

FEMALES IN THE PROFESSORiate AT THE UNIVERSITY OF MELBOURNE

Paper presented at the Royal Society of Victoria Symposium
in honour of Professor Nancy Millis

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Klein, A.G. 2010. Females in the professoriate at The University of Melbourne. *Transactions of the Royal Society of Victoria* 122(1): xxxi-xxxv. ISSN 0035-9211.

For the first 120 years from its establishment in 1854 the University of Melbourne had an all-male professoriate. Personal chairs were established in 1964 in order to recognise and reward exceptionally distinguished academics that were not heads of departments; the first female professor was appointed to such a chair in 1975. The first female Departmental Head with the title of professor followed in 1979 and our guest of honour, Nancy Millis was appointed to a Personal Chair in Microbiology in 1982 – only the fourth female professor ever. This paper traces the growth in female numbers in the professoriate, which, in 2008, stood at 85 out of about 410 – that is only about 21% - but growing, as outstanding female candidates reach the required level of distinction.

The University of Melbourne was established in 1854 with a teaching staff of four Professors: Classical and Comparative Philology; History and Political Economy; Law, and Mathematics. Fifty years later there were 14 professors, all male and all heads of their departments. On the centenary of the University there were 44 professors; most of them heads of departments - but by then there were several subjects and faculties that had multiple chairs – for example Medicine which had no fewer than six. Still no females – with one remarkable exception: Georgina Sweet, an outstanding academic and zoologist who did her research under Professor Sir Baldwyn Spencer in the Biology Department and became the first female Doctor of Science in 1904. She assumed the role of Acting Professor in 1916/17 during Spencer's absence – so that she must count as the first female Professor in this University.

For those, like Georgina Sweet, for whom there was no opening at the level of Head of Department, the rank of Associate Professor was introduced in 1921. Other distinguished female academics, for example the noted Plant Geneticist Margaret Blackwood who later became Dame Margaret Blackwood and a Deputy Chancellor, were never elevated to the rank of Professor. Several other females were later

promoted to Reader, a title that was established in 1965, among them Diana Dyason who was appointed Reader in Charge of the Department of History and Philosophy of Science; Alison Patrick, head of the History Department and Barbara Falk, head of the Centre for the Study of Higher Education. Gwen Dow in Education and Pat Grimshaw in History became Readers in 1970 and Mary Hiscock in Law was promoted in 1972. But still no female Professors!

It took several more years before this situation was rectified. It became clear that there were distinguished people in various departments of the University whose international reputation was at least equal to that of their Department Heads. Hence the category of Personal Chair was established in 1964 to which such individuals could be appointed on the criteria of 'distinction and international reputation'. By 1967 a question of numbers arose, since these positions were centrally funded, and a quota of six was agreed upon. There had been one appointment in 1964, three in 1965 and two in 1966. Later the quota was revised to equal one tenth of the number of established chairs and thus it was set at nine in 1967. It meant that when this number was filled, as in 1969 and 1972, candidates had to wait until a vacancy occurred.

Finally, in 1975, Dr Priscilla Kinkaid-Smith, a Royal Melbourne Hospital nephrologist with a formidable reputation became the first female to be appointed to a Personal Chair and the first female professor after 120 years of existence of the University of Melbourne. That the first woman professor was in Medicine – then a conservative and male-dominated faculty, was an extraordinary development because before that even the professors of gynaecology were all males – a situation comparable to having professors of automotive engineering who do not own cars.

The first regular chair appointment followed four years later, in 1979: Sister Margaret Manion became Professor Manion when she succeeded her mentor, Professor Joseph Burke, to the Herald Chair of Fine Arts. She later became the first female President of the Academic Board.

Several more years had to elapse before the next appointment. After waiting in the “queue” (until the noted poet Vincent Buckley vacated a position by retiring) our guest of honour, Nancy Millis, was appointed to a personal chair in microbiology in 1982 (having in previous years served as Acting Head of Department but without the benefit of the title of Professor at that stage). Her reputation in research and in teaching, having established the pioneering course in Industrial Microbiology, finally received its long-overdue recognition, as she became the fourth ever female professor, counting Georgina Sweet as the first.

The next case is a rather curious one: Professor Austin Hughes was appointed Director of the Vision Research Institute in 1983, following a brilliant research career at Oxford. A strange sequence of events resulted in his becoming Professor Abbie Hughes following a sex change procedure completed around 1990. To its great credit, the University community took this in its stride causing little or no comment beyond some wags quipping that ‘this University will now go to any lengths to create female professors’ because by then an Equal Opportunity policy was in full swing. Regrettably, it appears that the Optometry profession, which supported the Chair, was less able to cope with the situation and Professor Hughes resigned in 1991.

