



University of Kentucky
UKnowledge

Theses and Dissertations--Family Sciences

Family Sciences

2014

GRADUATES' PERSPECTIVES ON TRANSITION FROM COLLEGE GRADUATION TO THE WORKPLACE: A QUALITATIVE APPROACH

Katelyn B. Hendricks

University of Kentucky, katelyn.hendricks@uky.edu

[Right click to open a feedback form in a new tab to let us know how this document benefits you.](#)

Recommended Citation

Hendricks, Katelyn B., "GRADUATES' PERSPECTIVES ON TRANSITION FROM COLLEGE GRADUATION TO THE WORKPLACE: A QUALITATIVE APPROACH" (2014). *Theses and Dissertations--Family Sciences*. 16. https://uknowledge.uky.edu/hes_etds/16

This Master's Thesis is brought to you for free and open access by the Family Sciences at UKnowledge. It has been accepted for inclusion in Theses and Dissertations--Family Sciences by an authorized administrator of UKnowledge. For more information, please contact UKnowledge@lsv.uky.edu.

STUDENT AGREEMENT:

I represent that my thesis or dissertation and abstract are my original work. Proper attribution has been given to all outside sources. I understand that I am solely responsible for obtaining any needed copyright permissions. I have obtained needed written permission statement(s) from the owner(s) of each third-party copyrighted matter to be included in my work, allowing electronic distribution (if such use is not permitted by the fair use doctrine) which will be submitted to UKnowledge as Additional File.

I hereby grant to The University of Kentucky and its agents the irrevocable, non-exclusive, and royalty-free license to archive and make accessible my work in whole or in part in all forms of media, now or hereafter known. I agree that the document mentioned above may be made available immediately for worldwide access unless an embargo applies.

I retain all other ownership rights to the copyright of my work. I also retain the right to use in future works (such as articles or books) all or part of my work. I understand that I am free to register the copyright to my work.

REVIEW, APPROVAL AND ACCEPTANCE

The document mentioned above has been reviewed and accepted by the student's advisor, on behalf of the advisory committee, and by the Director of Graduate Studies (DGS), on behalf of the program; we verify that this is the final, approved version of the student's thesis including all changes required by the advisory committee. The undersigned agree to abide by the statements above.

Katelyn B. Hendricks, Student

Dr. Donna R. Smith, Major Professor

Dr. Jason Hans, Director of Graduate Studies

GRADUATES' PERSPECTIVES ON
TRANSITION FROM COLLEGE GRADUATION TO THE WORKPLACE:
A QUALITATIVE APPROACH

THESIS

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of Master of Science in the
College of Agriculture, Food and Environment
at the University of Kentucky

By

Katelyn B. Hendricks

Lexington, Kentucky

Director: Donna R. Smith, Associate Professor of Family Sciences

Lexington, Kentucky

2014

Copyright © Katelyn B. Hendricks 2014

GRADUATES' PERSPECTIVES ON
TRANSITION FROM COLLEGE GRADUATION TO THE WORKPLACE:
A QUALITATIVE APPROACH

By

Katelyn B. Hendricks

Dr. Donna R. Smith

Director of Thesis

Dr. Jason Hans

Director of Graduate Studies

March 11, 2014

Date

ABSTRACT OF THESIS

GRADUATE'S PERSPECTIVES ON TRANSITION FROM COLLEGE GRADUATION TO THE WORKPLACE: A QUALITATIVE APPROACH

This article explored the experiences of college graduates in their program of study and during their transition from college graduation to the workplace. Factors focused on were perceptions of program and curriculum, employment preparation, connections to faculty and relationships with family members. Six individuals who graduated from the University of Kentucky Family Sciences (FAM) Department were interviewed. Participants openly shared positive and negative experiences. The study was examined through two theoretical lenses: Glen Elder's life course perspective and Ludwig von Bertalanffy's general systems theory. Participant interviews were transcribed verbatim and transcriptions were analyzed with inductive coding. Central themes that emerged included connections and networking, feelings in classes/curriculum/program, support and challenges within family relationships, transferring majors, ambiguity and lack of direction and graduate school. Findings from the study showed that graduates generally felt positively about their program of study and its translation to the workplace, though challenges were experienced in understanding what FAM was and what type of job it could lead to. Connections and networking within personal and professional relationships were found to be a crucial component of experiences.

KEYWORDS: Transition, System, Curriculum, Significant Relationship, Employability

Katelyn B. Hendricks

March 11, 2014

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The following thesis, while an individual work, benefitted from the insights and direction of several people. First, I would like to thank my Thesis Chair, Dr. Donna Smith, for her consistent support, dedication, confidence and guidance during my graduate studies and writing of this thesis. In addition, I would like to thank my committee members, Dr. Diana Haleman and Dr. Nathan Wood for their beneficial insight, challenges and support throughout the writing of this thesis that contributed to its timely completion. In addition to the technical and academic support above, I received equally valuable assistance from family and friends. I would like to express my gratitude to my husband, whose patience and backing were pivotal, and my parents and siblings, whose unending support and confidence served as a key piece to the success of this project. Finally, I wish to thank the participants of this study (who remain anonymous) for their time and insights that created an informative project and laid the ground for future research.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Acknowledgments.....	iii
List of Tables.....	vi
Chapter One	1
Introduction	1
Statement of Purpose	3
Chapter Two.....	4
Theoretical Framework.....	4
Life Course Theory	4
General Systems Theory	5
Literature Review.....	7
Employer Responsibility and Expectations	7
Systems approach.....	9
Graduates’ perspective.....	10
Curriculum factors	10
Job factors and motivation.....	11
Mentoring and faculty.....	12
Family influences.....	13
Broader context.....	15
Chapter Three.....	17
Methodology	17
Qualitative Research	17
Participant Recruitment and Description	17
Data Collection Procedures	19
Data Analysis	20
Role of Researcher	21
Ethical Considerations	22
Transferability and Validity	22
Chapter Four	24
Findings.....	24
Feelings on Classes/Curriculum	25
Connections and Networking	29
Ambiguity/Lack of Direction	32
Transferring Majors and Awareness of FAM	34
Graduate School	36
Preparation for the Workplace	38
Family Relationships	39
Summary of Major Themes	43
Chapter Five	46
Discussion.....	46

Findings Related to the Research Questions	46
How do graduates generally feel about their program of study?	46
How well is curriculum preparing students for employment? What preparation is lacking?	47
In what ways do individuals' family relationships impact their transition from education to employment?	49
In what way does faculty involvement influence graduates' perception of education experience?	50
Findings Related to Theory	51
Findings Related to the Literature Review	54
Implications for Practice and Policy	57
Implications for Research	59
Limitations	60
Conclusions	61
Appendix A: Key Terms	64
Appendix B: IRB Consent	65
Appendix C: Consent to Participate in a Research Study	66
Appendix D: Summary of Participant Characteristics	69
Appendix E: Course Guide	70
Appendix F: The Codebook	73
References	74
VITA	77

LIST OF TABLES

Table 1, Summary of Participant Characteristics	18
---	----

LIST OF TABLES

Table 1, Summary of Participant Characteristics	18
---	----

Chapter One

Introduction

University education is a frequently chosen pathway for individuals desiring to be employable participants in the workforce (Perez-Pena, 2012). Reasons for choosing this pathway include personal, societal and financial motivators. Individuals seeking university education expect to learn in a rigorous environment and attain a marketable degree and earning potential (Ojalvo, 2012). Employers and students alike expect education to give students the knowledge and skills they need to be contributors to their desired field of work. However, employers are increasingly noticing that graduates lack a number of skills their businesses need, such as strategizing and communication abilities (Yorke, 2004).

The transition out of university and into the work force is not always a smooth one (Dahlgren, Handal, Szudlarek, & Bayer, 2007). Examples of difficulties with the transition include discrepancies between what employers and students view as desired employability skills. For example, Robinson and Garton (2008) found graduates ranked writing skills of low importance, while employers deemed writing competencies as valuable. Robinson and Garton (2008) also state that entry-level graduates are not equipped with general, transferable skills such as problem solving and decision-making necessary for employment, and thus are not prepared to enter the workforce. Lack of preparation indicates a problem at the educational program level, implying programs of study do not provide graduates with tools needed for employment. Though it is not the direct role of higher education to ensure graduates a job, institutions can take steps to promote the likelihood that their graduates will gain what may be deemed as appropriate

employment (Holmes, 2013).

Employability is an increasing problem, partially due to a combination of the discrepancy mentioned above and an increasingly competitive job market. Additionally, according to a recent survey, only 19% of Americans are satisfied with their jobs (Adams, 2012). Low job satisfaction could be avoided in some cases if students were able to get a feel for their potential job before graduating and entering the field. Classroom experience and academic advising do not always provide an accurate depiction of work life, resulting in students being misled and unsatisfied. Skewed expectations of what life after graduation will be like set students up for an unstable transition from college to work.

The experience of students on their trajectory from higher education to employment is influenced by certain variables such as perception of curriculum, job goals, expectations, motivation, and family factors. Each of these variables will be discussed further in Chapter Two. For the purpose of the present research, it is especially important to highlight family factors, as they are a critical yet overlooked variable in examining the transition from education to employment (Nystrom, Abrandt & Dahlgren, 2008).

Though the movement from school to work is a normative life transition, it can be difficult for families to adapt smoothly when individual members experience such a transition. Walsh (2012) comments, “A shift in one’s inner world and identity and a reorganization of major life role are almost inevitably accompanied by disequilibrium in one’s relationships, inside and outside the family” (p.430). From a systems perspective, any life transition of an individual who belongs to a system will affect other members of the system. The focus on school to work transitions cannot be one-dimensional; experiences influence the graduate, as well as those individuals who have a role in his or

her life. Family relationships have the ability to strengthen transition through encouragement and support or weaken it by insensitivity to new roles and demands (Walsh, 2012). Individuals can overlook consequences of their transition on the family level and neglect family needs or potential support. For these reasons, it is critical to examine family factors as a variable in the study.

Statement of Purpose

The purpose of the present study was to obtain personal accounts from graduates of the University of Kentucky's Family Sciences Department. Accounts about their experiences in higher education and transition to employment were collected through face-to-face interviews. Focusing on variables such as satisfaction with curriculum, motivation, and job and family support aided in understanding specific phenomena that may make transitions difficult. This research examined the relationship between education experience and employability, specifically how they interact during transition points. The potential that graduates could find more employability success and job satisfaction contingent upon curricular changes needs to be explored. A review of the literature reveals that additional understanding is needed of students' perspectives on their specific experiences in education and entrance to the workplace. Thus, the following general questions guided the research: 1) How do graduates generally feel about their program of study? 2) How well is curriculum preparing students for employment? What preparation is lacking? 3) In what ways do individuals' family relationships impact their transition from education to employment? and 4) In what way does faculty involvement influence graduates' perception of education experience? Key terms of this study can be found in Appendix A.

Chapter Two

Theoretical Framework

Life Course Theory

The theoretical perspectives guiding this research are life course theory and general systems theory. Both theories serve as a framework in examining the transition between education and employment and are applicable in individual and family contexts.

The life course perspective emphasizes the historical and social context of individuals' lives, taking into consideration the overall trajectory, beginning at birth, and accounting for how events and relationships influence one another. A life transition represents a change in role or status into a clearly different role or status (Hutchinson, 2007). Education and employment are historically and socially constructed events in the lives of young adults and represent role changes. The events and roles experienced by graduates influence the transition from students to graduated employees; this transition is not always a smooth one and may result in role confusion.

The origin of life course perspective traces back to the 1920s when the first longitudinal studies on children were begun. Glen Elder further developed ideas of life course in the 1960s, when he was introduced to such studies: "In my view, they [pathways] refer to the social trajectories of education, work, and family that are followed by individuals and groups through society. Life transitions (e.g., entry into first grade, birth of a child) are always part of social trajectories that give them distinctive meaning and form" (Elder, 1998, p.1). "Transition points or life stages of children and young people are more easily defined by age while adult transitions are associated with a

fuzziness of life stages and different institutional role transitions” (O’Regan, 2010, p. 5), such as the transition from higher education to employment.

In parts of his research, Elder (2003) specifically examines life course perspective as it applies to the movement of adults from school to work in the United States.

Appropriate training and preparation for employment is frequently a missing component during this role transition. Rigorous job preparation is commonly included in other cultures, such as Japan, Germany and the United Kingdom, in the form of apprenticeships, on-site training and in-school training, whereas job preparation in America is more ambiguous (Elder, 2003). The unstable bridge between education and employment can result in confusion and helplessness during a crucial phase in an individual’s life course.

Applicable to the school-work transition, “life course perspective elaborates the importance of time, context, process, and meaning on human development and family life” (Bengtson & Allen 1993, p.1). While such an event is viewed as a life transition, it is also a natural part of a developing life course. Career is made up of aspects of people’s lives which develop over time and include the developmental process, not just work related experiences and paid employment (O’ Regan, 2010). Time and context play a role in the transition, with regard to when and why a student is looking to be employed. In the present study, family life is examined as a variable contributing to transitions.

General Systems Theory

General systems theory also serves as a framework for this research. The theory provides a holistic and integrative exploration of phenomena and events in a variety of situations, as was Bertalanffy’s intent (Laszlo & Krippner, 1998). In the context of this study, graduates, their education, their potential employers and the significant

relationships in their lives make up a system because they all play a part in an individual's employment journey. Ludwig von Bertalanffy is credited as the originator of general systems theory, beginning in the 1940s. His purpose was to develop a framework that viewed the world as an organization, conveying that the whole is more than the sum of its parts and characteristics of the whole are not explainable from the characteristics of the isolated parts (Laszlo & Krippner, 1998). The model was originally developed in relation to biological systems, but was found to be relevant on multiple dimensions, thus coined 'general systems theory'.

When different entities interact with each other, the ebb and flow between them creates some friction (Friedman & Allen, 2010). It is important for the parts in a system to understand the needs of the other parts of the system so that each component can benefit the whole in its functioning. For example, if educational programs do not know the expectations of businesses, they cannot be sure how to properly prepare students. Education and employment are overlooked as a system. If they can take advantage of their systemic identity, graduates, educators and employers will each benefit from a thriving system.

Systems theory can be used as a lens to view the relationship between educational institutions and businesses. If these entities can better learn to use their strengths when operating as a system, as Holmes (2013) suggests, graduates could have a more smooth transition between the two. The current approach to launching graduates into the workforce is more of an independent one; parts of the system are not working together. Education provides graduates with the knowledge the respective institution has deemed appropriate and graduates take this knowledge and begin the search for a job.

