

## **Assessing Personal and Academic Competencies of Family Science Students: Results of a Gatekeeping Process**

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### Author Note

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**ABSTRACT.** This paper describes the “gatekeeping process” of a family science undergraduate program developed in 2007. The intent of the process is to assess student academic readiness and personal suitability for the family science profession before internship placement. There is discussion of factors needing consideration before implementing such a process, which include faculty and university support for and student response to the assessment process. The authors provide initial data and outcomes which support continued implementation of the gatekeeping process over a seven-year period. Implications for practice, intervention, research and policy are offered, with the goal of benefiting students, protecting future clients, and upholding the family science profession.

*Keywords:* gatekeeper, practicum, intern, student assessment, competencies

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## ASSESSING PERSONAL AND ACADEMIC COMPETENCIES

### **Assessing Personal and Academic Competencies of Family Science Students: Results of a Gatekeeping Process**

*Thank you for all your support and seeing me for all that I can and am today...I wouldn't have made it this far without your support...I'm thinking about coming back for my Master's degree in a year...*

- From a statement by a Program Progress Review female student after completing a Family Science internship

In 2007, the Intern Placement Coordinator of an undergraduate Human Development and Family Studies (HDFS) program identified the need for a “gatekeeping” process within the program. The term “gatekeeping” in academia generally refers to student assessment, remediation, and support, and/or dismissal of students, before internship or graduation (Bodner, 2012; Leighninger, 2000; Sowbel, 2012; Vacha-Haase, Davenport, & Kerewsky, 2004). The need for a process was raised because although some students completed the program’s academic requirements with grade-point averages required for internship placements, their personal issues or behaviors limited their placements to only the most accepting and flexible of agencies. Addiction, depression and other mental health issues impacted some students’ competencies, while others expressed nonconformity with family studies values and ethics, demonstrated challenges with interpersonal communication skills (e.g., poor non-verbal skills, lack of empathic responding skills, and poor listening skills) and/or displayed general difficulties with responsibility and accountability. Nonconformity with family studies values were made evident in student comments and behaviors, highlighting their inability and/or unwillingness to work with all families, including families in poverty, families with diverse sexual and gender orientations, and religious beliefs.

As faculty discussed the need for a gatekeeping process and debated what the process might include, they considered the definition of “gatekeeper” and the process’s potential benefits of and costs for students, the program, and the university. The social science literature portrays the gatekeeping role as one assumed by experienced faculty members in order to benefit students, protect future clients, and uphold their respective professions (Homrich, 2009; Lafrance, Gray, & Herbert, 2004; Ziomek-Daigle, 2010). The authors assumed that family science programs strive to ensure that their graduates are academically and personally competent to work effectively with families. A review of the family science literature, however, shows little empirical documentation of how students’ academic and personal competencies are assessed and supported. In an effort to identify gatekeeping processes in the family science field, Koepke and Barnett (2014) examined gatekeeping practices of fifty undergraduate and graduate family science programs in the United States. Findings indicated that most family science programs support and assess their students’ academic competencies, whereas fewer programs address students’ personal competencies. This may have a significant impact on their professional practice.

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The HDFS department consulted the National Council on Family Relations (NCFR) mission statement, the NCFR Code of Ethics, and the Family Life Education Certification Code of Ethics for guidance about family science gatekeeping. NCFR's mission implicitly assumes some responsibility for gatekeeping of students because it "provides a forum for family researchers, educators and practitioners to share in the development and dissemination of knowledge about families and family relationships, establishes professional standards, and works to promote family well-being" (NCFR, 1998, 2012). Using social science literature and NCFR's mission as a foundation, faculty considered a variety of issues pertaining to the gatekeeper role, including (a) supporting student growth, (b) concerns about program reputation, (c) potential for discriminatory or highly subjective assessment of students, (d) liability issues, and (e) the ethics of graduating students whose personal behaviors or traits would likely compromise their professional practice or harm future clients/families. As a result of this discussion and after reviewing assessment practices incorporated in related counseling, marriage and family therapy, and vocational rehabilitation graduate programs, HDFS faculty developed a developmental gatekeeping process. The process incorporates student and faculty assessment of students' personal and professional competencies and is referred to as the program progress review (PPR).

