

**THROUGH THE YEARS. . . AAHE, HOUSING PROBLEMS AND  
CHANGE: AN ACADEMIC PERSPECTIVE**

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**Introduction**

Just over 25 years ago, I graduated from college and unknowingly entered the field of housing. I was assigned to teach "Housing and Home Furnishings" to home economics students at a high school in Connecticut. After two years of trying to stay one step ahead of my class, I looked for a graduate program in housing and found The Pennsylvania State University and AAHE member-mentor Ruth Smith. After the MS and three years with HUD on the East Coast, I started teaching housing at Colorado State University and joined AAHE at the 1972 (Dallas) meeting. Since then, like the Virginia Slims women, we've come a long way . . . baby!

To develop an overview of 25 years of progress in academic programs in housing, I first reviewed some AAHE history I had assembled earlier (White, 1986). Next, I informally analyzed titles and articles in the past 24 AAHE Proceedings, selected *Housing and Society* issues, plus tables of contents from introductory housing textbooks. My presentation is divided into four sections: definition and focus; course, content and curriculum development; textbook support and teaching methods; and impact and continuity. I shall compare and contrast the past with the present, and in some cases, speculate about the future. Because of the limits of my charge, information relative to AAHE's important research and extension missions is omitted.

**Definition and Focus**

In 1965, our founders defined housing broadly and nonspecifically, so as not to exclude anyone who might like to join the organization. Home economics' contribution was to complement, not compete with, contributions from architects, interior designers, urban planners, etc. That broad definition (or lack thereof) was cause for concern, however, by more than one early AAHE President (Nygren, 1969; Crow, 1976). Salmon (1973) described housing as "so multi-dimensional as to become unintelligible" (p. 7).

As the '80s began, we revised the AAHE Constitution to define housing as a product, an environment, a service and a process. The objective of our study was, and still is, to increase quality of life. Today, we can point to an interdisciplinary field of study with a body of knowledge and a conceptual framework (White, 1986). Moreover, AAHE members have developed and tested new theories.

In the mid-'60s, AAHE members' housing courses generally had an individual/family (micro-level) consumer orientation for home economics majors. The content, primarily dictated by state vocational education certification requirements, focused on application of the material in careers other than housing per se (e.g., home economics education or Extension).

As AAHE developed, we broadened the consumer emphasis to include reciprocal interactions and relationships, expanding to neighborhood and community housing concerns (macro-level). In addition to educating generalists, we moved toward pre-professional and career preparation specifically for housing advocates, providers and

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policymakers. An important consequence was the development of interdisciplinary housing courses and research on our campuses. As the '90s began, we expanded even further to issues of internationalization and global interdependence in housing (Makela and Tripple, 1989).

## **Housing Courses, Content and Curriculum Development**

### ***Housing Courses***

As AAHE became a reality in 1965, most members were teaching one broad, introductory service course for Home Economics Education/Extension students and perhaps for Interior Design and Consumer Affairs majors. Later, in schools seeking American Home Economics Association (AHEA) accreditation, that course often became the "near environment" course in the home economics core curriculum. As we filled our teaching loads with courses in areas such as family economics, home management, household equipment or interior design, some housing educators dreamed of future housing majors. Meanwhile, the housing course served as our primary recruiting vehicle in a sometimes indifferent student environment--a great challenge!

The bulk of AAHE members' housing course content during the '60s was related to physical design of single-family homes (the product) and their acquisition (floor-planning and home-buying). Another early emphasis was historical aspects of housing. The subject most often missing in course outlines of the late '60s was that of housing policy (Wysocki and Carll, 1989). In the '70s, content moved toward an emphasis on socio-psychological, economic, plus political-legal aspects of housing (the environment, service and process) (Whitaker and Starks, 1979). Content on housing for the elderly and disabled was broadened to include single-parent families and other populations with special needs. Conversely, the portion of introductory texts devoted to the history of housing decreased sharply.