Employees have a construct for who is deemed an employee of worth and their definitions of worth do not often match educational institution's determinant of worth. A lack of communication within the system about what makes graduates employable can result in a frustrating and choppy transition from education to work.

Literature Review

For better understanding of available data, this section has been categorized into units addressing major themes in the current literature. A significant portion of the existing literature originates from outside the United States, primarily from the United Kingdom, but also from countries such as Spain and Australia. Moreover, current studies on employability have frequently chosen to focus on psychology and business related fields, while the current study has chosen to focus on social science fields. Additionally, much of the current literature is quantitatively based. Such gaps in the literature are discussed further at the end of the chapter.

Employer Responsibility and Expectations

An emerging theme in current data on employability is that employers should be responsible for conveying expectations for future employees to universities (Selvadurai, Choy & Maros, 2012). A small number of findings indicate that employers should take a non-intervention approach when it comes to influencing curriculum (Nunn, 2008). Overall, employers are concerned that graduates do not have the ability to transition smoothly from graduation to employment (Stephens & Hamblin, 2006). To some degree, employers have the power to make this transition easier. Some feel they are involved in this way, but only half of employers are satisfied with their involvement with career development for students during their time in university (Archer & Davison, 2008).

Employers' lack of involvement at the university level is a recurring theme in the literature. More extensive graduate-employer interaction before hiring could be helpful. Naturally, there is a demand for graduates to be desirable to employers, but poor communication from employers about these demands (Oria, 2012) has been defined as hypocrisy on their parts (Selvadurai, et al., 2012). Notably, some of this research is from outside of the United States (Selvadurai et al., 2012; Oria, 2012) and cultural education contexts must be considered when reflecting on findings.

Employers feel there is a gap between what they expect of newly graduated employees and what these employees actually provide. Use of surveys and questionnaires has shown gaps in employers' and graduates' perspectives in areas of problem solving and decision-making skills (Robinson & Garton, 2008), social interaction (Selvadurai, et al., 2012), work experience (Nunn, 2008) and communication (Holmes, 2013; University of Kentucky, 1996). In examining perspectives, it is important to take into consideration how gaps are defined. Understanding of employers' perceptions has been a historical gap in the literature. For example, what measures does an employer use to gauge whether or not a new employee has sufficient social interaction? Likewise, barring employer feedback, how do newly graduated employees know if their skills are above, below, or meeting expectations? In the hiring process, job seekers send signals about employability competencies to employers by their level of educational credentials (Cai, 2013). Credentials carry an assumption that graduates possess adequate employability skills, but sometimes that is proved untrue after graduates begin a job (Dahlgren, et al., 2007; Robinson & Garton, 2008). Thus, a gap in expectations and performance can arise.

In addition to the literature about employers' perspective and responsibility,

university responsibility is addressed in existing literature, but the area of university perspective is not given adequate attention. Employers have the ability to let the educational system know their needs, but it is less natural for universities to initiate communication with employers. From a systems perspective, it could be useful for each entity (employers and higher education) to view the other as a valuable resource. While higher education institutions do not control the labour market and cannot guarantee employment outcomes, they can take steps to promote the likelihood that their graduates will gain what may be deemed appropriate employment (Holmes, 2013).

Systems approach

An emerging theme from the research on employability is the concept that employers and universities should work together, as a system, to enhance graduate employability. In addressing responsibility, a difficulty arises in evaluating where this responsibility lies, or how it should be divided up. A multi-faceted approach should be taken in the development of employability; it is cultivated both inside and outside the formal curriculum, drawn up by universities, and developed in part-time employment sectors or home life (Yorke, 2004). Though universities and employers do not have competing goals, they do have dissimilar understanding of what makes an individual employable. Clear and frequent communication could help build this system. From an employability standpoint, if employers were engaged in learning strategies, students may get a better education (Nunn, et. al, 2008). Such a standpoint supports the employer involvement discussed above. Nonetheless, casting aside employer responsibility, universities need to focus on future implications of education in terms of employability (Hennemann & Liefner, 2010). A successful systems approach involves cooperation

between employers and universities.

Graduates' perspective

In addition to employer perspectives, graduates' perspectives should be given attention in efforts to understand the full realm of graduate employability. In current literature, the disparity between the two perspectives is highlighted (Nystrom, Abrandt & Dahlgren, 2008; Selvadurai, Choy & Maros, 2012; Yorke, 2004). Similarities in perspective, however, do exist. Primarily, like employers, graduates identified problem solving and decision making as skills needing more attention in curriculum (Robinson & Garton, 2008). In comparing graduates' perceptions to employers' perceptions, Robinson and Garton (2008) found that graduates found perceived skills to be more important than the ability to actually execute the skills. Students also felt that critical questioning and application of the knowledge acquired are seen as fundamental conditions for learning if they were to be successful in the work place (Dahlgren, et al., 2007). Student feelings such as these are a primary focus of this study.

Curriculum factors

Satisfaction with curriculum is rarely discussed in the literature, but some specific indicators are addressed. A longitudinal study of 5,203 students found that two factors important to curriculum satisfaction are preparation for career and graduate school and academic advising (Tessema, Ready & Yu, 2012). Additionally, a University of Kentucky student satisfaction survey administered to graduates found one of the top five factors identified by students and faculty for needing improvement was academic advising (University of Kentucky, 1996). Furthermore, in interviews by Yorke (2004) some graduate students expressed they entered employment with the feeling their

program of study was not complex enough, while others felt they were immersed with too much book knowledge and not enough practical experience. Such findings as these indicate certain dissatisfactions with curriculum, but no clear direction for improvement or attention to areas of student satisfaction are addressed, so it is difficult to know what they [students] felt positively about.

Job factors and motivation

Many graduates transitioning to the workforce find their employment experience is not related to their education experience. In fact, 40% of graduates say their job is not at all related to their major, 22% said their job is related to major, and another 40% believe their job is somewhat related to their major (Stone, Van Horn & Zukin, 2012). Also, graduates may perceive employment itself in varying lights. Holmes (2013) suggests individuals have varying internal and external motivators for seeking employment. One motivation could view employment as a stepping-stone to bigger things. Another viewpoint might see employment as a status, or life course achievement. Employment may also be viewed in a one-dimensional light, for the purpose of earning money only. Benford and Newsome-Gess (2006) report, “Thirty-six percent of students seek a college degree to pursue a career they love, 32% to be financially successful, and 23% to satisfy a personal interest or goal” (p. 81-82). Graduates must ask themselves for which of these dimensions they want to be employable, so they may begin to shape their employability goals and plans.

Motivation factors for seeking employment can be both intrinsic, such as achieving a personal status goal and extrinsic, such as attaining resources (van Emmirik & Hetty, 2012). For the purpose of the present study, understanding of graduates’

motivation for seeking employment is critical. Motivation is defined as drive or incentive (Webster's new world college dictionary, 2011) and plays a role in the transition from school to work. Individuals' perception of their transition from school to work, whether good or bad, is influenced by their motivations in obtaining a job. Depending on individual objectives in job attainment, being employable may be important to some, and trivial to others. For example, if someone is motivated to pursue a career in law because it is his or her family tradition to do so, it would be important for that individual to seek internships or seminars in the field of law, promoting their employability in the specific field. For someone who viewed their job attainment in a less concrete way, such as being satisfied with a career in law or a career in business, a specific goal for employability may seem trivial.

Mentoring and faculty

Academics, such as faculty and/or mentors, are stakeholders in graduate success. They have invested time in students, often care about them emotionally, and on some level, it reflects poorly on them if students do not do well. In the business realm, "managers who had a mentor, compared to those who did not, showed higher levels of job satisfaction and a higher promotion rate and women lawyers who had been mentored perceived themselves as more satisfied and successful than those who had not been mentored" (Jacobi, 1991, p. 516). Faculty and students both agree that academic advising, a form of mentoring, needs improvement (University of Kentucky, 1996; Liu, et. al, 2009). The literature reveals some gender differences seen in the evaluation of faculty experience. For example, women were more likely to report positive ratings of education and faculty support than men (Tessema, et. al, 2012).

Similar to the state of university perspective, the literature is lacking with regard to faculty perspective on employability. To some degree, this is expected, as faculty involvement in employment is indirect. However, it can be inferred that faculty do, in fact, have an impact on college experience and career path for students. Support from faculty is a predictor of satisfaction and success, both personally and academically in college (Tessema, et. al, 2012). In the present study, it was useful to include an interview question about faculty involvement during times of transition, as their role is often overlooked.

Family influences

Significant relationships, primarily in the form of family, have been given some attention by the literature in terms of their impact on both college and job satisfaction (Allen, Dreves & Ruhe, 1999; Gold, 2006; Nystrom, et al., 2008). The majority of this attention is focused on familial support in choice of career or college performance, specifically grade point average (Allen, 1999). At this time, literature on familial support in the overall transition between school and work is lacking. Specific impacts vary by stage of the life course cycle – single, married, living with parents or non-traditional student. Family relations in the adult life cycle influence the way individuals perceive, construct and deconstruct their career (Nystrom, et al. 2008). Thus, it would be remiss to discuss the transition into career without considering the impact family has.

A common way family relationships may affect employability and education is examined with regard to the work-family conflict phenomena, especially for those in graduate education, a more intensive commitment by individuals, taking a larger amount of time away from family. A life transition such as undertaking graduate study by one

family member confronts the family system with a need to “re-balance, define and realign their relationships” (Gold, 2006). Academic life and personal life have a reciprocal effect on one another. A large majority (89%) of students say that obligations outside of school at least occasionally affect their success at school and family obligations and family support coincide; outside obligations (Benford, & Newsom-Gess, 2006) are often present when support is present. The current study seeks to draw a more specific connection between family support and employability.

Support from family is shown to have a positive effect on academic success of graduates. Family emotional support is presumed to affect both academic performance and persistence (Allen, et al., 1999); this is more related to achievement goals than transition goals. Social support in the form of any relationship serves to decrease stress and increase life satisfaction overall (Townsend, 2010; Jacobi, 1991). In contrast, in satisfaction surveys given to graduate students, Gold (2006) found married graduate students were less satisfied with schools and struggled with relational problem solving. Family involvement in individuals’ lives has an ironic effect; it has the ability to both increase and decrease stress.

Overall, the strengthening of significant relationships as a life course goal has the potential to help promote more individual success in life transitions. Quality, not just quantity of relationships should be considered (Shanahan, 2000; Hutchinson, 2007). As evidenced by the findings of Gold (2006), relationships can also be a source of stress for those working towards employability. If partners have competing goals or are unsupportive. From a systems and life course perspective, there is a need for more focused attention on how personal relationships impact education, job satisfaction and

goals.

Broader context

An additional factor affecting employability is the economy and job market. There are presently competing perspectives on the states of the economy, but it can be determined that the number of graduates seeking employment is greater than the number of positions available, thus students are expected to be competitive (Baumann, Ionescu & Nearkasen, 2011). Simply being employable does not ensure graduates a job, but employability can foster job search and the chance of finding reemployment (Koen, Klehe & Van Vianen, 2012). In addressing the competitive nature of employability, it is important to note attention given in the literature to the impact of international experience; there are consistent indications that employability chances are greatly promoted for graduates who have had international school or work experience (Archer & Davison, 2008; Crossman & Clarke, 2010).

The current review found several emerging gaps in the literature. On a basic level, there is a need for more research on employability in the United States. A few studies in the present review took place at American universities (Benford & Newsome-Gess, 2006; Walsh, 2012), but many more were done internationally (Baumann, Ionescu & Nearkasen, 2011; Dahlgren, Handal, Szudlarek & Bayer, 2007; Yorke, 2004; Willie, DeFruyt & Marojolein, 2012). International attention is imperative to the topic, but addressing it on the national level is necessary as well. Additionally, there has been little qualitative research done on employability. In the present review, only two studies were qualitative (Nystrom, et.al, 2008; Selvadurai, et al., 2012). Though the quantitative data adequately answers questions of gaps in employer expectations and graduates provision, it does not

provide sufficient information on how varying influences systemically contribute on the individual level.

Moreover, the literature is heavily focused on the experiences of business and psychology majors (Allen, et al., 1999). The present study is interested in exploring the experience of social science graduates. Also, students' perceptions are not sufficiently accounted for from both the education and employment side; there are no indicators in the literature of overall satisfaction with education experience as it applies directly to career experience (Tessema, et al., 2012). In efforts to fill this gap, this research is specifically interested in how the university, employer and personal factors combine to influence the transition from education to employment.

Tangible evidence with regard to insufficient preparation for the transition from graduation to employment is lacking (Allen, et. al, 1999). The identified gaps in student and employer perception are clear, but little research has examined where these gaps are occurring and how students feel they could be better prepared. Student initiative must not be overlooked; regardless of university and employer involvement, if students do not take responsibility for their own lives, employability will be difficult to achieve.

Employers' and graduates' perspectives are stakeholder aspects of employability (Yorke, 2004). Education and training are direct influences. Other stakeholders, such as family and friends involved, as well as indirect influences, such as personality, influence employability. From a systems and life course perspective, these contributors cannot be ignored.

Chapter Three

Methodology

Qualitative Research

For the present study, a qualitative research design was utilized. Qualitative methods are beneficial in that questions give participants the opportunity to respond in their own words (Glesne, 2007). Open-ended questions have the ability to evoke responses that are meaningful and culturally salient to the participant, unanticipated by the researcher, and rich and explanatory in nature (Mack, Woodson, MacQueen, Guest, & Namey, 2005). In addition to these benefits, as discussed in the literature review, qualitative research on topics of employability is lacking.

Participant Recruitment and Description

All participants were graduates from the University of Kentucky's Family Sciences department. The current Director of Undergraduate Studies in the department provided a list of recent graduates to the researcher. After receiving approval to conduct this study from the Institutional Review Board (Appendix B), recruitment commenced. Criteria for eligibility to participate in the study included the following: a) graduate of University of Kentucky's Family Sciences Department, b) degree attained within seven years prior to study (2007-2013), c) acquisition of job or career related to family sciences since graduation and d) job related to field held for at least one month. Potentially eligible participants from the list were emailed information about the intent of the research and provided with the contact information of the researcher. Those interested in participating were asked to contact the researcher and be screened for eligibility.

In an informational encounter with participants, the researcher explained that the purpose of the study was to gain understanding of graduates’ experiences in their transition from school to work. Participants were provided with a copy of the course descriptions and curriculum from their program of study. Also, it was explained the interview would last 60-90 minutes and include inquiries about their experiences in college and work. After hearing this information, willing participants continued with the interview process.