This paper describes the PPR or "gatekeeping process" of one family science undergraduate program. The intent of the developmental PPR process is to assess student academic readiness and personal suitability for the family studies profession before internship placement. There is discussion of factors to be considered prior to implementing such a process, including faculty and university support for and student response to the assessment process. Initial data and outcomes that support continued implementation of the gatekeeping process are provided. Finally, the authors offer implications for practice, intervention, research and policy.

### **Theoretical Foundation**

Bioecological systems theory requires that the entire ecological system in which a person lives must be considered in order to support human growth and development (Bronfenbrenner, 1973). Urie Bronfenbrenner defined five socially organized, interconnected systems that support and guide human behavior. Bioecological systems theory assumes that human development takes place through progressively complex reciprocal interactions between the person and these five systems. The first system influencing human development is the microsystem, as a result of interaction a person has with her or his immediate environment (e.g., parents, neighborhood, school). When two or more microsystems interact they are linked within the mesosystem. Exosystems are systems external to a person (e.g., parent's workplace, school system), but they influence that person's development. Cultural values within which the developing person interacts constitute the macrosystem, which includes the greater socio-cultural context impacting human development. Finally, human growth and development occur within a chronological time frame or chronosystem. This chronosystem uniquely influences all four systems, and ultimately, the development of the person.

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Applying bioecological systems theory to a gatekeeping process allows for consideration of a student's personal history and the various systems that have influenced the student's academic abilities, personal values, and professional goals. The goals of the undergraduate program and interaction with faculty also influence the student's development as part of the exosystem. The macrosystem (e.g., values of the university, expectations of college graduates, goals of the family science profession) are aspects of the greater socio-cultural context that influence a student. NCFR states goals for family scientists in its Code of Ethics: (a) to "inspire and encourage family scientists to act ethically, (b) provide ethical guidance in areas that family scientists may overlook, (c) provide guidance in dealing with often complex ethical issues, and (c) enhance the professional image and status of family scientists by increasing the level of professional consciousness" (NCFR, 1998; 2012). Because the family science field continuously discusses how to better prepare and support students for entry into the field, it is appropriate to consider a gatekeeping process at this point in time, i.e. the "chronosystem".

### **An Undergraduate Family Studies Gatekeeping Process**

In 2007, a gatekeeping process to assess student academic and personal competence before internship placement was developed for an undergraduate human development and family studies (HDFS) program. The program served approximately 270 majors in a public university with an enrollment of 9,000 students. Generally, 20 to 30 students per semester are placed in an internship that occurs in the senior year. Internship is a one-semester, 4-8-credit course requiring 204-408 hours of supervised experience housed in a local human service agency. The request for a gatekeeping process arose from three sources: (a) internship supervisors identified concerns with students' work ethic and interpersonal communication abilities, (b) HDFS faculty observed student impairment and/or students who did not conform to values and ethics of the family science profession, and (c) the Internship Placement Coordinator noted impairment in certain students that could impact their abilities to work competently with clients.

After initial discussion with program faculty, the Internship Placement Coordinator reviewed assessment tools used in Mental Health Counseling, Marriage and Family Therapy, and Vocational Rehabilitation graduate programs. These tools were revised to reflect undergraduate HDFS program objectives and assess competency in academic and personal skills. The initial Program Progress Review Student Assessment Tool was submitted for faculty review and approval (Appendix A). The Internship Placement Coordinator and HDS Program Director met with the Dean of the College of Education and Human Services and the Dean of Students to (a) explain concerns about students, (b) provide feedback from internship supervisors, (c) review the assessment tool, (d) discuss legal/ethical issues, and (e) identify a potential program progress review process. After consulting with university legal counsel, both Deans offered constructive suggestions for documenting the process and requirements for student records. The Deans also offered unwavering university support.