During the '70s, AAHE's housing policy emphasis grew with members' involvement in political and legislative processes. We taught about the 1968 National Housing Act, the 1968 Fair Housing Act and the 1974 Housing and Community Development Act. In the '80s, budget cuts and housing vouchers, the McKinney Homeless Assistance Act and the 1988 Fair Housing Amendments were covered. The past 10 years have seen a major transition in policy-oriented content. We have moved from helping students to understand the private U.S. housing delivery system and the alphanumeric-soup of federal subsidy programs to highlighting the emphases on self-help and nonprofit state and local efforts, including public/private partnerships and codevelopment schemes that produce affordable housing without federal subsidies.

### ***Curriculum Development***

During the '70s, a few colleges and universities developed housing program emphases, minors and even majors. Hence, the introductory housing course was joined by focus and issues courses (three or four housing-only courses--an entire load for one faculty member). If not a named major, the housing option was often a concentration within an Interior Design or Family Resource Management major. These programs offered opportunities to recruit male and nontraditional students.

In the '80s, specialized pre-professional curricula in residential property or facility management were developed at a few institutions. A 1990 AAHE survey investigated undergraduate housing courses and programs (Johnson-Carroll, in White, 1990). Those data (plus subsequent follow-up information) revealed that 12 institutions offered a "housing-focused" major (not including design majors), while five schools offered a housing-focused minor or emphasis area within a related major such as design or consumer affairs. Two other schools were to institute a housing-focused program within the next five years. If one equates housing with residential design, far more programs are available. Housing design programs in several institutions have received an endorsement from the National Kitchen and Bath Association. In the early '90s, the AAHE Aca-

demographic Programs Committee plans to release a directory of the undergraduate housing programs described by survey respondents.

As noted above, AAHE members have moved from being most directly concerned with state home economics teacher education requirements to AHEA and Foundation for Interior Design Education Research (FIDER) accreditation/certification guidelines, Public Housing Manager certification requirements, and curriculum recommendations offered by professional organizations and trade associations (e.g., the National Apartment Association, Institute of Real Estate Management, the International Facility Management Association and others). Although not all directed toward "housing education," some of these dictates have (or may) become the tails that wag the housing-related curriculum development doghouse.

Also during the '80s, housing courses, programs and faculty positions in some schools faced potential elimination. This threat appeared as numbers of home economics education majors dropped, as home economics core curricula requirements changed, and as interior design programs were tightened to respond to FIDER accreditation requirements. Although the need for change placed some housing educators in a defensive position, a positive result has been the movement of housing professionals to a marketing mode. Two major marketing techniques are (1) proposing/promoting housing courses to meet university-wide general education (social science) requirements and (2) developing interdisciplinary undergraduate housing programs (secondary majors, minors, certificates, etc.).

Relative to graduate-level housing programs, a 1971 AAHE survey showed that 36 U.S. schools had graduate majors in housing, household equipment or interior design (AAHE Education Committee, 1971). By 1977, although 38 institutions were listed in the updated directory, few doctoral programs offered a major specifically in housing (Whitaker, 1977). The 1989 AAHE directory revealed that over 40 schools had graduate programs in housing and related fields (AAHE Academic Programs Section, 1989). Several universities are now offering doctorates in housing, and the majority of AAHE members have a terminal degree.

#### **Textbook Support and Teaching Methods**

As AAHE was born in 1965, housing educators had only the textbooks by Tessie Agan and Kate Ellen Rogers, plus extensive handouts, voluminous readings at the library reference desk and course outlines shared by colleagues. In 25 years, we have been privileged to use books published by AAHE members, including Agan Luchsinger, Fish, Hartwigsen, Keiser, Lindamood and Hanna, Meeks, Morris and Winter, Morrison and Natrass, Newmark and Thompson, Roske, Tremblay and Dillman, and Wedin and Nygren.