The final sample included six participants. The sample was comprised of five females and one male. Demographic details and characteristics of participants are provided in Table 1 (also seen in Appendix D). The number of participants was dependent on the point of data saturation. This means sampling continued until no new data emerged during interviews (Tuckett, 2004). The crux of saturation is that the quality, rather than quantity of interviews takes foremost importance. Saturation can specifically be determined by continually comparing data and ¹identifying new and emerging themes; when new themes cease to appear, the researcher may determine that saturation, thus an adequate sample, has been reached (Tuckett, 2004).

Table 1. Summary of Participant Characteristics

Name	Gender	Age	Race	Year Graduated	Job Title
Brenda*	Female	24	African-American	2011	County Extension Agent
Leslie*	Female*	24	Caucasian	2012	County Extension Agent

¹ * Pseudonym was given to protect participant’s confidentiality; names used in the manuscript are not participant’s real names.

Table 1 (continued). Summary of Participant Characteristics

Laura*	Female	53	Caucasian	2010	Family Resource Coordinator
Rose*	Female	25	Caucasian	2011	Service Coordinator
Fred*	Male	24	Caucasian	2012	Financial Aid Counselor
Tera*	Female	28	Caucasian	2007	Family Resource Coordinator

Data Collection Procedures

Each individual had unique and personal experiences. The purpose of individual interviews was to capture in depth meaning of lived experiences in the study participant's own words (Marshall & Rossman, 2011). After IRB approval was obtained, interviews commenced. Interviews were conducted face-to-face and with use of the predetermined guide and lasted approximately 60-90 minutes in length. At the beginning of each interview, the researcher reviewed the IRB approved consent (Appendix C) with the interviewee. The voluntary nature of the study and protection of confidentiality were made clear to participants.

After the review, participants willing to proceed took part in a semi-formal interview. An interview schedule was developed based on availability of the researcher and participant and the researcher met the interviewee at a location both convenient for the participant and private. Interviews were audio recorded, with the participant's consent, and the researcher also took some notes by hand during the interview. Interview tapes and notes were kept in a locked container during transportation from the interview site to a locked file. The semi-structure for the interview included the following inquiries:

- Tell me about your experience from the time you graduated college until the time you began a job in your field.
- What was your perception of the curriculum in the program of study you graduated from?
- In what ways did/does what you learned from curriculum affect your job?
- What part of your program helped you prepare for work?
- What was your relationship with faculty in your department like? How did this impact your pathway to the workplace? Do you still have relationships with any faculty?
- Tell me about your family relationships during college and transition period from graduation to work.

Naturally, some of the structured questions led to unplanned follow-up questions, depending on the interviewee's responses. Thus, a semi-structured interview allowed the interviewer a basis for questioning, while still providing flexibility for discussion of topics specific to the participants' experience.

Data Analysis

Data was analyzed using protocol from Glesne (2007). The first step in analyzing the data was organizational. Each interview was organized with all notes, demographic and audio information into a file with date and time of the interview. Then, the researcher transcribed each interview while listening to audio recordings. The researcher approached the transcribing process carefully; it is a complex, critically important to a qualitative analysis (Marshall & Rossman, 2011). Audio recordings were listened to in a quiet, private location and attempts were made to capture the full transcription of each

interview. Analysis began after the first interview was transcribed and continued until all data had been collected and transcribed.

After transcription, data was analyzed by inductive analysis. The primary purpose of the inductive approach is to allow research findings to emerge from the frequent, dominant or significant themes inherent in raw data, without the restraints imposed by structured methodologies (Thomas, 2003). Analysis was done through open coding, recognizing themes that emerged from the data rather than coding for predefined themes. Initially, one interview was chosen for open coding, and additional interviews were compared to themes in the initial interview. A second coder was recruited and trained to assist the researcher in ensuring reliability of codes. Each interview was read multiple times to gain meaning of the data. Additionally, while coding, the researcher engaged in a note-taking process, documenting patterns noticed during analysis. Reflection and note taking are processes invaluable to generating insights and identifying linkages in data (Marshall & Rossman, 2011).

Role of Researcher

Oftentimes, the best research stems from a personal passion or intimate interest of the researcher. While such research can be stimulating, the researcher must be sensitive to his or her own bias and make readers aware of any potential biases in the interest of full disclosure, allowing the reader to make an informed assessment of the research validity (Marshall & Rossman, 2011). I have an interest in the present study as I, like the study participants am a graduate of the University of Kentucky Family Sciences Department within the last seven years. Thus, I had some prior knowledge about people, places and experiences discussed by interviewees. In the context of an interview

approach to data collection, being aware of one's own experiences is especially important. With the potential to relate to participants' experiences, it became imperative I attain professionalism and frame interview questions in an unbiased manner. My personal experience may have created some bias, but since I am still a student and have not experienced the transition from school to work, the biases are not as pertinent to this study.

Ethical Considerations

Ethical considerations are relevant in all research involving human participants. (Marshall & Rossman, 2011). In the present study, ethical risk was minimal. Participants were not asked to share about trauma or deeply psychological/emotional experiences. As participants accounted their transitions from school to work, the researcher asked questions about the general nature of their lived experience. Nonetheless, it remained the responsibility of the researcher to respect rights of the participants and abide by ethical codes outlined in academia (Glesne, 2007). A benefit of this study is that it provided participants an outlet to share an experience for which they may not have previously had an outlet. An additional benefit is for the greater good of academia; participants have the opportunity to improve experiences of future graduates by sharing their own.

Transferability and Validity

In its nature, qualitative research is truth seeking, as it aims to attain rich data on lived experiences directly from participants (Thomas, 2003). A primary way the researcher ensured data had validity was through use of member checking, or "sharing data and interpretations with participants" (Marshall & Rossman, 2011, p. 40). Additionally, multiple read-throughs of transcriptions also helped ensure coding methods

are valid. The hope of qualitative research is that data obtained from interviewees will be trustworthy, but unfortunately that is not always the case, and there is no way for trustworthiness to be ensured. The researcher must believe participants are sharing experiences valid to their reality, making them relevant and useful. Marshall and Rossman (2011) describe that transferability indicates ways in which research findings will be useful to others in similar situations (p. 252). The rich, descriptive nature of the data contributed concrete thoughts and ideas to the issue of transition between graduation and work. In summary, efforts to maintain validity were done in three ways: 1) an outside coder was recruited to inductively code data in addition to the researcher, 2) member checking was done; transcriptions were sent to interviewees to ensure their experiences were accurately portrayed, and 3) verbatim transcriptions and multiple read-throughs of transcriptions were completed to help ensure valid coding and understanding.

Chapter Four

Findings

The intent of this study was to gain insight into the experiences of graduates from the Family Sciences department (herein referred to as FAM) at the University of Kentucky and understand how those experiences influenced graduates' transition to employment. Six graduates, all working in the field at the time of the study, were interviewed to elicit responses to the following four questions: 1) How do graduates generally feel about their program of study? 2) How well is curriculum preparing students for employment? What preparation is lacking? 3) In what ways do individuals' family relationships impact their transition from education to employment? , and 4) In what way does faculty involvement influence graduates' perception of educational experience?

At the time of the study, of the six graduates who participated, two were employed as county extension agents, two as family resource coordinators (FRC) in the public school system, one as a financial aid counselor in a university setting and one as a service coordinator for a nonprofit organization. All graduated between 2007 and 2012; one in 2007, one in 2010, two in 2011 and two in 2012. The participants were between the ages of 24 and 53; five were female and one was male. At the time of the interview, all six participants were unmarried; three were in significant relationships; one was divorced and five had never been married. A summary of participant characteristics can be found in Table 1 (Appendix D).

The qualitative technique of inductive coding was used to analyze the data (Glesne, 2007). Interviews were coded by experiences with curriculum, family, faculty

and jobs. Central themes that emerged across interviews are presented as follows: generally positive feelings about classes/curriculum, feelings of ambiguity about what FAM means, general support of family and significant others, importance of networking and connections, transferring from another department and learning about FAM, and graduate school.

Feelings on Classes/Curriculum

To aid in participants' ability to recall class names and descriptions, a course curriculum list was provided during the interview. This course list is attached (Appendix E). Most students were able to recall the general nature of a course but unable to recall the course number and title. Almost all classes in the course list were touched on during interviews. With a few exceptions, graduates generally reported positive feelings of curriculum and ability to translate concepts used in classes to the workplace. Some suggestions were made for course improvement and classes that were not helpful were also discussed.

A class that was clearly meaningful for participants was FAM 563 - *Families, Legislation and Public Policy*. Tera, who worked as a family advocate in the court system before accepting a position as a family resource coordinator in a public school felt quite positively about the course:

It was a really good class and it opened my eyes to thinking about how legislation plays out in an individual's life compared to community or family or city or statewide or nationwide. You don't think about how it can affect somebody individually, so that was a really good one.

One of the most frequently mentioned classes was FAM 360 - *Introduction to Family Intervention: Working with Families and Individuals*. Skills taught in this class, such as empathy, helping and reflection were clearly important to graduates and

especially applicable to their work. The theme of wanting to help others was predominant, evidenced by the following quotes from Leslie, Laura and Brenda, respectively:

“That one [FAM 360] helped me a lot. Just learning how to talk to people.”

“Introduction to Family Intervention, FAM 360....I learned an incredible amount from.”

“I feel like I was more prepared for relationship things like that – understanding family structure, understanding, like challenges that families face, helping....or understanding how some families are strong, how some families are weak, issues that cause that.”

Graduates reported mixed feelings on FAM 354 - *Families in Cultural*

Perspective; some found it helpful while others did not. Laura did not enjoy the class:

“It [FAM 354] was families in different cultures. It was a waste of time in a lot of ways. And the teacher was so bad I talked to the department chair about her. It was a bad experience.”

Rose reported good feelings toward the class:

“I guess just like learning how to kind of communicate with different cultures and then economic background, I’ve just noticed bits and pieces of different classes; there’s like a connection.”

Tera did not feel positively about the class:

“I didn’t think the cultural diversity class was very beneficial. I don’t even remember who taught it; I think it was a TA. But I can’t say that any of the information we learned in that class was applicable.”

Hannah had positive feelings about the class:

“It made me kind of appreciate different cultures other than my own. I really enjoyed that class.”

Brenda appreciated the class from a personal perspective:

“I took a class on like diversity and families. That’s helped, because it’s helped me to understand families other than my own.”

The benefit of application to both the workplace and personal development was an emerging theme for two courses 1) FAM 499 - *Internship in Family Sciences* and 2) FAM 357 - *Adolescent Development*. Each of these courses was mentioned in at least four of the six interviews and the application was evident from participant statements.

Tera related the classes to her job:

“They were good basic classes, applicable. Adolescent development was a good class. I used things I learn from that class with youth, working directly with the court system.”

Rose also related to her job:

I guess like the adolescent development, because I’m working with youth. It kind of has played out in every job that I’ve had just because I get more of how kids are and how they develop. Just kind of their perspective on things.....the adolescent class, I use it but I don’t even know that I’m using it. When I look back at the book its like, ‘Oh my gosh, yeah!’

Fred reflected on his internship experience:

“I think the 499 internship helped a lot. I think that opened me up and helped me feel more comfortable talking to people.”

Leslie, who worked as a court appointed specialist for her practicum experience, felt especially positively about it:

“The 499 internship, I think that is the one, that was my favorite being able to transition everything I’ve learned into practical use and stuff. “

In addition to her positive sentiments, Tera, who completed her practicum at a nursing home, also had some skepticism about the structure of FAM 499:

“Well the thing with that one, we had to do the work and do the internship but it wasn’t really closely monitored. So you kind of feel like you were doing it for nothing....it wasn’t helpful.”

For two particular courses a theme of application to the graduates’ own lives emerged: 1) FAM 251: *Personal and Family Finance* and 2) FAM 402: *Issues in Family*

Resource Management. Graduates seemed to feel positively about skills learned in these courses, not for career reasons, but personal ones. Tera shared about the usefulness of the class:

“Those were beneficial for anyone: money management, buying your first car, that kind of stuff. Saving from your paycheck and things that a college student doesn’t think about at the time.”

Brenda appreciated her experience in class:

FAM 251 was also good. Just as a human being I think that’s really important. Especially when you graduate and you’re on your own. I think that that’s, because if I hadn’t had that class I wouldn’t be as conscious about budgeting and stuff like that, and that would cause a whole host of other issues

Rose, in hindsight, found the class useful:

“Even the finance class, I didn’t use as much at the time but as I start to get older and talk about my 401K.”

When asked about their perceived gaps in the curriculum two themes emerged: courses that were needed but not offered and offered courses that were not needed. As mentioned above, FAM 354 - *Families Across Cultures* fits within the positive theme and the unhelpful theme. See above discussion of these themes. With regard to the first theme about needed courses, Laura, a non-traditional student, made some specific suggestions:

One of the things that I would have loved to have been able to take is a grant writing class.... Another thing is a culture of poverty class. I think for people that work in non-profit organizations, there’s a lot of people that you deal with that have that mindset...if I suggested a course it would be grant writing and the culture of poverty.

Other suggestions were centered on the theme of a need for more practical and applicable experience. Leslie, Rose and Fred, respectively, shared their thoughts:

It’s good to know the knowledge behind it and the background behind it, but sometimes translating it to work is a little difficult....and we talk a lot about like divorced families, and umm same-sex marriage and same-sex parents and stuff

like that, but it would be kinda nice to do something health related and how it affects families.

“I know this would be hard, but if you had to do like two internships.”

“I think those classes can be a little more – not interesting, it maybe revamped to make it more interesting. Maybe more applicable. Like you’re interested in learning it. I just felt like sometimes it was kind of boring.”

A positive theme also emerged in discussion of FAM 495 - *Independent Work In Family Studies*, frequently manifesting in experience as a teacher’s assistant; three of the six graduates reported positive experiences with the course.

Connections and Networking

A primary theme emerging from each of the six interviews was the importance of networking and making connections with other professionals when searching for a job. When asked how they learned the importance of networking, participants’ responses centered on the theme that they learned through experience rather than the importance of networking being explicitly told to them. Fred, who got his job as a financial aid counselor because a friend told him about the opening, shared that the importance of connecting with others had been emphasized to him growing up. He still feels strongly about the concept:

So definitely network; get your name out there. Even if it’s just emailing or volunteering for something to help out, stuff like that. People in my family are very people-oriented and know a lot of people and get involved in different things. I think that showing you can get your name out there and know other people and they can find out who you are.