After this support was obtained, consistent with the recommendations of Moore and Urwin (1990), the program progress review process (PPR) was included in and published in all formal HDFS program documentation. The PPR process is also included in all program literature

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and there is a description of PPR on the HDFS program website. The process is noted in the syllabus for the HDFS introductory course that is required for all HDFS students, and is discussed in that course. Although the assessment process has faculty and university sanction, student understanding of family science values underlying the process is a critical starting point. Their ongoing reflection on their academic and personal performance in the program is expected. Similarly, HDFS faculty are expected to be able to answer students' questions about the PPR process and are encouraged to participate in the assessment process when they experience or observe concerns with students during class sessions.

### **Program Progress Review Process**

The developmental assessment process begins in the required HDFS introductory course. The HDFS Program Director reviews program objectives, introduces the program progress review process, reviews the NCFR Code of Ethics, and reinforces the goal that requires students to have professional and personal practices that meet the profession's needs. Students sign forms stating they understand and have been informed about the PPR. They complete assessment forms (Appendix A), and keep them to reflect upon and to be aware of as they move through the HDFS program. Students also receive guidelines for creating portfolios in order to reinforce the importance of assessing their professional and personal performances over time. Portfolios are developed with the understanding that the materials included in them must reflect students' understanding and achievement of program objectives and document students' academic and personal competence.

After initial student assessment in the introductory course, students proceed through the program's required courses. If, at any point in time, a faculty member observes concerns about a student's academic or personal competencies, s/he may forward the student's name to the HDFS Program Director. At a certain time during each semester, faculty are asked to assess students whose names HDFS Program Director has received. Faculty complete the Faculty Program Progress Review Assessment Tool (Appendix B) and return it to the HDFS Program Director. The program progress review process takes place every fall and spring semester because the university allows students to enter the program in either semester.

If faculty members identify concerns about a student's academic or personal competence, that student is asked to assess her or his progress using the Student PPR Assessment Tool. Next, the student is scheduled to meet with a select core group of faculty members who serve as the program progress review committee. Specifically, faculty will suggest the program progress review committee meet with students about the impact of their behaviors on academic performance if students demonstrate consistent patterns of absences, poor grades, or significant lack of classroom engagement. If students display consistent fatigue, inebriation, or other signs of personal impairment, the program progress review committee will ask those students to meet with them to consider how such behaviors may impact their effectiveness in classes, in internships, and ultimately, in the field. If there are ethical violations, or if students regularly make comments that disparage against certain types of families, racial or ethnic groups, the program progress review committee meets with the student to discuss NCFR's Code of Ethics and other important to the family science field.

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The program progress review committee includes the Internship Placement Coordinator and two other program faculty members. Each semester, during a day set aside for student advisement by the university, the PPR committee meets with individual students to review concerns that faculty raise, to discuss the potential impact of those concerns as they relate to future internship placements, and to offer support and guidance. The program progress review committee has access to the student's transcript and self-assessment tool, and to program faculty assessments of the student. Each student receives 10-20 minutes to meet with the program progress review committee. Committee members reinforce the purpose of the review process as a supportive, confidential, and helpful one that is designed to help students with developing academic and personal success. Following these individual meetings, students receive (orally and in writing) encouragement and support, specific recommendations about areas needing improvement (academic and/or personal), and timelines for following up. Specific suggestions may include contacting campus resources such as disability services and academic skills centers, and meeting with faculty members about ways to improve classroom academic performance. Depending on the nature of their observed behaviors, students may be strongly encouraged to seek help from on-campus counseling centers and/or medical or other health services (however, these actions cannot be required of the student). Copies of committee members' letters to students are kept in their confidential academic files and submitted to the Dean of Students.

During the subsequent semester, program faculty members specifically assess these students again (along with any other students whose names have been forwarded). Students who met previously with the program progress review committee have follow-up meetings with the committee to provide updates on initial recommendations and on progress towards their goals. If students and program progress review committee members are satisfied with the progress students show in academic and/or personal areas, students are allowed to continue in the program with the expectation of their placement in senior internships. If there are continuing concerns, students receive continuing and/or additional recommendations they will need to fulfill. For example, students may be required to meet with their advisors and/or program directors to discuss suitability for an internship or for advisement out of the program. Students may not advance to internship placement until recommendations are satisfied at the committee's discretion.