The next appointment was in 1985, when my distinguished colleague on the panel, Adrienne Clarke was appointed to a Personal Chair in Botany. She later became the first female “Laureate Professor” – more about which anon. A few years later, in 1989, having waited her turn in the “queue”, Cheryl Saunders, the distinguished constitutional lawyer,

was also appointed to a personal Chair, in the Law School. Various regular chair appointments followed in subsequent years, Marilyn Renfree, Head of Zoology; Joan McMeeken, Head of Physiotherapy and Virginia Studdert, Veterinary Science (Clinical), all in 1991. Sally Walker was appointed to a regular chair in the Law School in 1993. She later became the first Senior Deputy Vice-Chancellor, just before resigning to become Vice-Chancellor of Deakin University in the year 2000.

A further two female appointments to Personal Chairs followed: Pauline Ladiges was appointed to a Personal Chair in Botany in 1992 and Lorraine Dennerstein, Personal Chair in Public Health in 1995. By that time the ‘quota’ of Personal Chairs had risen to ten, then one each year from 1982 onwards and finally to two appointments each year from 1992 to 1998, the total number having risen to almost 20. The reason for the increase in the number of Personal Chairs was a competitive imperative: Too many of our outstanding sub-professorial staff were liable to be enticed to chair appointments at other Universities, unless they were rewarded by a Personal Chair here. However, after 1998 a new policy came to the effect: No new appointments to Personal Chairs were made (after Professor Sam Berkovic, the world-leading epilepsy expert at the Austin Hospital who was appointed in 1998). Instead, regular promotion to Professorial rank became possible so that from 1999 onwards a veritable flood of new professorial appointments occurred each year, including a rising proportion of females. For example, in 2007, of the 15 Associate Professors who were promoted to Full Professor, seven were women. In this way several departments acquired their first female professors, among them Gabrielle Lakomski in Education (1999); Elizabeth Sonnenberg in Information Science (2000); Rachel Webster in Physics (2003); Frances Separovic in Chemistry (2005); Catherine Falk (Music) in 2006, who became Dean of the Faculty of Music, and quite a few others. Among the latest, Kerry Landman became the first female professor of Mathematics and Doreen Thomas became the first female Professor of Engineering – both promoted in 2008, bringing the total number to 65 active female professors currently on the staff – that is about 21.3 %.

After the discontinuance of personal chairs another new category, that of Laureate Professor, was instituted as a special mark of distinction. The first to be granted this honour in the year 2000 was Adrienne Clarke, followed by Marilyn Renfree (Zoology) in

2002 and Cheryl Saunders (Constitutional Law), in 2007; three females out of the current total of 11, i.e. about 27%. A complete list of female professors, past and present, is shown in Appendix 1 and a statistical overview is presented in Tables 1 and 2, (The University of Melbourne 2008) from which the steadily rising but still small proportion of females is evident. Looking on the bright side, the percentage of female professors has almost doubled in the last decade and it continues to rise, along with the availability of suitable candidates. The proportion of females in the sub-professorial ranks is much greater, from which one may conclude that the pool of potential future appointees is growing. I quite sure that given true equal opportunity, and more importantly equal encouragement, there will be a much greater representation of females in the professoriate in future. One by one, even the male-dominated professions are coming to realise that society cannot afford to waste 50% of its brainpower as it has done in the bad old days.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I wish to acknowledge the invaluable help of Professor Ron Ridley who researched the history of Personal Chairs (unpublished manuscript, 2003) and of Rohan Drape, Catherine Gow and Joan Rees of the Equal Opportunity Unit. The Equal Opportunity Unit produces an annual report 'Faculty Employment Profile by Gender' which includes accurate data on academic staff by level and gender. The reports can be found at: <http://www.hr.unimelb.edu.au/strategic/equity/planning/reports>. My other sources include extracts from the University Calendar: <http://www.unimelb.edu.au/Members/professor.html> and for former professors: <http://unimelb.edu.au/unisec/calendar/forprof.html>. Regrettably neither of the latter two lists is completely accurate.