Rose, who was connected to her current job by referral to a temp agency from a friend, also realized the importance of networking. She specifically emphasized the benefit of staying in contact with previous employers.

“That’s it. Yeah, just network is the thing....I made really good connections with the people.....And I guess just by the jobs that I got, especially at Sayre, my connection there helped me a lot.”

Laura shared similar thoughts about her finding her first job in the current school system as an instructional assistant, which later led to her job as an FRC:

So when I did that, I quit my job, but I needed to have something to do because I had quit my job and I couldn’t start until January, and it was September. So I came up to the school, I heard that there were instructional assistant positions, and I applied. My son had been a teacher at the school, so it was all about my connections.

Brenda, who found her job online, reported feelings of regret about her lack of networking:

I realized that I probably should have, like for networking purposes, I should’ve had more of a relationship with them, but at the same time, I didn’t know how to build that. I didn’t realize until later on in the program, my senior year I realized, “Oh, I should’ve been doing this since I started the program.”

In addition to professional connections outside the department, connections within the department by way of faculty were a component of the connections and networking theme. Commonly, a strong relationship with the Director of Undergraduate Studies was reported and a positive, but not a close relationship maintained with other faculty members.² Additionally, the director was the only faculty member that graduates reported still having contact with; five of the six reported contact with her after graduation, while more than one graduate indicated they did not have contact with other faculty members. Only two graduates reported using any faculty member as a job reference. Each of the six interviewees mentioned the director by name and the theme of high regard of her was reflected in remarks by participants.

² It is important to note that for students who graduated from 2008 - 2011, the Director of Undergraduate Studies served as the sole academic advisor.

Laura and Rose praised the teaching:

“Honestly anything she [director] taught I learned an incredible amount from.”

“...Made those connections and learned things and been encouraged to apply for them, yeah. And [director] was really good about doing that too.”

Tera elaborated on her relationship:

I had a really good relationship with her; me and my friend that are still friends today, we would go sit in her office when we had a break in or schedule and didn't have anything to do and just sat with her. And she was always so open. I don't believe she was my advisor, but she helped me out a whole lot.

Leslie shared similar sentiment:

“I stayed in touch with [director] and definitely built a good relationship there....She just seemed like she really cared about helping you to be successful and helping you to plan well.”

Fred reflected positive sentiments:

“Well I love her, I really do. She was always my favorite. She was just so easy to talk to.”

With regard to other faculty members in the department, all participants mentioned at least two others by name. When asked about their relationship with other faculty, responses were characterized by descriptors of positive, but not close, relationships.

Brenda reflects on her perception of faculty:

“I didn't really have a strong relationship with them...I would talk to some of them from time to time, after class. But knowing me really well - I wouldn't say that they did.”

Leslie also felt positively about encounters with faculty:

All of them were very understanding and great. I really didn't have a problem with any of my professors. You know some - you kind of enjoy their classes a little bit more (laughter) than others, but I did...I did learn a lot from every professor I had and a couple of the ones I still feel like I could talk to if I was confused about something or needed help with something...like [professor] I feel

like I had a better relationship with her and understood...like she could help me with different things, especially if I wasn't understanding something.

Rose mentioned intentional efforts to seek out faculty:

And I really for the most part enjoyed all of my teachers. And then I would make sure to talk to them because I'm not the best test-taker, so I'd always make an effort to find out what I could do to study. Then really, my last two years of college, except the CLD classes were bigger, at least all my FAM classes, and then you have some of the teachers multiple times. I think they would all know me by first name. I don't know. I really liked all of my teachers.

A final theme emerging in this category was about a lack of connection to other students in the department. Students expressed a desire to have more of a relationship with other students both during the program and after they graduated. This issue could be a direct result of the frequency of student transfers into the department. A lack of seniority, as a result of low freshman enrollment who stay in the department four years is linked to low prevalence of student organizations and alumni groups. Student feelings on this matter are reflected in the following statements. Laura and Brenda, respectively, shared their thoughts:

“I wish that we had more of an alumni group.”

...Get more involved on campus with your classmates, people you have class with...I had friends that were in the same major and we had classes together and stuff like that but I would've liked to have gotten involved with other people too. So get involved with that; I think it's definitely beneficial....the students should take more initiative to get involved and then maybe the program and people involved with the program could organize some things too.

Ambiguity/Lack of Direction

An emerging theme from five of the six interviews that was not anticipated from the research questions was that of ambiguity about FAM or a lack of direction from the department on how to utilize it. During the interviews in which this came up, the theme of ambiguity repeated itself several times throughout the course of discussion. This theme

was represented both through graduates' account of their own feelings and their perception of the feelings of friends and family members. When speaking about advice he would give to incoming freshmen in the department, Fred said:

They have to realize that they're going to have to explain this major to a lot of people, because a lot of people don't know what it is. Well what can you do with that?...I would say I spent a lot of time when people would ask.

Brenda and Leslie, respectively, both specifically discussed how the sense of ambiguity arose for them and their families while they were searching for a job:

My dad wanted to make sure that I would choose a major that would allow me to support myself. So when I told him about FAM it was - he was kind of concerned, because it was new to him, he didn't know a lot about it. And he wanted to know "Ok, well what kind of jobs can you get with that sort of major?"

My family...my parents did not understand what FAM was. They were like, "What are you gonna do with that?" But they were supportive, my mom was supportive especially.

Brenda mentioned the challenges she faced in describing the major to family:

My dad was kinda like, "I don't really understand why I'm paying for you to go to school, what are you gonna do with this?" But especially once I got the internship and I was able to relate it back to real life, like I talked about, he kind of understood and umm, and my parents were supportive of my job I just told them I need to get my foot in the door somewhere.

Other ways the theme of ambiguity emerged was in discussions of what type of job to get with a FAM major:

Rose reflected on experiences of her peers:

It's been a while. I guess family studies is such a broad field and you're open to so many positions...it's such a broad job. Like the people I graduated with; some of them work at a bank as a finance director, some of them work at a school like me, I started in the court system. Some have their MSW...all over the map, yeah. Which is good but it doesn't necessarily cater to details of all those little things to prepare you.

Fred stressed a need to be focused:

So I think family sciences is very area specific. And I think its good if you know exactly what you want to do and if you plan on going to grad school....It's good to know a direction you want to go but it's ok if you don't.

Tera focused more on terminology aspects of the major name:

You probably know, Family Sciences had been called a lot of different things throughout the years. So once I would say Family & Consumer Sciences they would kind of get what you were talking about and what you could do with it.

Rose also reflected on lack of directions of how to use the major:

“My parents were like, ‘Ok, you’ve picked this degree and you graduated, what are you going to do?’ And after I realized I wasn’t gonna get the extension job I was like, ‘I don’t know!’.”

Transferring Majors and Awareness of FAM

Of the six graduates interviewed, five had transferred to FAM from a different department or major at the University of Kentucky and one was a nontraditional student who decided what she wanted to study after obtaining some work experience.

Majors/departments that graduates transferred from were: business, elementary education, interior design, hospitality and management and communications. Reasons discussed for the switch were centered on themes of a desire to help and work with people. Graduates also reported themes of a good fit in the FAM department after switching over. Another emerging theme was acquiring knowledge of FAM; of those who transferred, all reported finding out in different ways about FAM.

Leslie began her student career as an elementary education major and switched to FAM shortly after beginning college. She remembers experiencing dislike for her education classes and difficulty seeing herself as a teacher. Leslie found out about FAM through her academic advisor in the College of Education:

She [advisor] said, “There’s a couple of options. And one of the more popular majors that’s kind of coming around is FAM. And she gave me like the list

(points to list) kind of like that and told me the classes you take. So I looked over that and I met with the director [of FAM].

In comparison to her previous major, Leslie felt FAM was a better fit for her career goals:

...ended up switching my major. To FAM. And then, and then, we were just talking about different career opportunities and she mentioned extension. And I looked into it, and I was really interested in it, just the whole aspect of in extension you get to be a teacher, and educator but you don't have to do lesson plans all the time.

Rose, now a service coordinator, started out with an undeclared major, then switched to a communications major in her sophomore year; she felt an interest in switching her major because she had not decided on a career path in communications.

She found out about FAM through a boyfriend she was dating at the time:

Then it was actually the end of my sophomore year. The guy that I was dating at the time, he was taking a FAM class and I was reading over his syllabus. And I can't remember but it was, but I remember thinking, "This sounds really, really interesting". And he's like, "You know that's like a degree they have." So I kind of did some research on that, and I think I got one of the pamphlets that says what kind of job you could have and I just really liked that it was working with people, kind of the non-profit stuff. And I probably talked with the director someone.

Brenda, now a county extension agent, felt dissatisfied in her interior design major and switched to FAM during her sophomore year. The theme of a desire to help others recurs in Brenda's discussion of her decision to major in FAM. Her discussion also exemplifies themes of FAM being a good fit and finding out about the major in an indirect way:

I wanted to do something that would allow me to work with people, that would equip me to work with people and help people on more of a direct basis rather than just designing a building and never getting to build a relationship with those people or never getting to help them in a meaningful way. And the way that I found FAM, I was just looking online at the UK website and reading descriptions of different majors and that one sounded appealing to me. And I ended up staying because I really liked the professors just really, they seemed passionate about

what they were teaching, they seemed to be very knowledgeable, they seemed to have good backgrounds in what they were teaching.

Fred began as a hospitality and management major and then transferred to FAM; both majors are housed within the school of Human Environmental Sciences, and this is how he found out about FAM. Fred reported a desire to switch majors on a basis similar to Brenda and Leslie: having unhappiness in his former major and inability to envision himself in a related career.

I think that was part curriculum and I was working at a restaurant at the same time and I was like, I don't really want to do this for the rest of my life. Working in a restaurant really opens your eyes to a lot of things. I wouldn't say it wasn't a good major; it just wasn't really for me in the moment.

Tera's discussion of her switch to FAM involved similar themes. She was unhappy in her major and heard of FAM through her academic advisor:

I entered in as a business student and I didn't want to take calculus. So I went to my advisor and he was like, "You're doing really well in your family studies classes, why don't you go over there and talk to them about options?" And I did and I ended up transferring and finishing up.

Related to this theme of switching majors is the implicit need for more clear marketing for the FAM major. In the narratives above, all five graduates had been at UK for at least one year before finding out about the FAM major and even then only found out about it after they were already discontent in their former major. At that time, the major was discovered through a variety of measures (academic advisor, boyfriend, etc). Thus, it seems more likely the major is receiving attention through word-of-mouth publicity than advertising ploys or informational sessions.

Graduate School

All six of the graduates interviewed made some mention of graduate school. Two were already enrolled in graduate courses, at the time of the interview; two were

beginning to contemplate where to apply and in what type of program, and two viewed it as a distant, but likely goal. This theme was not anticipated from the research question, but was clearly an important topic, as each graduate brought it up. Tera, who at the time of the study was about to begin a graduate program in counseling, spoke of her motivation for pursuing a master's degree:

I don't know. It gives you some different opportunities. If I'd like to be at higher pay scale, I need a master's. It's hard to believe I've been out of school all these years. Graduating in 2007, no. I would've never thought that I'd be interested in going back. I thought I'd done my time and I was done. Yeah, I never thought I'd be interested in going back. I thought about it several different times but I just hadn't decided on a focus.

Leslie was taking graduate courses in FAM at the time of the interview. Her primary motivation, like Tera, was for job advancement and she shared her thoughts on graduate school as well:

Extension does encourage it, I think you have to get 12 hours toward your Masters in 5 years or something like that, and then there is a pay increase, as soon as you get your Masters, I think there's a raise, another bracket of income. And I just like to learn, I appreciate things more, I think when I'm in school I get different perspectives on things, and umm, it kinda opens my eyes a little bit more and so I just enjoyed going to school, even though it is a lot of work. It makes me appreciate the people I work with more; it opens my eyes and helps me understand their situations.

Brenda reported uncertainty about graduate school in her future:

Brenda: I did want to go into counseling, but I knew that I would have to go into....Well I would definitely have to get my masters after that, after getting my bachelor's. But that was the mindset I had, especially when I switched into FAM, going into school counseling or something like that. So....

Researcher: Ok. So you kind of changed your mind it sounds like?

Brenda: Well I don't know, I mean I still don't know completely what I want to do with my whole career, but umm I don't know, maybe at some pint I'll do that, but I'm not 100% sure, I could stick with this.

Fred also reported feelings of uncertainty about graduate school:

I know that's it's something that I should really go on and do while I'm here because I'm an employee and I can save some money. The thing is, I don't really know what I want to do, which path. I just need to spend some time and research and see. I really do like this job here and it does have room for growth, I just don't know exactly where I want to go yet.

Preparation for the Workplace

The theme of whether or not graduates were prepared for the workplace after graduation was one of general preparedness in terms of curriculum, as discussed above.

A theme of unpreparedness emerged when graduates talked about more technical and logistical aspects of their transition to employment. Leslie shares her experiences with this theme:

One of the things that I felt like I wasn't prepared for was my first year of employment. I didn't really, I had the knowledge and everything, but I didn't know what to expect in way. I kind of, umm I don't know in that HES 400 class they kind of told you that your first year of work kind of sets your future....I just remember someone saying that....so my first day of actual "work" work with extension I was kind of overwhelmed like "I don't wanna mess up!" So I maybe wasn't prepared for maybe the first day – first year of work and stuff like that – the real world. Even though I had real world experience I still had support from the school. I don't know, I just felt like I was kind of on my own a little bit.

Tera: Team building in a different learning environment. Because that is something you're forced to do whenever you're working with anybody because you have to work with other people and learning personality types, and having to deal with hierarchy and politics within the office. I don't know.

Researcher: Something you don't necessarily get prepared for.

Tera: Yes, enough. And maybe that's something that can be touched on more.

Graduates also seemed to be unprepared for the time and energy it took them to find a job. Rose, now working as a service coordinator, discussed having five different jobs over the course of two years before accepting her current position. She shared a story about her job-hunting experience:

...Lexington is just kind of over-saturated, and maybe that's part of the problem I was having applying for jobs. Because I was applying for a bunch of things, but just either not hearing back. Or, I don't know, I felt like the jobs I was applying

for, maybe minimum wage was the starting off salary or something. So I just felt like it was hard to find a job I was qualified for.