Evaluation of the program progress review process outcome data since 2007 seem to confirm that students and faculty view the process as a reflective one for assessment of academic and personal competencies, and where students receive help to prepare for internship placements and their professional futures. Students have opportunities to examine their professional and personal strengths and limitations, to consider how these may affect their practice, or to consider alternative career paths. As gatekeepers in the program progress review process, faculty are reminded that assessment of student academic and personal competence extends beyond the classroom to internship agencies, to clients served, and to the profession. For this specific program, outcome data confirm that a gatekeeping process makes a difference in students' academic and personal competence and should take place at the baccalaureate level.

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### Methodology

Students who participated in the program progress review process beginning in the fall 2014 semester were included in the data for a total unique sample of 61 undergraduate students (14 males and 47 females).

Frequency distributions using SPSS were conducted for Semester of First Program Progress Review and Follow-up Reviews. Cross-tabulations for gender were conducted for Primary Presenting Issue at Time of First Review, Program Progress Review Committee Recommendations, and Student Outcomes.

### Results

#### Sample

Out of 61 students referred for the program progress review, 77% were female and 23% were male (Table 1). Since males comprise, on average, approximately 4% of our total students in a program of 220 students, they are highly overrepresented in referrals for the program progress review. See Table 1.

#### Semester of Program Progress Review

The numbers of students referred by faculty for the program progress review each semester varies (Table 2). When we have had new faculty members join the department, there is a socialization process whereby these faculty gradually learn the program review process and their rights/responsibilities to contribute observations/documentation. See Table 2.

#### Primary Presenting Issue at Time of First Review

The primary presenting issue was determined by reviewing the reason that a faculty member referred a student, along with the student's own, voluntarily shared presenting issue. A majority (57%) of all students presented academic concerns at the time of their first review, including inconsistent attendance, lack of active participation, and low grades (Table 3). Males presented in higher numbers than did females for Mental Health, Alcohol and Other Drug Abuse (AODA), and Physical Health. The AODA category focused primarily on effects of alcohol use. Physical Health was concerned primarily with disordered sleep. Female students presented uniquely with loss/grief issues and in higher numbers for Multiple Issues than did males. The Multiple Issues category included a combination of presenting issues in this table, along with coping with stress, employment, and lack of family support. See Table 3.

#### Follow-Up Reviews

The committee saw 54 percent of the students in two reviews. The average number of reviews as of fall 2014 was 2.52. Five students, or 8%, were seen for five or more reviews. This group of students experienced multiple stressors over time. These stressors included serious physical challenges, AODA, and mental health issues.

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### **Program Progress Review Committee Recommendations**

Across gender, recommendations were similar, with 50-53% of committee recommendations involving accessing the campus counseling center and class accountability issues. Class accountability recommendations included (a) advising students to contact instructors for completion of work, (b) reinforcing students' consistent attendance, (c) students using their voices for active participation, and (d) demonstrating commitment to majors (Table 4).

Thirty-six percent of males were referred for a combination of counseling/medical follow-up/class accountability issues, compared to 23% of females. The medical follow-up category focused primarily on assessment of disordered sleep and monitoring of psychotropic medications. Less than 10% of the students did not attend their initial program progress review appointments with the committee to receive recommendations. Therefore, "holds" were placed on their academic records. To remove these holds, students had to meet with the HDFS Program Director before being allowed to register for additional coursework. See Table 4.

### **Student Outcomes**

When examining student outcomes by gender within the program, differences were noted (Table 5). Sixty-four percent of males compared to 79% of females were placed in their internships, graduated, or followed through with recommendations and continued in the program. Thirty-six percent of males compared to 21% of females withdrew from the program. See Table 5.

## **Discussion**

Historically, social work educators have contemplated and defined the "gatekeeping role" as an obligation to the profession to ultimately admit into its ranks those applicants judged to have requisite knowledge, skills, and values for effective practice. Among social workers, there is a belief that students should be monitored throughout the curriculum and that this monitoring (or gatekeeping) ultimately results in better service to the profession and clients (Reynolds, 2004). Family Science programs have a gatekeeper role in preparing students to be competent professionals in order to achieve the goal of strengthening and empowering families. Since many family science undergraduate students work in non-profit agencies serving vulnerable populations and at-risk families, they must have the knowledge and skills, professionally and interpersonally, to serve these populations competently. Ongoing continuous feedback to students concerning their personal and professional competencies supports the idea that better judgments are possible relative to student compatibility or "fit" with the profession's demands (Reynolds, 2004). Feedback strengthens students' awareness of requisite professional behaviors and empowers them to independently judge their compatibility with the profession.

