

Official Report of the Course of Domestic Economy
Report to U.S. Senate

DEPARTMENT OF DOMESTIC ECONOMY IN THE IOWA AGRICULTURAL COLLEGE, AMES

n.d.

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The first instruction in this department was given in 1872 by a course of lectures to the junior girls on matters connected with housekeeping. In 1877 the trustees added a course in cooking, and provided and furnished a kitchen for the use of the class. For the last four years, therefore, lessons in cooking have been given to the junior class, in connection with lectures on such subjects as house furnishing, care of the sick, care of children, management of help, dress, &c. Physiology and domestic chemistry are carefully taught as a part of the course in domestic economy.

In 1879 the course was further extended by the addition of sewing and laundry work. These have been taught with fair success for two years. Many of our students, however, have been able to pass them by examination, and it was found difficult to arouse the same degree of interest in either as in cooking. There has been a steadily increasing demand for instruction in the latter, and the course has been reorganized for this year so as to give the cooking lessons to a larger number of students. These lessons were formerly confined to the juniors, on account partly of want of room in the small kitchen provided by the board, and partly on account of lack of drill in chemistry in the preceding years. At the last session of the legislature larger rooms were assigned to the department, and the present plan arranges for progressive lessons to the freshman, sophomore, and junior classes.

The young women of the freshman class prepare, under my instruction, the noon-day meal for one table in the main dining hall, where two hundred students are boarded. The housekeeper furnishes the bill of fare for the day, and sends to the practice kitchen sufficient material for a dinner for ten persons, which is cooked and served by the teacher and her class. Not more than five work at once, and

thus each receives careful supervision and can get actual practice at every lesson. In this way the class is taught plain cooking-how to prepare meats, vegetables, and simple desserts. The dinner cooked at the last lesson is a fair sample of the daily work. It consisted of roast beef, mashed potatoes, stewed tomatoes, and apple dumplings. While the work was going on the teacher explained not only the culinary processes, but told the class also something about the value of beef as a food, the best cuts, how to tell good beef from poor, the marks of disease, something also about the history and food value of the potato and apple, the tests for good flour, and the composition and action of baking powder.

In order to get time for this minute instruction to so large a number, the laundry work and sewing were necessarily abolished and the sophomores are given the lectures, which have been extended to embrace not only those matters which relate strictly to housekeeping, but more comprehensive information on hygiene, the laws of good breeding, and those things which go to make a home beautiful as well as clean and convenient. The class is required to take notes, and in connection with the lectures do a good deal of careful reading and write several essays each on the topics treated of.

Finally, to the juniors is given a more elaborate course in cooking. Great pains is taken in that year to explain as carefully as may be the nutritive value of different foods, tests for adulterations, the combination of the several classes of food in bills of fare so as to be most valuable, &c. Together with the theory is given thorough practice in both plain and ornamental cookery. Bread and soups are made the subjects of special drill, while salads, side dishes, pastry and cake, carving, boning, and garnishing are also most thoroughly taught. A few lessons are given in the preparation of food for the sick, and these are dwelt on with special emphasis.

The interest of the students in the department of domestic economy has been constant and lively, while the board of trustees, the college faculty, and the patrons of the school have united in encouraging its development. It is acknowledged to have met a long-existing want and to have done real service to the young women of the State. It has not only given them manual skill, but it has also increased their respect for all branches of such labor, and added dignity to that part of their work hitherto considered as menial drudgery. The promise for the future is most encouraging. Stimulated by the enthusiasm of her pupils, strengthened by the good will of her fellow teachers, and aided by the generous appreciation and liberal policy of the board of trustees, the teacher of domestic economy looks forward with sure faith to the fullest development of her department.

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