Leslie recounted the experience in the eight months between college graduation and starting her job in extension, during which she worked as a nanny:

It was...it was frustrating. I got really frustrated. Especially when I graduated and my mom was like "we need to have a graduation party" And I'm like " Mom I don't wanna have a graduation party, because, I didn't have a job and I didn't want people asking like "What are you gonna do?" "Oh December that's really, early, I'm sure I'll find something by May." It... I mean I don't know, things just didn't happen....In May when I finally graduated I was like "Ok its gonna happen, I'll just do this nannying job, its work right now"

Tera shared a similar experience with nannying for six months before finding her job with the court system:

I wasn't working when I graduated. I was working up until last semester of my senior year when my parents let me quit work and discovered I was a better student. So when I graduated I wasn't even doing retail work and I had a month left on my lease and my parents said, "Either find something to do or come home." And I didn't want to go home, so I found a babysitting job that I worked for that month, and then it ended up being a live-in nanny position. And then from there I ended up applying for different things, interviewing for different things. Like that was probably the start of the downfall of the economy, so it was that time when it was getting hard to find a job with just a bachelor's.

Fred remembers his experience working two jobs before finding his job as a financial aid counselor:

I had two jobs - I worked at movie store in my hometown; that's a family business; I've actually been there since I was 16...worked both of those places and then just did the job search. Applied for a lot of jobs...It was frustrating at times. I'm sure you've heard this, but people will say "You don't have enough experience" and how do I get experience without you giving me a chance? So that was frustrating.

Family Relationships

Two central themes emerged with regards to family relationships: 1) feelings of support and 2) feelings of challenges. Feelings of challenges are primarily reflected in

terms of difficulties describing the major and job options to family members and is described in the above section about ambiguity. Thus, this section will focus on positive feelings of support from family members were discussed as an influential factor to success in the transition from college graduation to the workplace for most graduates.

Rose mentioned support from several sources: friends, family and boyfriend:

I've always had a really good support system. I was in AOPi, right across the street. So all my friends there were really supportive, and then my parents....we really hit it off, we've always gotten along and he's [boyfriend always been really supportive, even – when I met him was kind of when I'd gone through my job struggles. So he's been a really good supporter. And a lot of it, I never wanted to give up, but I just really wanted a job, not to impress him, but be like, "My girlfriend's jobless." It was an extra little kick. He's always really supported everything that I've wanted to do, and he's interested in my work, so that's been good....guess my parents have always been very supportive. My grandma, I always tell her everything. I guess just kind of all my close friends.

Tera spoke specifically of her parents and a close friend who she met in the FAM department:

They're both really, really proud of me. My mom has two bachelor's and a master's degree and then my dad has a doctorate. He's a professor. But I was the only one of the girls to go to college and finish. I think Tina started college but she didn't finish. So they're very supportive, very proud. They paid for my undergrad, they were helpful with my master's. They've been good about that...I've had really good family support outside of my parents too. My grandparents were always supportive.

We took almost every class in family studies together after we met each other and we would do our schedule around each other and when we would have paper we would go to one another's house to write together. Separate papers, but we would switch laptops and read the other's. That was really beneficial. And she's encouraged me outside as far as finding a job.

Fred mentioned his family as being a factor in his decision to become a FAM major:

I have a huge family. I'm number 7 of 8. Lots of nieces and nephews and aunts and uncles and all that. We've always been the type of people who were there to

help you no matter what. So I would say that's part of what enticed me to this major, just that in general definitely had a factor.

Like Rose, Leslie spoke of the importance of the support from her parents and boyfriend:

They were supportive, my mom was supportive especially...But especially once I got the internship and I was able to relate it back to real life, like I talked about, he kind of understood an umm, and my parents were supportive of my job I just told them I need to get my foot in the door somewhere. I didn't really care where I was going, you know I wanted to be in KY, but I didn't really care where. Umm, and so they were very supportive of my extension position. And even now I've had homesickness bouts during my first year, you know...But they've been very supportive and helped me through it, especially my mom. And my boyfriend was very supportive, he you know, he understands. He got into both U of L and UK last year, this is his first year. He got the notice in December of last year and I had been working for two months in Ashland and so he decided to go to UK...So it would be 2 hours instead of 3 hours, exactly. So he was supportive in that way too and I think it's helped me in my job especially. Helped me to be a better...I feel like if you're not happy in your personal life, you're not happy in your school or work life either.

In addition to support, there was also an emerging theme of family struggles coinciding with the graduates' experiences in school or the transition to work. Each graduate who spoke of a struggle also appeared to perceive benefit of the struggle to his or her personal growth as a student and/or professional.

Fred shared that his father had passed away a year prior to the time of the interview:

Fred: And then my dad passing away. Hospice care was involved and I commend them a lot for what they do. I guess that kind of goes along with the whole helping others.

Researcher: Yeah. I'm sorry to hear about the loss of your dad.

Fred: Yeah. It was rough, but he's better off.

Researcher: It sounds like that happened around the time you started this job.

Fred: It was three weeks before.

Researcher: Wow, that's really hard.

Fred: That was tough. I almost didn't come to the interview because my dad was in the hospital and I was like, I don't know if I can do this.

Researcher: Yeah.

Fred: But I'm glad I came and he would've wanted me to come.

Researcher: That's great it ended up working out.

Fred: And that was actually one of the last things I told him was that I got the job. So that was cool.

Laura remembers the support she received from her husband during the program, followed by the devastation of their divorce shortly after:

My husband was very supportive, he had his own business....And that's when he told me he thought we should just get a divorce and we should be friends...It was a month shy of our 29th anniversary and he moved up there and I guess it was just one more shock to my system

When describing her decision to enroll in the program, Laura mentions the death of her son as a motivator:

“And I did that and when I left Asbury, there was a tragedy, my son passed away. So that's when I decided to go back to college and do what I wanted to do.”

Laura also mentioned strong support from friends as an important factor in her experiences both as a student and employee:

And Ellen, I wish I could've introduced you to her better. She was amazing when I came here. She (laughter) one of the first days she said, “You'll have to take so-and-so to the bathroom every day before they get on the bus. And I get sick at vomit and I was just thinking, “There's no way I can do this, I cant, you don't understand.” And she was like, Yes you can” So I took this girl to the restroom, and you know, she had a diaper on. You had to do things that I was never – a middle school, you know, but I did it! And I'll never forget Ellen saying ,”Look at that Ben would be so proud of you!” And I remember thinking, “Ben wouldn't believe I ever did it”... Things like that that people helped me to step outside what I was normal with and encouraged me, and we'd laugh about things. You know, laughter's people helped me to step outside what I was normal with and encouraged me, and we'd laugh about things. You know, laughter's a wonderful thing.

Summary of Major Themes

Educational institutions often give their students an opportunity to evaluate individual courses and teaching at the end of a semester. However, it is not as common for students in a program to be given an exit survey upon graduation, allowing them to provide a comprehensive evaluation of the program as whole, compared to an isolated review of an individual course. This interview process allowed graduates' an opportunity to provide such a review and consider how experiences translated into the workplace. Additionally, the interview process allowed graduates an opportunity to share their experiences, while reflecting on their transition period and the program as a whole.

The first theme centered on courses and curriculum. Most graduates felt positively about the classes they took during their time in the program and specifically felt that concepts learned were referred to in the workplace. Several specific classes were mentioned repeatedly as being useful to work. Despite the positive theme, graduates were also able to take a critical approach to curricular examination, offer suggestions about courses that were not useful or courses that needed to be added; however, such suggestions were outweighed by the positive feelings.

A second theme emerging in discussions of transition to the workplace was general preparation outside of the curriculum. Graduates frequently had skewed expectations of work life and the ease of finding a job. It is important to distinguish this lack of preparation from a lack of academic preparation; general preparedness refers to workplace relationships and routine.

A third theme involved the importance of main connections and networking both during college and the transition to the workplace. The terms connections and networking

were used interchangeably, but carried the same meaning. All participants emphasized the importance of connections to success in the workplace and some expressed regret they did not network sooner. Also included in this theme was building relationships with faculty members in the department. Graduates reflected on the importance of their connection to the director during their time in the program; they reported a less strong but still valuable connection to other faculty, with some expressing regret that they were not closer with other faculty or other students in the department.

A theme that developed during the segment of the interviews about transition to the workplace was one of ambiguity about the FAM major. Both graduates and their families had trouble understanding what FAM was, when first introduced to it. Also, the ambiguity was present in career selection. Graduates expressed that they felt uncertain about exactly how and where to utilize their degree.

Another theme that emerged was transferring into the department. Five of the six graduates interviewed shared they had begun their student career in a department different than FAM and transferred into FAM, commonly in their junior year. Along with this theme was the presence of unhappiness in the first major and increased happiness in FAM. Also related to this theme was an issue of awareness; graduates had no knowledge of the FAM program before making a decision to transfer, at which point they were informed by varying sources.

During various segments of each interview, another developing theme was centered on graduate school. It became clear that pursuing education beyond a bachelor's degree is a natural pathway for a FAM graduate. Each of the six participants was in

pursuit of a graduate degree or was contemplating the idea of getting one; the field of study mentioned varied but were all related to a helping profession.

A final emerging theme was one about support from significant relationships such as family, friends and mentors. When asked about family relationships, graduates generally reported feelings of family encouragement. The theme of ambiguity felt by families will remain separate from this theme, as it was discussed distinctly separate from the support during interviews. Parents were most frequently cited as supporters, followed by friends and significant others. In addition, support from mentors was discussed as significant. Some graduates talked about siblings, and others about more distant family members, such as grandparents and cousins. The support was perceived by graduates to be beneficial to their time in school and transition to the workplace. A codebook of major themes and their definitions can be found in Table 2 (Appendix F).

Chapter Five

Discussion

This chapter will focus on implications of the findings and discuss how they relate to each of the four research questions. Furthermore, findings will be related to the theoretical framework of the study and preceding literature review. Implications will be addressed, followed by limitations of the study. Finally, the chapter will end with the conclusion of the study.

Findings Related to the Research Questions

How do graduates generally feel about their program of study?

This question was addressed at several points throughout the interview process. A pattern that was evident in answer to this question was one of optimism. One way in which this research question was answered was through narratives of graduates' experiences transferring into FAM from another department. Most compared and contrasted their feelings about the FAM program to their previous program and in such analyses, positive feelings were apparent and relayed by Leslie and Brenda, respectively:

I just enjoyed the classes, I felt like I could relate to them in different ways, depending on the class....I don't know how to explain it. I just appreciated them more and I felt like I could relate to them a little bit more. I liked the courses. It wasn't like going to school, it was more, it was for fun, really.

"I ended up staying because I really liked the professors just really, they seemed passionate about what they were teaching, they seemed to be very knowledgeable; they seemed to have good backgrounds in what they were teaching."

In addition to such thoughts, graduates generally expressed contentedness in the major they had chosen and jobs to which it had led them. A primary way positive feelings about the program were conveyed was in sharing perceptions of classes and a secondary

way was in describing characteristics of the program director and other faculty. One participant ascertained his feelings about the program:

Researcher: Looking back, so you think you would have chosen the same major?
Fred: Yeah, I think so. I definitely would have.

How well is curriculum preparing students for employment? What preparation is lacking?

The first part of this section will address the second part of the research question about preparation that is lacking. An issue that was common with regard to unpreparedness was the lack of sense graduates had about what type of job they were prepared for, as discussed with the ambiguity theme. Graduates commonly framed this issue as confusion with the major being too broad. Rose described her struggle taking a job as a community director that she was unsure if she was qualified for:

I guess what I feel like is a very broad degree. So I think that's one thing I struggled with going out. Because if you're a teacher, you're just going to apply at schools to be a teacher. With this, its kind of in the beginning I was a little confused because I was like, "What exactly am I totally qualified for?" And taking that community director job I was like, "Oh I can hopefully do this." No, not ready for that at all.

Another way in that this issue was expressed was as a lack of direction of how to utilize the major and contribute to the field. Fred described his experience with the way implementation of a FAM major was conveyed to him:

I think it could've been portrayed better and maybe more information given. I know they provided an internships list so that gave you lots of ideas and was helpful. There's just so many things that tie in with the major I don't know how – maybe a list or something. Maybe in the intro class they could go more into career opportunities and stuff you could do with the major.

Leslie describes lack of preparation in terms of what it was like to have full-time job in the field by saying:

“College is a different world... its a lot different when its 40 hours a week... I kinda felt that I was pushed out a little bit.”

Related to this idea was the frustration and struggle that five out of six participants discussed feeling during their job search after graduation; this was something curriculum in the program decidedly did not prepare them for.

In addressing the first part of the question about how well curriculum prepared students, a clear theme was that graduates felt quite prepared for working and interacting with people on a daily basis. All of the six participants shared personal narratives about working with children, parents, the elderly, clients, consumers, co-workers, etc., and distinctly linked their skills in this area to concepts learned in their program of study.

Five of the six graduates discussed working with children and youth through their place of employment (county extension, the court system, public schools and a university). When discussing their work with youth, each one of these participants referenced FAM 357: *Adolescent Development* as a pivotal point of preparation that they refer to on a regular basis in their work. Another form of preparation that was distinctly linked to the curriculum was practice of principles learned in FAM 502: *Families and Children Under Stress*. This course was specifically cited as helpful in preparation for working with single parent and low-income families.

Finally, the practical experience offered by FAM 499: *Internship in Family Sciences* was found by graduates to be helpful. Skills learned in this course applicable in translation to the job field were working with the general public and supervisors, balancing workload and learning to interact with others in an engaging way.

In what ways do individuals' family relationships impact their transition from education to employment?

Participants seemed to have slight difficulty conceptualizing how their relationship to family and/or significant others specifically related to their job preparation. However, each participant seemed to agree that support from others was somehow beneficial to his or her experiences. Most support was expressed from a distance; with the exception of one participant who was married during her time in the program, all participants lived over an hour away from their family and significant others during the program but expressed frequent visits and phone calls to loved ones.

In transitioning from education to employment, support from significant others also seemed to be impactful. Three of the five participants who did not have a job upon graduation, shared that they moved back to their hometowns for a period of time, where they received guidance and backing from their parents while applying for jobs. The two of these five who chose to stay in their college town while job-hunting described frequent contact with family members during which their searching process was discussed.

In talking about the experience after their job was acquired, participants mentioned feelings of pride and confirmation from their loved ones; this appeared to be an important factor to them in making their transition. Graduates found value in being able to share their experiences during the time of change with those that cared for them and vice versa. Particular individuals mentioned were parents, friends, mentors, grandparents, cousins, siblings and significant others.