In this paper, we suggest and have found initial empirical support that the family science profession's gatekeeper role starts at the undergraduate level. Initial outcomes appear to confirm that students and faculty view the gatekeeper process as reflective and supportive. They also see that gatekeeper process as a developmental one, where academic and personal competencies are

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assessed and students receive guidance for preparation to enter their internship placements and the professional world. The process also fulfills faculty responsibility to safeguard their students, to protect the public with a focus on vulnerable individuals, children, and families, and ultimately, to uphold the family science profession.

Between 2007 and 2014, the authors gathered no qualitative data from students about how they felt about participating in this process. However, students have told faculty in the program about how much the process has meant to them (see e-mail quotations below). To strengthen the rationale for other family science programs to develop a similar process, the researchers have discussed ways of gathering such data from students. This data could be shared with future students to show the process's supportive nature and to provide documentation of the developmental outcome of working through such a process with students.

*I just wanted to send you a note to thank you for the intervention the HDFS team had with me about your concerns regarding my drinking behavior. That was one of my lowest points in my life and also an awakening...the HDFS team helped me to see that my alcoholism was a reality and I had to face it. I apologize for my inappropriate behavior and disrespect. After dropping out of the university, I eventually entered Hazelden a couple of times for impatient treatment. I have been sober for about three and a half years and I am finishing my B.S. at the University of Minnesota. I plan to go to Utah to work as a field guide for an Outdoor Behavior Therapy Program and hope to someday go back to school for my MSW. I just wanted to let you know how I was doing and thank you from the bottom of my heart for the tremendous impact you have had on my life!*

--From a statement by a female PPR student

*You deserve an apology. I'm sorry for the time, words, and energy you thought you may have wasted on me. I want to tell you that it really wasn't wasted. I was not mature enough, or maybe even old enough, to fully accept the lessons you tried to give me. My arrogance and stubbornness as a younger 20-something was something even I was blinded by. I always thought I was tricking everyone into thinking I was mature and fulfilling my "potential", and maybe I was, but I was also tricking myself. Potential means nothing if it isn't fulfilled. In my bi-annual meetings with the HDFS team the term self-sabotage came up a lot. I knew the definition, but I never faced it. I faked it. I don't want to be a fake. I would love to meet with you because I am ready to continue my course down the HDFS path. I feel like you really cared, in fact, I know you cared about me. I want to be the person that everyone thought I had the potential to be. Even if I don't reach that height, I want to face my fears to get as close as I can. You have kept that fire alive in me, no matter how small it has gotten. I truly thank you for that.*

-- From a statement by a male PPR student

The most significant outcome of this study is that 75% of students referred to the program progress review committee continued in the program, were placed in internships, and graduated. Many students commented during their reviews that although they were initially unhappy or confused about being referred, they understood faculty concerns, acknowledged their own behaviors, and appreciated receiving faculty support over time. This supports the belief that

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it is important for family science educators to help students, as early as possible in their educational experiences, to identify whether they have qualities that are compatible with delivery of effective services, and then to aid and empower students in strengthening those behaviors. The earlier such identifications take place, the better for the student and client, and ultimately, for the profession (Reynolds, 2004). Preliminary data supports the idea that our undergraduate students used feedback from the program progress review to assess their compatibility with demands of the profession, thereby resulting in 75% successful completion of the program.

