

Women in Chemistry Symposium

On October 18, 2005, a group of graduate students and post-doctoral associates from the School of Chemistry and Biochemistry at the Georgia Institute of Technology hosted more than 100 undergraduate and graduate students, faculty and administrators, and government and industry scientists at the School's inaugural Women in Chemistry Symposium. The event focused on raising awareness of, and implementing solutions to, the challenges faced by women in chemistry today and providing resources for female students planning to pursue careers in chemistry. Shannon Watt, Chair of the Women in Chemistry Committee, noted in her introductory remarks that, while women currently earn approximately 1/3 of doctoral degrees in Chemistry, studies show that they are significantly underrepresented in many upper-level positions in academia, government, and industry.

The Symposium addressed these issues from a variety of perspectives. Dr. Mary Frank Fox, NSF ADVANCE Professor in the School of Public Policy and co-director of the Center for the Study of Women, Science and Technology at Georgia Tech, opened the Symposium with a lecture about the status of women in academic science. Panel discussions featuring female scientists from metro Atlanta academia, government, and industry highlighted diverse strategies for overcoming challenges to achieve personal and professional success. Dr. Geraldine Richmond, Professor of Chemistry at the University of Oregon and Chair of the Committee on the Advancement for Women Chemists (COACH), drew attention to the COACH program's efforts to lower the barriers to women's achievement in academic chemistry. Dr. Karen Wooley, Professor of Chemistry at Washington University in St. Louis, translated her personal experiences into a thought-provoking keynote address. A panel discussion addressing the self-selection phenomenon resulted in discussion of strategies to repair the "leaking pipeline" of women into careers in science. Guided and free-form networking opportunities throughout the day afforded students and professional scientists an opportunity to benefit from others' experiences and opinions in an informal setting.

"The Women in Chemistry Symposium marks an important day in the history of the School of Chemistry [and Biochemistry]. It recognized the opportunities to raise awareness about issues facing women in chemistry and hopefully contributed significantly to helping the community move further down path of leveling the playing field for women and providing them with a nurturing environment. I am grateful to the committee for showing such leadership and for developing such a stimulating symposium," said Dr. Seth Marder, Professor of Chemistry and Biochemistry and Director of the Center for Organic Photonics and Electronics, which co-sponsored the event. The Symposium was also sponsored by the Georgia Tech NSF ADVANCE program, the College of Sciences, the School of Chemistry and Biochemistry, and the Buice Family Fund.

Dr. David Collard, Professor and Associate Chair of the School, noted that the Symposium's discussions provided much more than just career advice. "While participants had the opportunity to gain insights into the inner workings of science and employment opportunities in academia, industry, and government, perhaps the most important thing for students to hear was that others share their own concerns. It is easy for a student to feel isolated and to believe that they are the only one to have a particular concern about their future. Much of the discussion

should have provided support to the participants to help them work out their own place in the scholarly, entrepreneurial, and creative enterprise. As was reinforced at the symposium, many of the concerns are not gender-specific, but pertain to the creation of a supportive environment for all students,” Dr. Collard said.

Over 50 graduate and undergraduate students from six Atlanta-area universities participated in the Symposium and took away valuable new perspectives, advice, and inspiration. Georgia Tech graduate student Hillary Huttenhower summed up her experiences by saying, “The Women in Chemistry Symposium was both an interesting and eye-opening experience for me. It was comforting to me to know that other people out there do think about and worry about some of the same issues that I do. At the same time, lots of other issues were raised and discussed that I had never really considered before, and I'm glad all those things were brought to my attention.”

Contact: Ms. Ashley Ringer, Women in Chemistry Committee Chair
School of Chemistry and Biochemistry
Georgia Institute of Technology
Atlanta, GA 30332-0400
ashley.ringer@chemistry.gatech.edu
(404) 385-1310

Additional Information can be found on the Women in Chemistry website:
<http://web.chemistry.gatech.edu/~wic>