One participant offered some exception to this theme when describing support felt by her husband during the program that ended when she graduated; he surprised her by

asking for a divorce. She shared feeling crushed by the weight of such a setback that coincided with the transition to a new job in the school system. Though her narrative was an exception to the general theme, the loss of the support she so clearly grieved as she began her new job solidified the perceived need for family support.

In what way does faculty involvement influence graduates' perception of education experience?

The answer to the question about faculty relationships emerged under the major theme of connections and networking. Due to the distinct thematic difference in discussions of relationships with the director vs. all other faculty, they will be discussed separately in this section, beginning with faculty outside of the director. Relationships to faculty were discussed in several ways. First, participants spoke of the strength of their connection to faculty both during and after the program. During the program, connections were present with faculty and discussed as being helpful to the participants' learning experience and overall influenced their perception in a positive way. This especially seemed to be an important part of being comfortable after a transition into the program. Words used to describe faculty on the whole were: open, great, knowledgeable and understanding.

More specific than the general descriptors of faculty characteristics were descriptors of student relationships with faculty. Relational descriptors (words and phrases) used in interviews were: not really strong, "should've had more, I remember hoping we would get somebody else [as an instructor]. The overall theme that emerged as characteristic of the relationship was distal and temporal. For example, when it came to sustaining relationships with faculty beyond graduation and during transition to the

workplace, such relationships were nonexistent for graduates with the exception of the director. When asked about consulting with faculty during job hunts or for references, no respondents recalled engaging in the first act, while two remembered using the director as a reference, but all respondents were more likely to list past job or internship supervisors. Such a phenomena was reflected in statements such as: “I don’t think I talked to anyone from the faculty or anything like that” or “I didn’t really contact them as much as you think I would.”

The separate theme that emerged in answer to this research question was one of a strong connection to the Director of Undergraduate Studies in the department. Each participant offered a narrative description of their relationship with her, using words and phrases such as: great, my favorite, learned an incredible amount, she really cared. In their narratives, it was clear the director strongly influenced a positive perception of the program and was influential in graduates’ decision to major in FAM. However, like other faculty, overall, most graduates did not report seeking the director out for job references, thought some did report consulting with her about career choices. Overall, it is clear faculty play an important role in influencing the graduates’ perception of their program of study; for the FAM department, faculty primarily influenced perceptions in a positive way.

Findings Related to Theory

This study examined the experience of graduates in the FAM program and their transition to employment through the lens of Glen Elder’s life course perspective and Ludwig von Bertalanffy’s general systems theory. This section will give an overview of findings related to both, beginning with life course perspective, which emphasizes the

historical and social context of individuals' lives, particularly during periods of transition. The theory also takes into account the trajectory of an individual's life over time.

During the interview process, chronological experiences were obtained, frequently beginning with an individual's entrance to college, continuing throughout their time in college (and the FAM program), through their time of transition into employment (where job-hunting was involved) and ending with acquisition and actual transition to the workplace. It is important to consider the contextual factors impacting each of these time periods and what the individual experienced during them.

From the interviews, it was evident that graduating college and obtaining a job was a crucial period in each participant's life course. Such a period was influenced by timing, placement, and linked lives, all crucial components characterizing Elder's life course theory. Timing was important to the transition process of job acquisition. For example, one participant mentioned that she began to apply for jobs at the beginning of the economic recession; a time factor she felt influenced her ability to get a job quickly.

Linked lives across the life course was a vibrantly represented component of the life course perspective throughout the interview process. This was evidenced by examples described within the theme of connections and networking. Each graduate identified at least one (usually more) influential individual who was impactful in his or her journey. The importance of "who you know" as a key to finding a job was stressed. Lives were linked in the form of professional, personal, familial and academic relationships. Having such connections gave graduates the ability to learn of job opportunities otherwise unheard of, open their minds to new ideas and find comfort in down times through such relationships. Additionally, participants were able to enhance

their academic and professional experiences by engaging with those who had more or different experiences than themselves. The concept of linked lives was also connected to placement; graduates were likely to return to their hometown while searching for a job or likely to apply for jobs located close to loved ones.

One participant's experiences were markedly different than the other five; this particular participant was a non-traditional student who completed her degree while in her 40s, while all other participants completed the degree in their 20s. This timing in lives component influenced her ability to make connections and identify a career path more easily than other graduates as a result of her past experience. Furthermore, her later life stage was related to family dynamics; she was the only participant married with a child at the time of degree completion and she perceived this to be influential to her experiences:

I was very intentional when I went there to develop relationships with them [faculty]. Because number one, I was an older student and number two, even though I had worked at a college before and I was familiar with it, UK was a big place and I wanted to be able to get everything out of it that I could and not get lost in the shuffle of everything. There was also at the time, there was an adult education program, an adult evening program for students. It was in the basement across from the registrar's office.

Findings were also related to Bertalanffy's general systems theory, which says that a whole is more than the sum of its parts and characteristics of the whole are not explainable from the characteristics of the isolated parts (Laszlo & Krippner, 1998). The pathway graduates take to the workplace is a process influenced by their personal choices, their program of study and the curriculum it encompassed and professional interactions with potential employers. Graduates, their program of study and places of employment work as a system to help graduates obtain a job. This study focused on graduates' perceptions of interactions between these three entities. Findings indicated that the FAM

program is generally doing a good job of preparing graduates, but that they are not necessarily collaborating. Such a phenomena is evidenced by the discussion about the infrequency with which graduates reach out to their department with help in getting a job after courses have ended. Though it is not realistic to have an expectation these three entities consistently work together in a formal way, it could benefit each individual part if all three had similar understanding of what the other's perceptions and expectations are. Graduates did not clearly mention the need for educational institutions and employers to communicate. However, those employed in specialized fields conveyed a need for the program to cater to such a field. For example, Tera, who had worked as an advocate for children in the court system, discussed a need for more classes that discussed legal issues surrounding families. Generally, graduates mentioned it would be helpful if the program was communicating with employers about what needs were (i.e., what classes would be helpful for a family court specialist).

Findings Related to the Literature Review

Only half of employers are satisfied with their involvement with career development for students during their time in university (Archer & Davison, 2008). Employers' lack of involvement at the university level is a recurring theme in the literature. More extensive graduate-employer interaction before hiring could be helpful. Naturally, there is a demand for graduates to be desirable to employers, but poor communication from employers about these demands (Oria, 2012) has been defined as hypocrisy on their part (Selvadurai, et al., 2012). Findings were consistent with previous literature on the topic of employer-student communication. Only one of the six participants discussed communication with a future/potential employer during their time

in the FAM program outside of FAM 499. A lapse in communication was also evidenced in the ambiguity described by graduates of what type of job to attain. For graduates, any communication with professionals in the field during their studies could have aided this knowledge.

Uses of surveys and questionnaires have shown gaps in employers' and graduates' perspectives in areas of problem solving and decision-making skills (Robinson & Garton, 2008), social interaction (Selvaduri, et al., 2012), work experience (Nunn, 2008) and communication (Holmes, 2013; University of Kentucky, 1996). Findings from the present study that relate to these previous findings were limited. A need to focus on graduate' perspectives, rather than employers' was seen from the literature, so there is not extensive comparable data on the topic. Nonetheless, related findings seen were consistent with other topics in previous literature; some participants in the present study reported limited social interaction during their time in the program that slowly built with increased professional exposure and one participant described employers' messages to him that he needed more work experience; both of these themes were seen in previous literature, (Nunn, 2008).

Additionally, the review of previous literature agreed that while higher education institutions do not control the labour market and cannot guarantee employment outcomes, they could take steps to promote the likelihood that their graduates will gain what may be deemed appropriate employment (Holmes, 2013). Findings from the present study indicated that the FAM program is taking theoretical and conceptual steps to prepare their students for the workplace; this was seen in participants' descriptions of adequate curriculum that promoted preparation. However, related to the issue of ambiguity,

findings indicated that the FAM program does not prepare students with knowledge of what are appropriate employment choices. Findings from this research agreed with the findings of Yorke (2004) that a multi-faceted approach taken in the development of employability, cultivated both inside and outside the formal curriculum, drawn up by universities, and developed in part-time employment sectors or home life would be beneficial to graduating students.

The review of previous literature revealed that students felt that critical questioning and application of the knowledge acquired are seen as fundamental conditions for learning if they are to be successful in the work place (Dahlgren, et al., 2007). Some participants in the current study agreed that more application of knowledge was needed through coursework during their time in the program. An important part of this study was the exploration of curriculum factors in employment preparation, as this was something lacking in previous studies. Through interviews, a deeper understanding of how curriculum impacts employment was gained. Graduates agreed that the curriculum in the FAM program was vital in their transition to the workplace and additions to the curriculum could benefit their transition.

In the literature review, it is discussed that 40% of graduates say their job is not at all related to their major, 22% said their job is related to major, and another 40% believe their job is somewhat related to their major (Stone, Van Horn & Zukin, 2012). Findings from the present study contradicted this; such a contradiction may be an effect of a small sample size, which will be discussed in the limitations section. At the time of the study all of the six participants felt that their job was related to their major and also reported feeling of happiness about such relatedness. Two of the six did admit to wondering when

beginning their jobs if their majors were related, but after saturation in the workplace were able to see that their FAM major did indeed relate to their work.

Finally, in terms of family relationships, previous literature found that social support, particularly family relationships, was important to academic success (Allen, 1999; Townsend, 2010; Jacobi, 1991). Participants in the present study spoke of their support systems as helpful in decision-making and during times of change, rather than specifically helpful academically. The literature review necessitated a need for more exploration of family factors, and findings from this study offered some insight about this.

Implications for Practice and Policy

Findings from this study may help to inform the education system as well as other graduates. The implementation of an outlet for sharing experiences can be an empowering process that has the potential to enhance experiences of future graduates.

Currently, the FAM program does not offer an end of course evaluation for seniors exiting the program. In interviews, it was apparent that graduates had not previously been asked to reflect on their experiences with curriculum and transition to workplace. End of course evaluations are provided, but opportunity to systematically evaluate the program as a whole does not exist. Obtaining such evaluations could be a natural way for the department to receive feedback on graduates' perceptions, thus program effectiveness.

As discussed in the findings sections, a majority of participants discussed a struggle with the broadness of the major and confusion about how to utilize it when launching into the workplace. Students and faculty alike identify academic advising as a factor needing improvement within curriculum (University of Kentucky, 1996).

Participants in the current study did not speak too specifically about their advising, but a resulting solution is that it could be utilized to help students gain a more secure sense of comfort within their major. However, the distinction should be made between academic advising and career counseling.

It is the role of an academic advisor to help determine course load. Through this process, a change that could be made is the inclusion of a very candid conversation with students about career interests that course choices cater towards. The role of an advisor does not go far beyond this. Implementation of career counseling specifically geared toward FAM students could be helpful in improving knowledge, as graduates emphasized a need for understanding work contexts post-graduation. Within such a process, it could be helpful to openly discuss with students the natural frustrations and waiting that come with job-hunting, as this seemed to be something students were unprepared for.

Related to lack of preparation for the reality of job-hunting was the lack of general preparedness for working life. Educational institutions may not be equipped to give students a picture of what work would be like, but it could be useful to have a candid conversation with seniors about the difference between college and full-time work. A possible solution is for students to do a few hours of job shadowing of a profession in which they are interested in being employed.

In further addressing the issues of ambiguity about a major, it could be beneficial for graduates to have interaction with professionals currently working in the field in various types of jobs. Only one of the five participants in the study offered any type of account on an interaction with such professionals. Engaging in such relationships is another method that could help graduates gain a sense of how to develop their

professional identity. Related to this is the lack of community within students once they are in the department. Having relationships with peers in the field could benefit students academically and professionally. Participants mentioned knowledge of a student organization, but none reported taking advantage of it. Emphasizing the benefits of peer involvement to graduates could influence their choice in this area.

Finally, the department should consider an evaluation of the manner in which they recruit students into the department. Graduates reported hearing of the program through advisors, friend, or paper information as upperclassmen. To increase both enrollment and seniority within the department it could be helpful to assess methods in which incoming freshman can be made aware of the FAM department. Participants indicated they felt there was room for improvement in making students aware, but did not offer explicit ideas; instead they generally mentioned informational sessions or better marketing.

Implications for Research

Continuing research is necessary to understand the experiences of graduates in their programs of study as they transition into the workplace. Few longitudinal research studies exist to examine these experiences (Tessema, Ready & Yu, 2012). Though it is helpful to obtain cross-sectional narratives, it is recommended that more longitudinal study be done. Graduates may feel differently about their transitions during the beginning stages of their job than they do after working over time. Similarly, it is important to know if curricular influences have long-lasting effects, or if job experience begins to overshadow academics over time. In longitudinal studies, it would also be helpful to take

into account outcome expectations of students when going into the program, as expectations significantly influence perceptions and contentedness with results.

It is also recommended that a comparative analysis be done both between the FAM program and other programs at the same university and then between UK's FAM program and FAM departments at other universities. Criteria that could be useful for comparison are curriculum, job acquisition and student satisfaction. Such a study could benefit both students and program designers. A comparative analysis could be useful to enrich findings from the present study as well.

Also, specific research to understand the connections of responsibility between graduates, employers and educational institutions is needed (Hennemann & Liefner, 2010). The etiology of why some preparation is lacking is undiscovered and trying to understand perceptions of individual responsibilities and expectations of others' responsibilities is needed. A focus group of representatives from each party could be useful in understanding such concepts.

Limitations

A primary issue concerning limitations of the study was convenience of the sample. Participation was voluntary and based on availability of the participant. Additionally, a sample bias limits the study. A primary finding of the study was that graduates generally felt positively about their program of study. The sample bias infers that graduates who felt positively were more likely to feel positively about their job in the field as well, and thus more likely to volunteer for this study, potentially limiting results. Though interviews were done until data was saturated, the sample population of six is still small, presenting an additional limitation to the study. With any small sample size,

an issue of generalizability is present. Thus, the sample size may not be representative of the FAM alumni population as a whole. Furthermore, the study was specific to one department at one university, meaning that while results may be transferable to other contexts, they are not overly generalizable to them. Also, the gender ratio of the participants was representative of the gender breakdown within the department, so lack of male participation is not included as a limitation.

More generally speaking, qualitative research is limited in that it is focused on perspectives of the participants as understood by the researcher (Marshall & Rossman, 2011). The researcher put forth best efforts to avoid bias in interpretation, but as with any researcher, complete objectivity is unavoidable. The researcher took care to accurately portray participant's experiences from their own perspective. To ensure the most possible accuracy, member checking with participants occurred.