Overrepresentation of male students among those referred for review was a primary finding in this study's preliminary data. Out of 61 students referred for review, 77% were female and 23% were male. Since males comprise about 4% of students where an average of 220 students is enrolled, men are highly overrepresented in referrals to the program progress review. There are historic gender imbalances in social work education and practice. We collected data in our program that illustrates this imbalance. However, there is a need for more data collection (Galley & Parrish, 2014). Both professions pride themselves on championing diversity and social inclusion. Therefore, gender imbalances are a priority for family science programs to address. If we find that family science mirrors social work, then male students in social work and in family science students may experience discrimination, stereotyping, and minority status based on gender, especially in cases of ethnic or sexual orientation minority status, in contrast to traditional male privileges. This can shed some light on why male students may have additional challenges that are related to gender. For example, males referred to the program progress review presented in higher numbers for Mental Health, Alcohol and Other Drug Abuse (AODA), and Physical Health. In reference to outcomes, 64% of males compared to 79% of females were placed in internships, graduated, or followed through with recommendations and continued in the program. Thirty-six percent of males compared to 21% of females withdrew from the program.

It is apparent that meeting the needs of male students by supporting their success in completing internships and graduating from our program poses a challenge. If males are targeted for recruitment into a predominately female profession, developing gender-specific strategies to support male success is important. These data have led to the HDFS program director holding focus groups with randomly selected groups of male students to consider and identify unique gender-based needs.

### **Implications for Intervention and Practice, Research, and Policy** **Implications for Intervention and Practice**

The social science literature identifies two areas of support that must be in place before implementation of a gatekeeping review process: faculty involvement and university administration approval (Cole & Lewis, 1993; Koerin & Miller, 1995; Moore & Urwin, 1991). Specific to family science programs, type of institution (i.e., private versus public), size of university and program, number of faculty in program, and specializations or types of degrees offered may contribute to whether and how family science faculty engage in gatekeeping (Koepke & Barnett, 2014).

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Program faculty must commit themselves to a process that can be time consuming and sometimes challenging. At the undergraduate level, discussion of a review process needs to include (a) recognition of subjectivity and potential for discrimination, (b) desire to help with students' personal development, (c) adolescent developmental norms, (d) family of origin dynamics, (e) intern placement supervisor feedback, (f) ethical considerations, and (g) legal rulings. Recognition that a student's presenting issue may mask more serious mental health issues. Discussions of faculty responsibility to address such issues are critical. However, boundary issues need recognition and maintenance. As educators, our responsibility is to focus on the education of students. Although "disruptive" student behaviors clearly serve as barriers to their receiving an education, faculty responsibility is to focus on the behavior of the student instead of making clinical judgments. The Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) makes it clear that educators cannot request information related to a specific disorder. The function for determining accommodation needs of a student falls to Disability Services on a specific campus. When/if a student self-discloses a disability, faculty must disregard the mention of that and focus on the student's behaviors as related to courses the student is taking. Although some faculty may be licensed therapist/counselors, they cannot serve in that role in a gatekeeper review process. If these boundaries are crossed, there is the potential for significant liability. Only after these issues have been identified and discussed, in the context of our responsibility to our institution and profession, can a gatekeeping process be created to fit departments and universities.

Discussing information about legal rulings that pertain to student evaluation and possible termination from an academic program with university officials before receiving approval is critical (Cobb, 1994; Cobb and Jordan, 1989; Madden, 1993). Courts have consistently upheld the professional judgment of faculty in student evaluations when clear information about academic requirements and criteria for adequate performance is provided early in a program (before practicum/intern placement) and when due process procedures are followed. It is important for programs to provide students with information about their university's appeal process. Most university appeal processes have legal bases and protect students' rights to due process. All schools are legally protected if they adhere to due process guidelines (Cobb & Jordan, 1989). Perhaps unique to the university in this study, undergraduate students may select any major upon admittance, and, except for academic reasons, the university has no policy on removal of students once they are admitted. HDFS faculty were allowed and encouraged to define programmatic standards as a foundation for the program progress review process. Family science programs at other institutions would be wise to obtain clear administrative approval for assessment/review processes that could potentially deny students entry to practicum/internships required for graduation, or that substitute additional requirements for some students.