Today, unfortunately, only a few of those volumes are listed in *Books in Print*. Furthermore, despite efforts such as the AAHE competency-based curriculum workshop held at Michigan State University in 1975 (Whitaker and Starks, 1979), consensus has never been reached on the "best" content inclusions for an introductory housing text. Today's course outlines emphasize new (or re-titled) topics that appear in few introductory housing textbooks. These issues include nontraditional/alternative housing forms and living arrangements, housing affordability and homelessness, local and state roles/mechanisms for funding-assisted housing, housing rehabilitation in the 21st century, housing technology, internationalization of housing systems, and 1990 census trends.

The "obsolescence" of the current used textbooks written by AAHE members presents a major challenge for the future. Comprehensive, new introductory housing textbooks are badly needed to keep our courses and programs viable. Yet an important publishing prerequisite is proof of a well-defined, mass market. I am confident that as we improve our theoretical frameworks in housing education and strive to develop interdisciplinary, issue-oriented general education courses, increased enrollments and new learning resources will emerge.

Mid-60's teaching methods centered on narrowly-defined subject matter with lectures filled with facts and figures and consumer "how-tos." The latter were often overlaid with middle-class value judgments (especially homeownership). Twenty-five years later, the knowledge explosion means we cannot teach students everything they will need to know during their careers. Therefore, housing educators have moved to problem-solving approaches requiring students to synthesize rather than memorize. We have also become more value-neutral in our presentation of housing for all people (including groups with different cultural mores).

During the '60s, we eagerly gathered teaching tips at AAHE meetings. Many housing educators used furniture layout kits, extensive audiovisual materials (several slide sets prepared by AAHE members were distributed by the organization), and land-use games to add interest and meaning to their courses. Today, our classes practice group decision-making skills and are evaluated via outcome-based terminal and performance objectives. Moreover, students continue to increase their skills at micro-computer applications and simulations (Impson, Schlagel, Tyler, and Sherman, 1987; Schlagel, 1984; Zavotka, 1984).

### **Impact and Continuity**

In the earlier years, we talked to ourselves--a group largely unknown to all but AHEA and the Extension service. When asked what we taught, some of us fumbled with the explanation--describing what we did not teach (e.g., architecture or design) more than what we did teach. Today, the AAHE is a well-known professional organization, as evidenced by our cooperative arrangements with groups and agencies such as the National Institute for Building Sciences, National Association of Housing and Redevelopment Officials, the American Gas Association, National Kitchen and Bath Association, National Association of Real Estate Editors, the Census Bureau, Environmental Protection Agency, the Public Affairs Information Service Index, and others.

AAHE members are impacting local, state and federal housing and community development policy in a knowledgeable and positive way. State housing officials will call on our resources as they develop the community-wide Comprehensive Housing Affordability Strategy plans required by the 1990 National Affordable Housing Act. Because we have become known for what we do, no fumbling is necessary, and the explanation of who we are often is no longer required.

Looking to the future, AAHE was one of the three cosponsors for a 1990 AHEA pre-conference workshop titled *Housing and Equipment Curricula in the Year 2000*. After a day of hard work, the participants reached consensus on five action recommendations that will facilitate further progress in academic programs in housing. The projected results include (1) a position paper responding to 11 searching questions posed by Dean Francille Firebaugh that day; (2) production of a marketing/visibility/student recruiting pamphlet suitable for use with high school or community college students, plus those in others majors; (3) investigation of organizational changes (involving AAHE, the Association of Household Equipment Educators and the AHEA art and design, housing/furnishings/equipment, and human services subject matter sections) for more effective action; (4) development of a networking vehicle to share successes and failures; and (5) development of a "Near Environment" university general education course package/model that uses issue-orientation and problem-solving approaches (White, 1990).

After all these years, we are still holistic, multi-interdisciplinary and integrative. We have moved students and their constituents or clients from dealing with choiceless realities in housing to assisting more Americans with choices in housing. Not only has the AAHE baby come a long way, but it has matured into a young adult organization that will meet the challenges of the coming century--head-on and successfully.

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