Researcher Profile

An Interview with Dr. Jeff Dew

Jeff Dew earned a dual-title Ph.D. in Human Development and Family Studies and Demography from Pennsylvania State University. He then completed a two-year research post-doctoral position in Sociology at the University of Virginia. He has been an assistant professor in the department of Family, Consumer, and Human Development at Utah State University for three years. Dr. Dew sees himself as a family studies researcher who is interested in how financial issues are associated with relationship quality.

Keywords: Dew; family studies; financial therapy

Q. Tell us a bit about yourself.

A. I earned a dual-title Ph.D. in Human Development and Family Studies and Demography from the Pennsylvania State University. I then completed a two-year research postdoctoral position in Sociology at the University of Virginia. I have been an assistant professor at Utah State University for three years. I see myself as a family studies researcher who is interested in how financial issues are associated with relationship quality. I usually submit my research to family studies journals – Family Relations or Journal of Family and Economic Issues, for example. But I also occasionally submit my work to financial counseling and planning publications, like the Journal of Financial Counseling and Planning. I am delighted that the Financial Therapy Association is a group that recognizes the importance of both financial issues and family relationships.

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Q. Define what you do professionally.

A. I am an assistant professor in the department of Family, Consumer, and Human Development at Utah State University. An assistant professorship is the entry-level position on the tenure-track for professors in academia. To achieve tenure, one must demonstrate scholarly activity with a defined research area and provide quality instruction to students. In others words, I will have to continue to publish research and teach my classes well.

Q. What activities encompass your professional responsibilities?

A. I conduct research on families. My research examines how daily issues, such as finances and time usage, are associated with family relationships. For example, in a recent study I examined whether fighting about finances predicted divorce better than other types of common marital arguments (e.g., housework or in-laws). In that study, financial arguments did predict divorce more than other types of conflict.

I also teach undergraduate and graduate level family studies courses and statistics courses. Right now, I am teaching an introductory course on family studies, which is a broad overview course on family relationships. I am also teaching a graduate level course on regression, a statistical analysis technique.

Dr. Dew's workspace.

Dew's office is located in a house that was converted to office space near the Utah State University campus.

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Q. How long have you been engaged in your professional activity?

A. I have been doing quantitative research since my senior year in college, which makes over 11 years.

Q. What led you to your professional calling?

A. I left a job in the mental health field to attend graduate school. The job had a reasonable salary and incredible benefits. As I was walking home from my graduate office one evening, I wondered how the financial change would influence my marriage. I have been researching this issue ever since.

Q. How are you compensated?

A. I work for a state university as a professor on a salaried, 9-month contract.

Q. Do you work alone or do you have a team? Please explain.

A. Interdisciplinary work is important to a tenure track position and to the growing research area of family relationships and finances. Therefore, I often work with colleagues in different disciplines, including marriage and family therapy, financial counseling and planning, economics, and sociology. Due to the interdisciplinary nature of my work, I often collaborate with colleagues from other universities.

Q. What theoretical framework guides your work when dealing with clients and/or conducting research (e.g., some practitioners use a solution-focused theoretical framework while others are more eclectic)?

A. As a researcher, I don't have clients, but I do provide statistical consulting. My theory then is to provide both the best statistical analysis and most understandable results that I can. Theory is an important aspect of research. Common theories that I use in my research are social exchange and distributive justice theories. I think these theories could be applied to therapy/counseling as helpful frameworks for understanding client behavior.

Q. What needs to happen so that 10 years from now we can say that financial therapy is a respected field of study?

A. I think two things need to happen. First, distressed families need to experience the benefits of financial therapy for themselves. Nothing spreads ideas faster than people telling others about their own positive experiences of being helped. When people tell their

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friends and family about how financial therapy has helped them and how it has changed their lives, it will boost financial therapy's profile among the public. Second, researchers and practitioners need to continue publishing research to empirically demonstrate the benefits that we know clients are experiencing.

Q. What benefits can the Financial Therapy Association provide to others doing work that is similar to your professional activities?

A. I love the Financial Therapy Association because it provides a space where I know that most everyone else is thinking about the same things that I am thinking about. Scholars outside the FTA will sometimes call me a "family person" or a "finance person." However, I study both important aspects of people's lives. FTA recognizes how important both finances and relationships can be. FTA provides a great place to network and to share ideas.

Q. If others are interested in finding out more about you personally and professionally, where can they obtain this information?

A. They can drop me an email at jeff.dew@usu.edu. I am always thrilled to talk to people who are interested in the association between financial issues and family life.

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