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RESEARCH CHAIR TO BENEFIT WOMEN

Women in science and engineering (prairie region) chair will focus on Aboriginal women

The University of Manitoba has a new Chair devoted to encouraging girls and women to take up science and engineering careers. Annemieke Farenhorst has been named the prairie region's new Chair for Women in Science and Engineering by the Natural Sciences and Engineering Research Council of Canada (NSERC).

“The work done through the Chairs for Women in Science and Engineering program helps remove barriers and encourage women to bring their unique perspectives and talents to bear on today’s challenging problems,” noted Suzanne Fortier, president of NSERC. “Our selection committee was impressed with Dr. Farenhorst’s program, including her focus on the needs of Aboriginal girls and women.”

Ms. Isabelle Blain, NSERC’s vice-president, research grants and scholarships, announced Farenhorst’s appointment at a news conference held in Migizii Agamik (Bald Eagle Lodge). Farenhorst was presented with a plaque marking the soil science professor’s elevation to NSERC Chair.

Farenhorst will receive a total of \$1.4 million in support over the next five years from NSERC and the additional funding partners: Manitoba Pork Council, University of Saskatchewan, Province of Manitoba, Association of Professional Engineers and Geoscientists of Manitoba, Manitoba Institution of Agrologists, Canadian Society of Soil Science, the Faculty of Agricultural & Food Sciences, and the University of Manitoba.

A Statistics Canada study, published in July 2011, shows a slight increase of females employed in the areas of sciences, engineering and mathematics. In 2009, just 22.3 per cent of professionals in these occupations were women, up marginally from 19.5 per cent in 1987.

Farenhorst plans to address the level of participation of women in science and engineering as students and professionals in the Prairie region.

“We anticipate this new Chair will make an impact in promoting science and engineering opportunities to women and Aboriginal women in particular, as well as increasing public and institutional awareness of mechanisms that influence the participation of women in these fields and encouraging enhanced role modeling for women,” said Farenhorst.

Gender equity is key to providing food security as outlined in a 2011 report published by the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO). By working closely with Manitoba Pork, the Agricultural Institute of Canada, and the Manitoba Institute of Agrologists, to particularly promote the importance of gender equity in agriculture, this Chair program will ensure that young women recognize the career opportunities in applied science areas such as agriculture.

With the task of increasing discussions among women scientists and engineers, and their potential students, Farenhorst unveiled a new website dedicated to do just that.

“In any mentorship program, typically the first hurdle is to establish a connection between the mentor and the student,” explained Farenhorst. “I plan to increase the ease of communication between women interested in a career in science and engineering and women who have established themselves as professionals in these fields. In part, this will be achieved through the development of a searchable internet-based tool connected to \$15,000/year in women student-professor mentorship funding to be first launched in 2013.”

At the high school level, Farenhorst is working in collaboration with the University of Manitoba’s Aboriginal Student Recruitment Officer, Jen Storm, in producing videos that highlight and celebrate Aboriginal culture on campus, and provide examples to girls of opportunities for science and engineering careers. In particular, the video production will be aimed at reaching youth in on-reserve First Nations communities.

“Today’s announcement is wonderful news, not just for Dr. Farenhorst who brings her greatest strengths to the Chair, and the University of Manitoba, but for all of the women in our prairie provinces,” said Dr. Digvir S. Jayas, Vice-President (Research and International) and Distinguished Professor at the University of Manitoba. “It is certain that the outcomes of her networking initiatives will lead to the increase of female presence in what are currently predominantly male dominated fields.”

The Chairs for Women in Science and Engineering program is regional, with one Chair for each of the Atlantic, Quebec, Ontario, Prairie, and British Columbia and Yukon regions. The goal of this Chair program is to increase the participation of women in science and engineering and to provide role models for women considering careers in these fields. For a complete list of current chairholders, please visit:

http://www.nserc-crsng.gc.ca/Professors-Professeurs/CFS-PCP/Wcurrent-Factuelles_eng.asp

Visit Farenhorst’s NSERC Women in Science and Engineering (Prairie Region) chairholder website <http://cwse-prairies.ca/> for which Farenhorst is working in collaboration with the University of Manitoba’s Aboriginal Student Centre to launch a logo contest. The lucky winner will see their logo on the new web-site and \$500 in their pocket.

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