

# Ideal Housewives: Home Economics at the University of Houston

By Aimee L'Heureux



Blanche Goul, Minnie Abberman, Sarah Groves, and Dorothy Callientts sit in front of a sign boasting homemaking is a career! "Today a major in home economics entails more than first learning to cook and sew. It meets a girl's needs as a homemaker or as a businesswoman." (Houstonian, 1958, p. 303).

The Home Economics Department at the University of Houston lasted from 1945 to 1977.

According to the 1950 University of Houston yearbook, *The Houstonian*, Home Economics offered instruction in food and nutrition, institution administration, clothing, textiles, costume design, interior decoration, child development, family life, and home economics education. "Home ec girls make clothes and model them. They learn how to prepare a first-rank meal economically and cut failures to a minimum." Concurrent with the growth of the University at that time, the Home Economics Department grew, and in 1954 the Home Ec House was built to accommodate the

expanding program. A waiting list to take a special home economics course resulted from the desire to live in the new Home Ec House, a luxury for the girls enrolled in the class. But as the times changed, so did the campus, and in 1977 the program ended. The following photo essay tells a history of Home Ec at the University of Houston.

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*“This is really living! This work of art is the reason there’s a waiting list to take the special home economics course. Girls enrolled in the class get to live in the new Home Ec House.” (Houstonian, 1954, p.49) The Home Management House that stood across from Law Hall, allowed University co-eds to live “in ultramodern surroundings.” Students of Home Ec learned “to cook, plan meals, and learn through experience to be ideal housewives.” (Houstonian, 1957, p. 9).*

Over the years, Home Economics has offered a variety of courses at the University of Houston, including: Food Preparation; Elementary Costume Design; Textiles; Food Preservation; Diet in Disease; Nutrition; Development and Nursery Education; Interior House Design and Furnishings; Home Management; Experimental Cookery; Meal Planning and Table Service; Large Quantity Cookery; Institution Purchasing and Marketing; Food Cost and Institution Accounting; Institution Administration; Clothing; Pattern Study and Construction; Children’s Clothing; Modeling and Draping; Tailoring; Child Development and Family Life; Apparel Arts and Merchandising; Housing, Interior Decoration, and Related Arts; Food and Nutrition; Home Economics, Journalism, Photography, Radio, and Television; Institution Administration and Restaurant Management; Home Economic Education; Food Preparation and Selection; Apparel Analysis; Consumer Science; Human and Consumer Advocacy; Communication Development for Human Development and Consumer Sciences; and Methods of Teaching Home Economics. (University of Houston Catalogue, 1944-1945, 1954-1955, and 1976-1977).





### PEAR UPSIDE DOWN CAKE

#1426

- |                          |                                 |
|--------------------------|---------------------------------|
| 1 cup flour, sifted      | 5 tablespoons brown sugar       |
| 1/2 teaspoon baking soda | 1/4 cup dark molasses           |
| 1/4 teaspoon salt        | 1/2 cup sour milk or buttermilk |
| 1 teaspoon cinnamon      | 1/4 cup shortening, melted      |
| 3/4 teaspoon ginger      | 3 ripe pears, peeled and halved |
| 1/4 teaspoon nutmeg      | 6 walnuts                       |
| 1 egg, slightly beaten   | 2 tablespoons chopped walnuts   |

1. Sift together all the dry ingredients.
2. Combine egg, sugar, molasses, milk and shortening; gradually add flour mixture, stirring until mixed. Beat vigorously about one minute until the batter is smooth.
3. Place the pear halves, cut side down into a well greased nine inch crinkle edge heat resistant glass pie plate. Place a walnut in the center of each pear. Pour the gingerbread mixture over the pears. Sprinkle with chopped walnuts and bake in a moderate oven, 350°F., about 30 minutes.



In 1949, the Home Economics Club had over thirty members. It was charged with the maintenance of the student lounge in the Home Ec building, and club members cooked and served dinners for various campus clubs in 1950. The Home Economics Honor's Society, Phi Upsilon Omicron, encourages both the intellectual and professional development of its members. (Houstonian, 1949, 1950, and 1971).

Members of the Home Economics Club "are minors or majors in the field of home economics, take part in a program which encourages them to become the best possible professional home economists—or the most efficient and imaginative homemakers. Besides numerous weekly luncheons and periodic style shows, to which the girls jokingly refer as 'practice,' the club also stages an annual dinner honoring the 'Home Economics Girl of the Year.' The recipients must have good grades in home economics as well as in other courses, must be of good moral character and must be deserving of the honor bestowed upon her." (Houstonian, 1957, p. 192).

◀ Sarah Jo Lie opened the oven to baste a roast. Similar to the whole University at that time, the Home Economics Department was rapidly expanding in 1949 under the direction of Mrs. Fay Anthis, Home Ec had eight complete and modern kitchen units. (Houstonian, 1949).





**Pastel Hue—Year’s Fairest:**  
 This section of the *Houstonian* offered short bios of the most attractive women on campus. The following excerpt from 1957 featured one of the Home Economics majors. “A refreshing, sparkling countenance is possessed by CHARLOTTE SMITH, sophomore home economics major. Charlotte is specifically interested in apparel arts and retailing. She lists sewing as a special hobby. Charlotte is uncertain as to future plans, but she is considering the field of marketing.”

*A Home Economics demonstration is filmed at the University of Houston by KUHT, Channel 8, the world’s first education television station.*

In 1955, two graduate Home Economists and a dietician headed the cafeteria, located in Oberholzer Hall. Serving three meals a day, seven days a week, the cafeteria served an average of 1,500 meals per day. (*Houstonian*, 1955, p. 361).

*Although Home Economics was geared toward women, men did take part in the department as students and professors. Here a male student is shown folding napkins. In 1957, the Home Economics staff was made up of seven women and one man, Edmund B. Roberts. (Houstonian, 1957, p. 53).*