### **Implications for Research**

This article has presented an attempt to contribute to conceptualization and discussion of the gatekeeping process within an undergraduate family science program. Several factors may impact development of a gatekeeping process in family science programs; these factors need additional research (Koepke & Barnett, 2014). For instance, early identification of problem behaviors is crucial. There should be ongoing research to articulate the requisite personal and professional competencies needed for effectiveness in delivering services (Reynolds, 2004). Recognizing and quantifying issues that arise in undergraduate or graduate family science

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students (e.g., ethical issues, mental health, alcohol and other drug addictions, low affect) would provide a foundation for the need for a gatekeeping role, and would illuminate what types of training would help faculty members.

There is also a critical need to conduct studies to validate measurement tools for evaluating preparedness of students seeking admission into the family science profession. As applied to family science students, an examination of assessment tools for interpersonal and intrapersonal competencies would be a valuable addition to the family science literature. Program progress reviews would also be validated by including student voices. Requesting student assessments of how the gatekeeping process affected their personal and professional growth would only strengthen the overall review process. Finally, research should explore “best practices” of pedagogy that develop and/or strengthen personal and professional competencies in our students.

### **Implications for Policy**

On the topic of implications for policy, applying Bronfenbrenner’s Bioecological system theory (1973) to values related to gatekeeping at the university (macro) level and to undergraduate family science programs is useful:

At the macro level, specific university policies that exist relative to a gatekeeper role need to be reviewed and clearly defined. A gatekeeping process can only succeed when faculty, staff and students have confidence in the university’s recognition and support of a gatekeeper role. University policies need to be explicit and overt in definition and application of gatekeeping responsibilities. (Koepke & Barnett, 2014, p. 10).

The family science field values establishment of professional standards and works to promote family well-being as noted in NCFR’s mission statement (NCFR, 2008). It is well documented that family science programs value students’ academic competencies and assess these thoroughly (Koepke & Barnett, 2014). At the undergraduate level, clarification and assessment of students’ personal competencies are of equal importance relative to defining professional standards for the family science field.

### **Limitations**

The limitation of this paper is that it describes a qualitative study. As with most qualitative work, the sample was small and reflects student outcomes from one undergraduate program located in the mid-western region of the United States. The sample was predominantly White students. No data on student perceptions of why they were asked to meet with the Committee, or on their reactions to committee input, were collected. Nor was there gathering of data from faculty about potential barriers to referring students.

### Conclusion

In this paper, the authors articulated the need for family science programs to serve in a gatekeeper role to strengthen the well being of students and families. As an example of the gatekeeper role, we described a program progress review process developed by one family science undergraduate program. The goal of the developmental review process is to assess student academic readiness and personal suitability for the family studies profession before internship placement. Discussion of factors needing consideration before implementing such a process, including faculty and university support for and student responses to the assessment process, were highlighted. Initial data and outcomes from the program progress review process support continued implementation of the gatekeeper process. Family science programs are encouraged to consider gatekeeping processes as a way to strengthen students and families served, and the profession.

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## ASSESSING PERSONAL AND ACADEMIC COMPETENCIES

Table 1

*Demographics*

Gender	<i>n</i>	%
Male	14	23
Female	47	77
Total	61	100

## ASSESSING PERSONAL AND ACADEMIC COMPETENCIES

Table 2

*Semester of Program Progress Review*

		% of 61
Semester	<i>n</i>	Total Students
Spring 2008	5	8.2
Fall 2008	1	1.6
Spring 2009	4	6.6
Fall 2009	6	9.8
Fall 2010	5	8.2
Spring 2011	5	8.2
Fall 2012	2	3.3
Spring 2012	6	9.8
Spring 2013	9	14.7
Fall 2013	6	9.8
Spring 2014	4	6.6
Fall 2014	8	13.1
<b>Total</b>	<b>61</b>	<b>100.00</b>

## ASSESSING PERSONAL AND ACADEMIC COMPETENCIES

Table 3

*Primary Presenting Issue at Time of First Review*

Issues	Males		Females		Total	
	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%	<i>N</i>	%
Academic	8	57	27	57	35	57
Mental Health	2	14	4	9	6	10
AODA	1	7	1	2	2	3
Physical Health	2	14	3	6	5	8
Loss Grief	0	0	2	4	2	3
Multiple Issues	1	7	10	21	11	18
Total	14	100	47	100	61	100

