curriculum development and assessment. It is established as the leading source for innovative, original materials for family life educators, family practitioners, family policy specialists, and researchers with an applied or evaluation focus.

NCFR offers a variety of methods to communicate with its members: NCFR’s quarterly member newsletter, Report contains information on departmental news, organization activities, news from Washington DC, and includes a pull out section, Family Focus that highlights a crosscutting family issue. The Zippy News, a
weekly e-newsletter features a comprehensive compilation of family related publications, grants, policy initiatives and legislation. NCFR’s website, http://www.ncfr.org offers information on all of NCFR’s activities and information.

**Student Affiliate Councils**

Student Affiliate Councils are student-led affiliates of NCFR, based at the university or college. They provide family science students a forum for professional development, exchange, and growth. Student affiliates organize and coordinate projects at a local, regional, or state level. Members of student affiliate councils attend professional meetings, discuss research and public policy, and conduct service learning projects. Funding is often available to offset the initial start-up costs for Student Affiliate Councils. For more information contact NCFR.

**State and Regional Councils**

Just as Student Affiliate Councils are affiliates of NCFR, so are many State and Regional Councils. Student councils have much to gain by becoming involved in their State and Regional Councils. Many State and Regional Councils have student divisions within their organization that provide students the opportunity for involvement and leadership. Involvement in State and Regional Councils also provide opportunities for networking and information sharing through conferences, listserves, and newsletters. For students whose interests are in applied fields rather than becoming researchers or other faculty positions, the state and regional organizations may be particularly important, as many of their members and officers tend to be leaders in these areas.

**NCFR Section Membership**

NCFR has ten membership special interest sections that provide members opportunities to exchange ideas, research, and information with colleagues with similar interests. Both the growth of membership in NCFR and the proliferation of special interests have brought about a need for sections. The networking opportunities that result from section membership assist with professional growth and enables members to build life-long professional relationships.

Just as interest in a specific section may shift over a lifetime, NCFR members are often members of more than one section. The following list describes overall section interest and purpose:

**Education and Enrichment:** The Education and Enrichment Section supports effective family life education by supporting the development and dissemination of materials, promoting interchange between members, and by recognizing outstanding professional achievements.

**Ethnic Minorities Section:** The Ethnic Minorities Section is made up of members who are concerned with issues related to ethnic families. This section strives to increase ethnic participation and representation both within the organization and in the programming at the NCFR Annual Conference.

**Family and Health Section:** The Family and Health Section provides the opportunity for its members to develop a national network of interdisciplinary...
scientists, educators, and practitioners whose primary concern is the interaction between health, health care, and family.

**Family Policy Section:** The Family Policy Section promotes effective social action, formulates statements of NCFR’s policy position, and plans annual meeting seminars.

**Family Science Section:** The Family Science Section expands, strengthens, and enhances the family science discipline through the focus on disciplinary and professional concerns.

**Family Therapy Section:** The Family Therapy Section improves the practice of marital and family therapy through the integration of family therapy theories, research, practice, and training.

**Feminism and Family Studies Section:** The Feminism and Family Studies Section integrates feminist scholarship and perspectives into theory, research, and applied family practice.

**International Section:** The International Section generates a better understanding of the unique variations of family process throughout the world by promoting cross-cultural family research, facilitating communication amongst international family scholars, and sharing information on current and proposed research.

**Religion and Family Life:** The Religion and Family Life Section promotes consideration of the spiritual dimension among family professionals. It explores theory, research and applied efforts reflecting the intersection of families and religion/spirituality.

**Research and Theory Section:** The Research and Theory Section facilitates research and theory activities in all content areas related to marriage and family science.

**Student and New Professional Membership in NCFR**

NCFR is particularly committed to its students and new professionals. They have an elected role in each section, and are represented on the Board of Directors and the Program Planning Committee for the annual conference. Their voices are important to the organization’s development, growth, and core.

Although section membership is optional, it is a key to involvement in our organization. NCFR students and new professionals are encouraged to join sections. NCFR sections are particularly helpful to student and new professional members. Since sections more intimately address individual and group needs, members can give their unique voice to issues, solutions, and future endeavors. Sections also provide opportunities to develop a leadership path toward the future of their choice. All sections have a Student/New Professional (S/NP) Representative as an officer, so student interests and needs can be represented in that section. It should be noted that several sections also provide monetary support for S/NP’s. Some sections offer travel funds to the national meeting for the S/NP representatives or provide travel awards for the best proposals/papers.
written and presented by S/NP’s at NCFR’s Annual Conference, whereas other sections fund a policy internship or dissertation award. Since funding varies based on the number of section members and other sources of income, it is prudent to check with each section of interest to see what monetary support is available to S/NPs.

References

American Association of Marriage and Family Therapy (AAMFT) http://www.aamft.org/index_nm.asp


University of Minnesota General College
http://www.gen.umn.edu
The worth of associations like the National Council on Family Relations is based on the ability of NCFR to attract students and new professionals to its ranks. We believe that NCFR has the best organization to provide you with an entry into a professional world that bridges research, practice, and policy in the family science field.

- NCFR’s Executive Director Michael L. Benjamin, MPH