

Women professors still a rare breed

Bias, hiring practices, keep their numbers down

Last in a series on women in the sciences

By MARY FORAN
Of the Emerald

Women science professors are a rarity at the University because of sex discrimination that includes outright salary inequities and a subtle "big-brother system," two women faculty members say.

Jane Gray and Patricia Boeshaar see their unique positions in the biology and physics departments as products of their scientific specializations, hard work and favorable circumstances. But both agree that women in science must deal with various forms of discrimination.

"Women scientists live in a world of silence," says Gray, the only tenured female in biology, with an adjunct position in geology. "Male colleagues don't include women in the camaraderie of the profession," she says.

Gray recently received an out-of-court cash settlement from a Department of Labor suit she filed in 1975, charging salary inequity due to sex discrimination. To prove her case, Gray had to find "comparable professionals" in related specialties.

That was a problem, Gray says, because there are no women with which to compare her position. She finally picked her male "comparitors" from both geology and biology, since her specialization in paleontology deals with aspects of both. Gray studies fossilized pollen and spores in the

highly specialized area of palynology.

"Most women are reluctant to make a fuss about salary discrimination," says Gray. "Not everybody is willing to pursue this."

The University may "sit on" a salary for various reasons, says Gray. "It's the single woman syndrome," she adds. "They make value judgments even if they don't admit it, asking what does she need the money for?"

Gray recently saw the successful conclusion of a discrimination suit she and three other women filed against the Public Employees Retirement System. The suit charged that PERS paid women smaller monthly retirement benefits than men, even though they contributed the same amount of money to the plan.

PERS promised to pay uniform retirement benefits after the state agreed that its practice of using "sex-segregated life-expectancy tables" violated the Civil Rights Act of 1964.

"It's a precedent-setting case throughout the United States because almost all (public retirement) systems do this," says Gray.

Gray says she was discriminated against in an interview with the Shell Oil Company, because the firm was reluctant to have a research program headed by a woman.

"There's still a big pool of men who feel very emasculated by professional women," says Gray,

who was the only woman in her graduate geology class of 90 in Illinois.

The situation is still difficult for women graduate students in geology, says Gray, because faculty members are reluctant to send women out into the field with men.

This limits the opportunities for women to gain mapping and other essential field experience necessary for jobs in industry, says Gray.

"No one's going to stop you from going off on your own," she adds. Certain areas are risky, however, and geologists in industry are usually sent out in pairs.

"I think I've been very lucky," says Gray of her science career. "I've had very supportive professional people behind my work. But I've also worked very hard," she says. "I've devoted myself to my science."

Gray says she got tenure at the University "right away," though at the time "tenure was easy to get." She was dismissed from her position at the University of Texas because of a nepotism rule, she says, even though she out-ranked her ex-husband and had been hired separately in a different department.

"We couldn't fight it," Gray says. "There were no laws then." In 1958 they tried to find jobs at Rice University, but "they couldn't hire us both, so they didn't hire either of us."

Husband-wife teams of scientists are less unusual now, says Gray. "You have to find a single institution that happens to want both your specialties." That isn't easy, she says.

Boeshaar found one such joint position at the University with her husband two years ago, and now says she "can't complain" about being the only woman faculty member in the physics department.

Boeshaar has a half-time appointment as an astronomer while her husband has a full-time astronomy position.

"This allows us to be together and support each other with our classloads," Boeshaar says. As-



Photo by Dennis Hickok

"Women scientists live in a world of silence," says Jane Gray, one of only two tenured faculty members in the University's science department. Gray teaches both biology and geology.

tronomy requires a lot of travel and observation she explains, so when her husband has to be gone, Boeshaar can take his classes.

Because Boeshaar's husband studies galaxies, while she studies spectro-stars, their research specializations don't overlap, allowing each to publish separately.

There are more women in astronomy than in other areas of physics, says Boeshaar, and most are separated from their husbands because they've had to find jobs in different locations.

"Most women in astronomy begin early as career women," says Boeshaar. She and her husband have decided not to have children, she adds. "You can do it if you want to, but most of us just decide we enjoy our work too much."

Boeshaar did graduate work in Louisiana "where women are treated as the property of their husbands."

"It's still a state law in Louisiana that no matter what her age, a

woman attending college has to live in the dorms," says Boeshaar. "The attitude 10 years ago in the south was that women students were just going to go off and get married."

Boeshaar says she hasn't noticed that attitude here, though "others don't feel they're treated as well." Boeshaar was part of the Women in Science group last year, a group working to eliminate "unconscious discrimination" by promoting women scientists as speakers, and visiting Eugene high schools to talk about careers in science for women.

"Discrimination against women in the physical sciences is not overt," adds Boeshaar. "It's the big brother system," she explains. "But if you're willing to hack the work, you can do it."

Boeshaar, who is now sitting on a search committee for the physics department, notes that out of 40 applicants, no women have applied. "If there are no women, how can you hire them?" she asks.

Would Newton gravitate toward O'Keefe?

Like the apple gravitated toward Newton.

You see, Newton was the beneficiary of a bump of enlightenment. Undoubtedly, he would have been amenable to other enlightening stimuli. For example, the hearty, full-bodied flavor of O'Keefe. The smooth and easy swallow. The fascinating, long-lasting head. As thousands of others after him, it is only logical that he would have said, "It's too good to gulp."

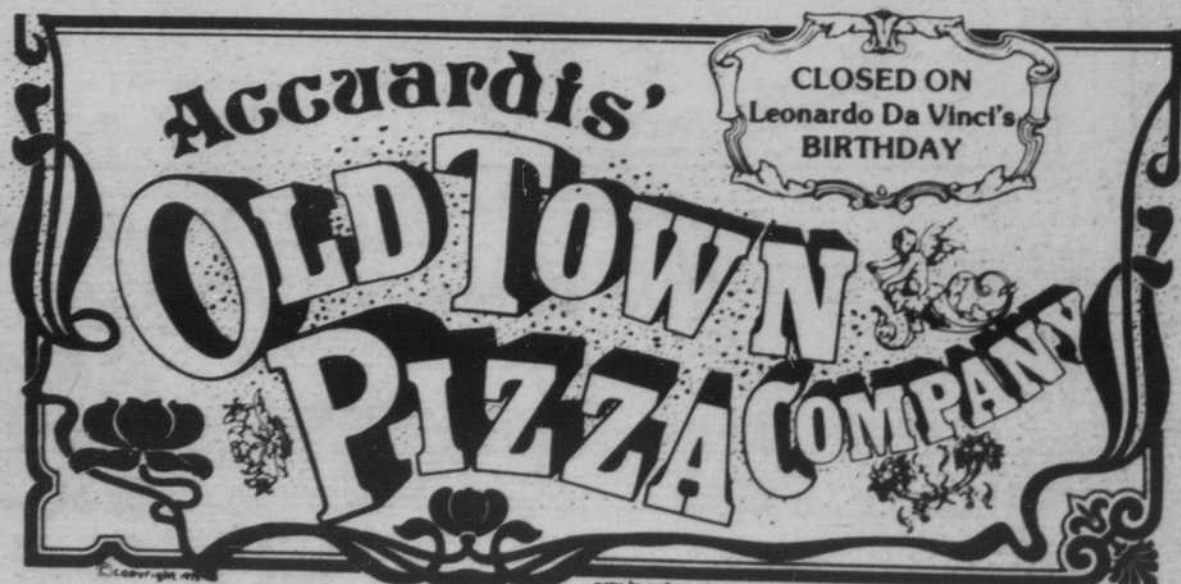


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