Table 4

*Program Progress Review Committee Recommendations*

Recommendations	Males		Females		Total	
	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%	<i>N</i>	%
Class Accountability	1	7	8	17	9	15
Counseling/Class Accountability	7	50	25	53	32	52
Counseling/Medical/Class	5	36	11	23	16	26
Class Accountability/Medical	1	7	3	6	4	7
No shows/Holds	1	7	2	4	3	5
Total	14	100	47	100	33	100

Table 5  
*Student Outcomes*

Outcomes	Male		Female		Total	
	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%	<i>N</i>	%
In School-Placed-Graduated	9	64	37	79	46	75
Withdrew	5	36	10	21	15	25
Total	14	100	47	100	61	100

## ASSESSING PERSONAL AND ACADEMIC COMPETENCIES

*Appendix A*

## HDFS Program Progress Review Student Assessment Tool

STUDENT EVALUATION  
PROGRAM PROGRESS CRITERIA  
 Human Development and Family Studies

STUDENT'S NAME: \_\_\_\_\_ TERM: \_\_\_\_\_

SCALE	N/O	1	2	3
	Not Observed	Unsatisfactory	Satisfactory	Exceeds

**Personal, Social and Emotional Maturity**

\_\_\_ I demonstrate characteristics and behaviors suitable to work in a professional capacity with vulnerable populations including but not limited to: compassion, tolerance for/understanding of diversity, respectfulness, problem solving and critical thinking skills.

\_\_\_ I demonstrate personal insight, a willingness to listen and examine my own values and beliefs and engage in personal change.

\_\_\_ I take responsibility for my behaviors, including the ability to admit to mistakes and take corrective action.

\_\_\_ I demonstrate flexibility, adaptability, self-regulation and I am responsive to external feedback.

**Interpersonal Relationships**

\_\_\_ I demonstrate the ability to establish positive relationships with peers, faculty and staff.

\_\_\_ I demonstrate a collaborative, cooperative attitude verbally and non-verbally.

\_\_\_ I demonstrate empathy, patience, active listening, warmth and genuineness in interactions with others.

**Professional and Ethical Conduct**

\_\_\_ I demonstrate understanding of and behaves in a manner conducive to the ethical guidelines established by the National Council on Family Relations, including being respectful of students and clients and ability to abide by high professional standards.

\_\_\_ I demonstrate ability to conduct research ethically, including being ethical in my interactions with employing organizations or agencies and assisting others to do so.

## ASSESSING PERSONAL AND ACADEMIC COMPETENCIES

**Communication Skills**

\_\_\_ I demonstrate **in written form** the ability to effectively communicate ideas, needs, concerns and goals/outcomes in a clear, concise, objective and accurate manner. (These skills may be demonstrated through in-class writing assignments, papers, or on-line discussions and emails.)

\_\_\_ I demonstrate **oral communication skills** effectively, clearly and understandably including information, ideas and feelings. (These skills may be demonstrated in interpersonal or small group settings such as classes, teamwork situations, peer presentations, meetings and/or other group interactions.)

Approved: 11/28/07  
STUDENT PROGRAM PROGRESS ASSESS CRIT 03 06 08T

## ASSESSING PERSONAL AND ACADEMIC COMPETENCIES

*Appendix B*

FACULTY EVALUATION  
Student Program Progress Assessment Criteria

Human Development and Family Studies

Student Name:	Term:	
Course #/Title:	Date:	Cumulative GPA:
Faculty Evaluator:	Current Grade:	Core GPA:

Criteria	Scale			
	Not Applicable	Area for Growth	Meets Expectations	Exceeds Expectations
<b>Personal Accountability:</b> attendance, on-time, present, prepared, appropriate computer usage, professionalism, and ethical conduct				
Comments:				
<b>Student Engagement:</b> large and small group discussions, taking risks, active listening, general affect, and sharing information, ideas, and voice				
Comments:				
<b>Class Assignments:</b> exams, quizzes, papers, group activities, presentations, and in-class assignments				
Comments:				
<b>Interpersonal Skills:</b> empathy, respect, patience, warmth, collaboration, and cooperation				
Comments:				