



Women's Studies Celebrates a Decade

Simon Fraser's women's studies program this month observed a series of milestones; its tenth anniversary, dedication of the only fully-endowed academic chair at SFU, and the only endowed chair in women's studies west of Manitoba, and the 1986-87 appointment to the Ruth Wynn Woodward chair in women's studies.

The daughters of the late Mrs. Woodward joined President William Saywell in dedicating the chair. During the brief ceremony, Mrs. Mary Twigg White and Mrs. Elizabeth Russ unveiled a portrait of their mother. A former chatelaine of Government House in Victoria, active supporter of community resource groups, one of the founders of the Vancouver General Hospital women's auxiliary and a charter member of the Junior League of Vancouver, Mrs. Woodward was also active in family business affairs.

Andrea Lebowitz, first program head, lauded mothers as role models. "Mrs. Woodward commemorates one such mother," she told the more than 100 students, faculty and supporters gathered to mark the decade of women's studies at

Simon Fraser.

Dr. Susan Penfold, who has just completed her term as first incumbent of the chair, and retiring MLA Rosemary Brown, her successor, were introduced to the group, as was former SFU poet-in-residence, Dorothy Livesay.

Capilano MP Mary Collins offered congratulations for the accomplishments of the university in "recognizing the role of women."

"Simon Fraser University has always been in the avant garde and it continues to be so by providing women's studies with the leadership to carry on.

"Mrs. Woodward was a woman of great strength. Her daughters must be so proud of her — as she would have been proud of them."

Funding for the chair was provided through a \$500,000 seed grant by the secretary of state, one of five such grants made regionally across Canada, a donation of \$400,000 by White and Russ, with the remainder being raised through private donations. A current appeal to British Columbia's women is expected to take the total to the \$1,000,000 goal.



On hand for the unveiling of a portrait of Ruth Wynn Woodward were President William Saywell, Mrs. Woodward's daughters, Elizabeth Russ (left) and Mary Twigg White (right) and Capilano MP Mary Collins. SFU's women's studies chair is named in honor of Mrs. Woodward.



The first incumbent of the Ruth Wynn Woodward chair, Dr. Susan Penfold, welcomed her successor, retiring Burnaby MLA Rosemary Brown, appointed for 1986-87. It marks a return to SFU for Brown. In the early 1970s she was a member of the counselling staff.

Reach Out and Touch Technology

Telephones have the capacity to keep several calls on hold at once. They can even be wired to play music to all the waiting callers. Why, then, must several callers who wish to speak to each other at the same time make special arrangements with the phone company?

Such questions are addressed in the work of Dr. Margaret Benston, who holds a joint appointment in Simon Fraser University's school of computing science and the women's studies program. "There are claims that technology is neutral," she says. "It is assumed that whether a technology is 'good' or 'bad' simply depends on who uses it for what purpose. But things aren't that simple. Any given technology reflects, in fundamental ways, the society that created it."

The telephone example shows how North American society, based on individualism, has influenced the development of technology "with the individual user in mind. There is no physical reason why the capability of easily speaking with several callers shouldn't be available; it is just that the designers, working in a given social context, are thinking of the individual."

Benston's work, analyzing design choices around computer-based communications systems, offers other examples, and she cites commercial data bases as one. "Most of these data bases are constructed on hierarchical principles, on the assumption that there will be two kinds of individuals involved — an information provider and an information user. A group wishing to use a more egalitarian on-line data base, where everyone both provided and used information, wouldn't get much help from existing public systems. The 'social bias' in such systems becomes very clear when you look at a concrete situation.

"Something like 25-30 per cent of Canadians are involved in some kind of volunteer or community group. These groups could obviously benefit enormously from on-line data bases and other computer communications media, but, for the most part, existing systems just aren't suitable for the kind of information flow inside or between such groups. And in a group or cooperative situation, of course, a great many questions arise: Who exactly is to be responsible for providing what information? Who is to say whether information is useful or acceptable? Who is responsible for removing information from the system once it is no longer needed? Different answers to each of these questions will require different technological responses.

Benston says that questions about the social context of technology become even more interesting when gender differences are considered. "We know, for example, that different 'user interfaces' are needed for different kinds of users — those with more or less computer experience, or information providers and information users. Women in our society generally have quite a different relation to science and technology than do men, and, among other things, I'm looking at the implications that this may have for design of computer communications systems.

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This is one of a number of features on women's studies research planned for Simon Fraser Week during the fall semester.