Conclusions

The information gathered through the interviews in this study revealed several phenomena that are consistent with existing research data (Yorke, 2004; Allen, 1999; Townsend, 2010; Jacobi, 1991). Some of the phenomena revealed represented themes that were not already present in the existing literature. For example, issues of ambiguity about chosen major and career path were not a topic in the literature review, nor were challenges within the family during transition points. During the interviews, participants were willing to share detailed information about their experiences and seemed appreciative of the opportunity to reflect on their program as a whole. Although similar patterns and phenomena were present in the six experiences, each participant had their own unique perspective on the program and journey to employment.

Each participant was willing to be open about the ups and downs of his or her personal, professional and academic life, which made for rich interview experiences. For many participants, the transition from education to employment was a fresh one, giving graduates the ability to give quite detailed accounts of events that transpired and feelings evoked. It was clear at some points participants were unsure of how to answer questions, likely from a lack of contact with such inquiries. Frequently, participants would respond with, “That’s a good question,” implying they had never been asked before.

It was obvious participants felt fondly towards the FAM program and were genuinely interested in helping families and individuals through their work. In describing their work with families and individuals, several of the graduates displayed a sense of passion. The benefit of a major that allows them to transition into such a field of work was clear, though increased knowledge of available types of jobs is needed. Despite a passion and desire to know what type of job they could get, feelings of desperation when unable to immediately find a job were conveyed. Normative stress was present in graduates who did not have a job when they graduated. It could have been helpful if they had been told to expect a lag in their transition.

The emerging themes about classes, connections, transferring, graduate school and family support were unmistakable and consistent across interviews. Making connections with other people at all levels is a crucial component to a successful transition to the workplace for graduates and class work was overall relatable to job work. Though the relationship to the Director of Undergraduate Studies in the department was consistently of good quality, it could benefit students to make deeper connections with other faculty in the department. Participants seemed to be overlooking what could be a

valuable resource in finding a job by neglecting to develop deeper relationships with faculty. The underlying cause of this issue, though likely a combination of passiveness on both the part of faculty and students, was not clear from the interviews. Interviewing faculty members in future research could prove helpful.

The qualitative nature of the study allowed for thorough and descriptive thoughts about experiences. Future research could further unpack these phenomena by focusing on perceptions of employers, students and educational institutions within one system to gain a comprehensive picture of pathways to employment. With implementation of more focused career counseling and end of program evaluations, the department could potentially be strengthened. The detailed accounts of these six individuals, though limited, are still relatable to the research literature as a whole and offer valuable insight into graduates' experiences.

Appendix A

Key Terms

Curriculum: the set of courses offered by and educational institution (Webster's new world college dictionary, 2011)

Employability: a set of achievements – skills, understandings and personal attributes – that make graduates more likely to gain employment and be successful in their chosen occupations, which benefits themselves in the workforce, the community and the economy (Yorke, 2004)

Employment: contractual relationship between two parties in which a service is exchanged for payment; condition of having paid work (Webster's new world college dictionary, 2011)

Expectation: A strong belief that something will happen or be the case in the future (Webster's new world college dictionary, 2011)

Higher education: education beyond the secondary level, especially education provided by a college or university (Webster's new world college dictionary, 2011)

Job: a specific duty, role, or function (Webster's new world college dictionary, 2011)

Motivation: drive or incentive (Webster's new world college dictionary, 2011)

Normative life transition: expectable and predictable based on biological, psychological or social norms (Walsh, 2012)

Satisfaction: fulfillment of a need or want (Webster's new world college dictionary, 2011)

Significant relationships: any meaningful bond an individual has with another person (Webster's new world college dictionary, 2011)

System: complex whole formed from interrelated parts (Laszlo & Krippner, 1998)

Transition: turning points in a life trajectory when an individual takes on new tasks (Walsh, 2012)

Appendix B IRB Consent



Office of Research Integrity
IRB, IACUC, RDRC
315 Kinkead Hall
Lexington, KY 40506-0057
859 257-9428
fax 859 257-8995
www.research.uky.edu/ori/

EXEMPTION CERTIFICATION

MEMO: Katelyn Hendricks
Funkhouser Bldg. Rm. 315
PI phone #: (304)395-2824

FROM: Institutional Review Board
c/o Office of Research Integrity

SUBJECT: Exemption Certification for Protocol No. 13-0868-X4B

DATE: December 5, 2013

On November 26, 2013, it was determined that your project entitled, *Graduates' Perspectives on Transition from College Graduation to the Workplace: A Qualitative Approach*, meets federal criteria to qualify as an exempt study.

Because the study has been certified as exempt, you will not be required to complete continuation or final review reports. However, it is your responsibility to notify the IRB prior to making any changes to the study. Please note that changes made to an exempt protocol may disqualify it from exempt status and may require an expedited or full review.

The Office of Research Integrity will hold your exemption application for six years. Before the end of the sixth year, you will be notified that your file will be closed and the application destroyed. If your project is still ongoing, you will need to contact the Office of Research Integrity upon receipt of that letter and follow the instructions for completing a new exemption application. It is, therefore, important that you keep your address current with the Office of Research Integrity.

For information describing investigator responsibilities after obtaining IRB approval, download and read the document "PI Guidance to Responsibilities, Qualifications, Records and Documentation of Human Subjects Research" from the Office of Research Integrity's Guidance and Policy Documents web page [<http://www.research.uky.edu/ori/human/guidance/htm#PIresp>]. Additional information regarding IRB review, federal regulations, and institutional policies may be found through ORI's web site [<http://www.research.uky.edu/ori>]. If you have questions, need additional information, or would like a paper copy of the above mentioned document, contact the Office of Research Integrity at (859) 257-9428.

Appendix C

Consent to Participate in a Research Study

Graduates' Perspectives on Transition from College Graduation to the Workplace: A

Qualitative Approach

WHY ARE YOU BEING INVITED TO TAKE PART IN THIS RESEARCH?

You are being invited to take part in a research study about the transition from education to employment. You are being invited to take part in this research study because you are a graduate of the University of Kentucky's Family Sciences Department. If you volunteer to take part in this study, you will be one of about 8 people to do so.

WHO IS DOING THE STUDY?

The person in charge of this study is Katelyn B. Hendricks of the University of Kentucky Department of Family Sciences. Dr. Donna Smith is guiding her in this research.

WHAT IS THE PURPOSE OF THIS STUDY?

The purpose of this study is to learn about experiences of graduates in their transition from graduation to work, including what was helpful and what areas could use improvement.

ARE THERE REASONS WHY YOU SHOULD NOT TAKE PART IN THIS STUDY?

All participation in the study is voluntary. As far as known by the researcher, there are no unique circumstances that would indicate you should not participate.

WHERE IS THE STUDY GOING TO TAKE PLACE AND HOW LONG WILL IT LAST?

The research procedures will be conducted at a meeting space agreed upon by the researcher and participant. You will need to come to the site one time during the study. That meeting will take approximately 60-90 minutes.

WHAT WILL YOU BE ASKED TO DO?

As a participant of the study, you will be asked to share your experiences from your transition from college graduation to employment. The researcher will have some predetermined questions about your experience. Participants may choose to skip questions if desired.

WILL YOU BENEFIT FROM TAKING PART IN THIS STUDY?

There is no guarantee that you will get any benefit from taking part in this study. However, some people have experienced satisfaction and the feeling of making a difference when sharing personal experiences. Your willingness to take part may help society as a whole better understand this research topic.

DO YOU HAVE TO TAKE PART IN THE STUDY?

If you decide to take part in the study, it should be because you really want to volunteer. You will not lose any benefits or rights you would normally have if you choose not to volunteer. You can stop at any time during the study and still keep the benefits and rights you had before volunteering.

WHAT WILL IT COST YOU TO PARTICIPATE?

There are no costs associated with taking part in the study.

WILL YOU RECEIVE ANY REWARDS FOR TAKING PART IN THIS STUDY?

You will not receive any rewards or payment for taking part in the study.

WHO WILL SEE THE INFORMATION THAT YOU GIVE?

We will make every effort to keep confidential all research records that identify you to the extent allowed by law.

Your information will be combined with information from other people taking part in the study. When we write about the study to share it with other researchers, we will write about the combined information we have gathered. You will not be personally identified in these written materials. You will be given a pseudo-name in data analysis and your name will not be associated with any information you provide. We may publish the results of this study; however, we will keep your name and other identifying information private. We will make every effort to prevent anyone who is not on the research team from knowing that you gave us information, or what that information is. We will keep private all research records that identify you to the extent allowed by law. However, there are some circumstances in which we may have to show your information to other people. For example, the law may require us to show your information to a court or to tell authorities if you report information about a child being abused or if you pose a danger to yourself or someone else.

Interviews will be audio recorded upon your consent. Both audio recordings and paper copies of interview information will be kept into a secure file behind a locked door. Only the researcher will have access to the materials. If you do not wish to be audio recorded, please notify the researcher.

CAN YOUR TAKING PART IN THE STUDY END EARLY?

Appendix D

Summary of Participant Characteristics

Name	Gender	Age	Race	Year Graduated	Job Title	Previous Major
Brenda*	Female	24	African-American	2011	County Extension Agent	Interior Design
Leslie*	Female	24	Caucasian	2012	County Extension Agent	Education
Laura*	Female	53	Caucasian	2010	Family Resource Coordinator	N/A
Rose*	Female	25	Caucasian	2011	Service Coordinator	Communications
Fred*	Male	24	Caucasian	2012	Financial Aid Counselor	Hospitality and Management
Tera*	Female	28	Caucasian	2007	Family Resource Coordinator	Business

3

³ * Pseudonyms were given to protect participant's confidentiality; names used in the manuscript are not participant's real names.

Appendix E Course Guide

College of Agriculture, Food and Environment School of Human Environmental Sciences

FAM

Family Sciences

FAM 251 PERSONAL AND FAMILY FINANCE.

(3)

Management of personal and family financial resources throughout the lifespan. A study of individual and family finances as related to planning, credit, savings, investment, insurance, taxes, housing costs, transportation costs, retirement and estate planning.

FAM 253 HUMAN SEXUALITY: DEVELOPMENT, BEHAVIOR AND ATTITUDES.

(3)

An introductory survey of human sexuality including gender, love and intimacy, sexual expression and variation, sexual orientation, contraception, pregnancy and birth, sexually transmitted infections, sexual coercion, and sex in society. FAM 253 is a University Studies Program Course. Prereq: Three hours in social or behavioral science.

FAM 254 LIFE COURSE HUMAN DEVELOPMENT.

(3)

An introduction to the basic principles of human development through the life course of the individual from conception to death, common life transitions, and social changes shape people's lives from birth to death. Roles of family, school, peers, and work will also be examined in relation to human development. Emphasis will be placed on the general theories of human development and their relation to the life course.

FAM 350 CONSUMER ISSUES.

(3)

An in-depth study of consumer issues, rights, and responsibilities. An examination of how individual and societal decisions affect quality of life, including consumer safety, and the interactions of consumption, health, law, government regulations and the economy. Consumer education and financial literacy will also be emphasized.

***FAM 352 ISSUES IN FAMILY SCIENCES.**

(3)

The scientific study of the family. Topics covered will include the important theoretical frameworks in family sciences, historical trends in marriage and family life, gender role theory, family life cycle theory, parenthood, communication, economics of family life, family wellness, capacity building, resource sustainability, integrative elements in life course development, conflict, divorce, stepfamilies and stepparenting, and family strengths. Students will analyze contemporary family issues and take informed, written positions on these issues. This course is required for all Human Environmental Sciences students and Family Sciences minors, and meets American Association of Family and Consumer Sciences accreditation standards. Prereq: Restricted to majors in Human Environmental Sciences; and Family Sciences minors only. Junior or senior standing required.

FAM 354 THE FAMILY IN CROSS-CULTURAL PERSPECTIVE.

(3)

Approaches the study of the family from a comparative perspective, emphasizing cross-cultural variability in the structure and function of family. Kinship, household formation, sex roles, and socialization are examined in the context of the family, as well as patterns of interaction, personality formation, and family pathology. Prereq: Declared majors or minors in Dept. of Family Sciences or SW. (Same as SW 354.)

FAM 357 ADOLESCENT DEVELOPMENT.

(3)

This course conducts an in-depth analysis of adolescent development and adjustment using an ecological, multi-contextual framework. The primary focus is on scholarship and empirical evidence from a number of disciplines that have direct bearing on the study of adolescent development, with a particular interest in applying a cross-cultural/national comparative lens. Prereq: Declared majors or minors in Dept. of Family Sciences, CTED or consent of the instructor.

FAM 360 INTRODUCTION TO FAMILY INTERVENTION: WORKING WITH FAMILIES AND INDIVIDUALS.

(3)

Survey course to introduce students to the various skills, strategies and professional ethical standards used by family scientists in helping relationships. The emphasis will be on learning the skills required to provide support for families and individuals. Prereq: Declared majors or minors in Dept. Family Sciences. FAM 251, may be taken concurrently.

FAM 390 INTRODUCTION TO RESEARCH METHODS.

(3)

An introduction to research design, methodology, instrumentation, and data analysis with emphasis on a student's ability to understand and critique research in human development and family relations. Prereq: Declared majors or minors in Family Sciences; STA 210.

College of Agriculture, Food and Environment
School of Human Environmental Sciences

FAM Family Sciences

FAM 402 ISSUES IN FAMILY RESOURCE MANAGEMENT. (3)
 Examination of family economics and management issues and analysis of their impact on the well-being of families across the major transitions of the family life-cycle. Particular emphasis will be given to family decision-making. Prereq: FAM 251 and declared majors and minors in Dept. Family Sciences.

FAM 403 MATE SELECTION THEORY AND RESEARCH. (1-3)
 This course is designed to develop a basic understanding of mate selection theory and research. Processes in the U.S. and abroad will be explored. Sex, love, culture, values, and how these factors play into the process of mate selection will be covered. Students may enroll for 1, 2, or 3 credits.

FAM 473 FAMILY LIFE EDUCATION. (3)
 Historical development, current programs, and emerging trends in family life education with particular emphases on programs and techniques for teaching sex education, marital relations, parenting and human development. Prereq: Declared majors and minors in Department of Family Sciences and FAM 360.

FAM 474 SPECIAL TOPICS IN FAMILY RESOURCE MANAGEMENT (Subtitle required).

FAM 475 SPECIAL TOPICS IN FAMILY SCIENCES. (1-3)
 Course will focus on selected topics drawn from various areas of family sciences taught by faculty members with special interests and competence. May be repeated to a maximum of six credits under different subtitles. Prereq: Consent of instructor.

FAM 486 FIELD EXPERIENCES IN FAMILY RESOURCE MANAGEMENT. (3)
 Field training in community setting. Opportunities for developing competencies in planning and conducting individual and small group experiences related to family resource management. Lecture, one hour; laboratory, seven hours per week. May be repeated to a maximum of six credits. Prereq: Senior standing and consent of instructor.

FAM 494 INDEPENDENT WORK IN FAMILY RESOURCE MANAGEMENT.

FAM 495 INDEPENDENT WORK IN FAMILY SCIENCES. (1-3)
 Intensive independent scholarship or training in family sciences. May be repeated to a maximum of 12 credits. Prereq: Junior or senior standing.

FAM 499 INTERNSHIP IN FAMILY SCIENCES. (3)
 Supervised internship, and capstone course for seniors, in a community, educational, Cooperative Extension, and/or research setting. Emphasis on observation, teaching, conceptualizing research problems, and developing competencies in providing service at the individual, family and/or community level. Students will be required to assist in designing, implementing, and evaluating research and programs related to family life. Presentations, research papers, outside speakers, and career guidance will be significant course components along with the laboratory hours. Lecture, two hours bi-weekly; laboratory, eight hours weekly. May be repeated for a maximum of six credits. Prereq: FAM 251, 352 and 360, and junior or senior standing. Family Sciences majors only.

FAM 502 FAMILIES AND CHILDREN UNDER STRESS. (3)
 An investigation of the stressors and crises experienced by families and their members and their efforts to cope with them. Special attention is given to prevention, management and enrichment strategies. Implications for practitioners will be drawn from conceptual frameworks and recent research. Prereq: FAM 352 and declared majors or minors in Dept. of Family Sciences or consent of instructor.

FAM 509 THE U.S. FAMILY IN HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE. (3)
 A study of American family experience and values from its pre-industrial Anglo-European roots to the present. Using an interdisciplinary focus, the course will examine the shifting boundary between family and community and the interaction between domestic life and demographic, religious, and economic influences in American history. Prereq: FAM 353 or SOC 409 or equivalent, or consent of instructor. (Same as HHS 596.)

FAM Family Sciences

FAM 544 CULTURAL DIVERSITY IN AMERICAN CHILDREN AND FAMILIES. (3)

Study of cultural and linguistic diversity in American children and families, with special emphasis on Kentucky children and families. Consideration of implications for working with young children and families in educational settings. Study of the variations in beliefs, traditions, values and cultural practices within American society, and their effects on the relationships between child, family, and school. Prereq: FAM352; declared majors or minors in Dept. of Family Sciences or consent of instructor.

FAM 553 PARENT-CHILD RELATIONSHIPS ACROSS THE LIFECOURSE. (3)

Exploration of the parenting process from a lifespan perspective. Current theory and research, with childrearing application, will be emphasized. Emphasis will be on parent education methods and the changing parental role over the life cycle. Prereq: FAM352; declared majors and minors in Dept. of Family Sciences or consent of instructor.

FAM 554 WORKING WITH PARENTS. (3)

Principles, techniques, and resources relevant to working with parents as individuals, couples, and families. Survey of related literature on parent effectiveness and parent education is included with relevant field experiences. Lecture, two hours; laboratory, two hours. Prereq: FAM 260 and six hours of 300 level or above in social and behavioral sciences or consent of instructor.

FAM 563 FAMILIES, LEGISLATION, AND PUBLIC POLICY. (3)

A study of the impact of legislation and public policies on the well being of the family. Emphasis on the involvement of individuals and families with policies and legal resources as a means for realizing satisfying life styles. Prereq: FAM251, 352, and declared majors and minors in Dept. of Family Sciences or consent of instructor.

FAM 585 AGING AND ENVIRONMENT. (3)

Explores the elderly person's changing experience of environment. Physiological, psychological and social changes are related to adjustment within urban and rural community environments, special housing for the elderly, and long-term care environments. Prereq: Graduate or advanced undergraduate standing and consent of instructor. (Same as GEO/GRN 585.)

Appendix F

The Codebook

Positive Feelings on Classes/Curriculum/Program	Optimistic attitude about experience in classes (what was learned; learning experience)
Course Suggestions	Ideas about what implementations could be useful and what existing classes are not so useful
Connections and Networking	Emphasis on the importance of building relationships with people who can offer links to jobs (includes faculty)
Ambiguity/Lack of Direction	Uncertainty about exactly what FAM is and what it can be used for (jobs)
Transferring Majors	Students originally beginning in one major other than FAM) who switched their field of study to FAM after their freshman year
Awareness of FAM	Knowledge that the major exists and is an option for students at UK
Workplace Preparation: Curriculum	Attitude about how concepts learned in the program prepared students for the workplace
Workplace Preparation: General Preparedness	Attitude about how the program prepared students for the in and outs of having a full-time job (searching, applying, transitioning, etc.)
Family Support	Optimistic attitude about family's role in college and transition to workplace

References

- Adams, S. (2012, May). New survey: Majority of employees dissatisfied. *Forbes Magazine*. Retrieved from <http://www.forbes.com/sites/susanadams/2012/05/18/new-survey-majority-of-employees-dissatisfied/>
- Allen, D. (1999). An empirical link between motivation and persistence. *Research in Higher Education Journal*, 40(4), 461-485.
- Allen, W., Drevs, R., & Ruhe, J. (1999). Reasons why college educated women change employment. *Journal of Business and Psychology*, 14, 77-93.
- Archer, W., & Davison, J. The Council for Industry and Higher Education, (2008). *Graduate employability: What do employers think and want?* London, England: The Council for Industry and Higher Education.
- Baumann, M., Ionescu, I., & Nearkasen, C. (2011). Psychological quality of life and its association with academic employability skills among newly registered students from three European faculties. *BMC Psychiatry*, 11(63), 1-10.
- Benford, R., & Newsome-Gess, J. (2006). *Factors affecting student academic success in gateway courses at Northern Arizona University*. Unpublished manuscript, Center for Science Teaching and Learning, Northern Arizona University, Flagstaff, Arizona.
- Bengtson, V. L., & Allen, K. R. (1993). Life course perspective applied to families over time. *Sourcebook of Family Theories and Methods: A Contextual Approach*, 19, 469-499.
- Cai, Y. (2013). Graduate employability: A conceptual framework for understanding employer's perceptions. *Journal of Higher Education*, 65, 457- 469. doi: 10.1007/s10734-012-9556-x
- Crossman, J., Clarke, M. (2010). International experience and graduate employability: Stakeholder perceptions on the connections. *Journal of Higher Education*, 59, 599-613. doi:10.1007/s10734-009-9268-z
- Dahlgren, L., Handal, G., Szudlarek, T., & Bayer, M. (2007). Students as journeymen between cultures of higher education and work: A comparative European project on the transition from higher education to work life. *Higher Education in Europe*, 32(4), 305-316. doi:10.1080/03797720802066005
- Elder, G. (1998). The life course as developmental theory. *Child Development*, 69 (1), 1-12.
- Elder, G. (2003). *The emergence of life course studies and theories*. Unpublished raw data.
- Friedman, B., & Allen, K. (2010). Systems theory. In J. Brandell (Ed.), *Theory and practice in clinical and social work* (pp. 3-20). Detroit, MI: Wayne State University.
- Glesne, C. (2007). *Becoming qualitative researchers: An introduction* (3rd ed.) Boston, MA: Allyn & Bacon Permissions Department.
- Gold, J. (2006). Profiling marital satisfaction among graduate students: An analysis of the perceptions of masters and doctoral-students. *Contemporary Family Therapy*, 28, 485-495. doi: 10.1007/s10591-006-9019-6

- Hennemann, S., & Liefner, I. (2010). Employability of German geography graduates: The mismatch between knowledge acquired and competences required. *Journal of Geography in Higher Education*, 34(2), 215-230. doi:10.1080/03098260903227400
- Holmes, L. (2013). Competing perspectives on graduate employability: Possession, position or process?, *Studies in Higher Education*, 38(4), 538-554. doi:10.1080/03075079.2011.587140
- Hutchinson, E. (2007). *A life course perspective*. (1st ed., pp. 1-37).
- Jacobi, M. (1991). Mentoring and undergraduate academic success: A literature review. *Review of Educational Research*, 61(4), 505-532. doi:10.3102/00346543061004505
- Koen, J., Klehe, U., & Van Vianen, A. (2012). Employability among the long term unemployed. *Journal of Vocational Behavior*, 82, 37-48. doi:10.1016/j.jvb.2012.11.001
- Laszlo, A., & Krippner, S. (1998). Systems theories: Their origins, foundations, and development. *Systems theories and a priori aspects of perception*, Ch. 3, 47-74.
- Liu, A., Ruiz, S., DeAngelo, L., & Pryor, J. Higher Education Research Institute, Graduate School of Education & Information Studies. (2009). *Findings from the 2008 administration of the college senior survey (css): National aggregates*. Los Angeles, CA.
- Mack, N., Woodsong, C., MacQueen, K., Guest, G. Namey, E. (2005). Qualitative research methods overview. *Qualitative Research Methods: A Data Collector's Field Guide (1-12)*. Triangle Park, N.C.: Family Health International.
- Mamqi, X., Miguel, J., & Olave, P. (2011). The relationship between employability and training. *World Academy of Science, Engineering and Technology*, 80, 656-660.
- Marshall, C., & Rossman, G. (2011). *Designing qualitative research*. (5th ed). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, Inc.
- Nunn, A. (2008). *UK commission for employment and skills – employability skills project*. London, England: Policy Research Institute.
- Nystrom, S., Abrandt, D., & Dahlgren, L. (2008). A winding road - professional trajectories from higher education to working life: A case study of political science and psychology graduates. *Studies in Continuing Education*, 30 (3), 215-229. doi:10.1080/01580370802439896
- Ojalvo, H. (2012, February). Why go to college at all? *New York Times*. Retrieved from: http://thechoice.blogs.nytimes.com/2012/02/02/why-go-to-college-at-all/?_r=0
- O'Regan, M. (2010). *Graduate transitions to employment: Career motivation, identity and employability*. (Doctoral dissertation, West Berkshire, United Kingdom). Retrieved from <http://www.reading.ac.uk/web/FILES/ccms/>
- Oria, B. (2012). Enhancing higher education students' employability: A Spanish case study. *International Journal of Technology Management & Sustainable Development*, 11(3), 217-230. doi: 10.1386/tmsd.11.3.217_1
- Perez-Pena, R. (2012, February). US bachelor degree rate passes milestone. *New York Times*.
- Robinson, J., & Garton, B. (2008). An assessment of the employability skills needed by graduates in the College of Agriculture, Food and Natural Resources at the

- University of Missouri. *Journal of Agricultural Education*, 49(4), 96-105. doi: 10.5032/jae.208.04096
- Sellers, R. Grey Matter Research Consulting, (1998). *Qualitative versus quantitative research – choosing the right approach*. Phoenix, AZ: *The Nonprofit Times*.
- Selvadurai, S., Choy, E., & Maros, M. (2012). Generic skills of prospective graduates from the employer's perspectives. *Asian Social Science*, 8(12), 295-303. doi:10.5539/ass.v8n12p295
- Shanahan, M. J. (2000). Pathways to adulthood in changing societies: Variability and mechanisms in life course perspective. *Annual Reviews*, 26, 667-692.
- Stephens, D., & Hamblin, Y. (2006). Employability skills: Are UK LIM departments meeting employment needs? *New Library World*, 107(1224), 218-227.
- Stone, C., Van Horn, C., & Zukin, C. (2012). Chasing the American dream: Recent college graduates and the great recession. (2012). *Work Trends*, 1-64.
- Tessema, M., Ready, K., & Yu, W. (2012). Factors affecting college students' satisfaction with major curriculum: Evidence from nine years of data. *International Journal of Humanities and Social Science*, 2(2), 34-44.
- Thomas, D. (2006). A general inductive approach for qualitative data analysis. *American Journal of Evaluation*, 27, 237-246. doi:10.1177/1098214005283748
- Townsend, J. (2010). *The moderating role of social support on the relationship of perceived stress and life satisfaction of psychology graduates*. (Unpublished doctoral dissertation, University of Kansas).
- Tuckett, A. (2004). Qualitative research sampling-the very real complexities. *Nurse Researcher*, 12(1): 47-61.
- University of Kentucky (1996). Executive summary: Student satisfaction survey.
- van Emmirik, I., & Hetty, J. (2012). The route to employability: Examining resources and the mediating role of motivation. *The Career Development International*, 17(2), 104-119.
- Webster's new world college dictionary (5th ed.). (2011). Cleveland, OH: Wiley Publishing, Inc.
- Walsh, F. (2012). *Normal family processes*. (4th ed.). New York, NY: Guilford Press.
- Willie, B., De Fruyt, F., & Marojolein, F. (2012). Big five traits and intrinsic success in the new career era: A 15-year longitudinal study on employability and work-family conflict. *Applied Psychology: An International Review*, 62(1), 124-156. doi: 10.1111/j.1464-0597.2012.00516
- Yorke, M. (2004). Employability in the undergraduate curriculum: Some student perspectives. *European Journal of Education*, 39(4), 409-427.

VITA

Katelyn B. Hendricks

2012 University of Kentucky – Lexington, KY
B.S. Family Sciences May 2012

PROFESSIONAL POSITIONS:

2012-2014 University of Kentucky Family Center
Intern Marriage and Family Therapist

2012-2014 University of Kentucky
Teaching Assistant

2012-2014 University of Kentucky
Research Assistant

AWARDS & HONORS

Graduated Suma Cum Laude, 2012

College of Agriculture Outstanding Senior
Awarded: April 2012

PUBLICATIONS/PAPERS

Huff, N., Hendricks, K., & Werner-Wilson, R. (2013, November). *Examining positive affect and communication trends in parent-adolescent conflict*. Paper presented at the National Council on Family Relations Annual Conference. San, Antonio, TX

PROFESSIONAL CONFERENCES:

Kentucky Association for Marriage and Family Therapy (KAMFT) Conference,
Louisville, KY, 2013 & 2014

American Association for Marriage and Family Therapy (AAMFT) National Conference,
Portland, OR 2013

MEMBERSHIPS:

American Association of Marriage and Family Therapy (AAMFT)
Kentucky Association of Marriage and Family Therapy (KAMFT)
Student Association of Couple and Family Therapy (SACFT)