Table 1. Number of women in academic (teaching and research) positions in Faculties of The University of Melbourne.

| | 1995 | 1996 | 1997 | 1998 | 1999 | 2000 | 2001 | 2002 | 2003 | 2004 | 2005 | 2006 | 2007 | 2008 |
|--------------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|
| Professor | 15 | 17 | 18 | 23 | 29 | 31 | 32 | 32 | 32 | 42 | 49 | 48 | 64 | 65 |
| Assoc Prof | 29 | 37 | 35 | 37 | 50 | 51 | 67 | 74 | 79 | 90 | 92 | 95 | 105 | 106 |
| Snr Lecturer | 94 | 110 | 138 | 152 | 144 | 159 | 163 | 167 | 171 | 166 | 167 | 173 | 174 | 169 |
| Lecturer | 201 | 191 | 188 | 181 | 173 | 178 | 191 | 199 | 219 | 227 | 246 | 224 | 226 | 215 |
| Tutor | 64 | 63 | 75 | 95 | 88 | 74 | 88 | 77 | 86 | 89 | 85 | 81 | 76 | 90 |

Table 2. Percentage of academic (teaching and research) positions held by women in Faculties of The University of Melbourne.

| | 1995 | 1996 | 1997 | 1998 | 1999 | 2000 | 2001 | 2002 | 2003 | 2004 | 2005 | 2006 | 2007 | 2008 |
|--------------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|
| Professor | 9 | 11 | 11 | 14 | 16 | 17 | 16 | 15 | 14 | 18 | 19 | 18 | 20 | 21 |
| Assoc Prof | 12 | 14 | 14 | 13 | 17 | 18 | 22 | 24 | 25 | 27 | 28 | 29 | 31 | 31 |
| Snr Lecturer | 24 | 27 | 33 | 32 | 31 | 33 | 33 | 34 | 36 | 34 | 33 | 35 | 37 | 38 |
| Lecturer | 46 | 46 | 44 | 42 | 43 | 44 | 47 | 47 | 49 | 51 | 52 | 53 | 53 | 52 |
| Tutor | 49 | 46 | 46 | 58 | 53 | 51 | 57 | 55 | 55 | 59 | 56 | 66 | 68 | 64 |

Appendix 1. A complete list of female professors of The University of Melbourne.

| Year | Name | Department | Status | Employment |
|------|-------------------------|------------------------------|----------------|------------|
| 1916 | Georgina SWEET | Biology - Zoology | Acting | Ret. 1924 |
| 1975 | Priscilla KINKAID-SMITH | Medicine-RMH | Pers. Chair | Ret. 1991 |
| 1979 | Margaret MANION | Fine Arts (Herald Professor) | Pres. Acad Bd | Ret 1995 |
| 1982 | Nancy MILLIS | Microbiology | Pers. Chair | Ret 1983 |
| 1983 | Austin/Abbie HUGHES | Vision Res. Inst | Prof. Fellow | Ret 1991 |
| 1985 | Adrienne CLARKE | Botany | Pers. Chair | Ret. 2004 |
| 1989 | Cheryl SAUNDERS | Law | Pers. Chair | |
| 1989 | Concetta BENN | Social Work | | Ret. 1991 |
| 1991 | Marilyn RENFREE | Zoology | | |
| 1991 | Joan McMEEKEN | Physiotherapy | | Ret. 2004 |
| 1991 | Virginia STUDDERT | Veterinary Sci. | Ret. 2002 | |
| 1992 | Pauline LADIGES | Botany | Pers. Chair | |
| 1992 | Kathleen CARTER | Social Work | | Res. 1994 |
| 1992 | Kaye STACEY | Maths Education | | |
| 1993 | Sally WALKER | Law (Hearn Professor) | Sen. DVC | Res. 2000 |
| 1993 | Patricia GRIMSHAW | History | | |
| 1994 | Frances CHRISTIE | Language & Literacy Ed. | | Ret. 2003 |
| 1995 | Bridie RABAN | Early Childhood Studies | | |
| 1995 | Lorraine DENNERSTEIN | Pub. Health/Psychiatry | Pers. Chair | |
| 1995 | Barbara CONE-WESSON | Audiology and Speech Sci. | | Res. 2000 |
| 1995 | Barbara CREED | Culture and Communication | | |
| 1995 | Amanda SINCLAIR | Management | | |
| 1996 | Suzanne CORY | Medical Biology | Director, WEHI | |
| 1996 | Judith PARKER | Nursing | | |
| 1997 | Ruth FINCHER | Urban Planning | | |
| 1997 | Margaret ABERNATHY | Managerial Accounting | Dean Econ. | |
| 1997 | Ellen GODDARD | Agribusiness | | Res. 2000 |
| 1997 | Doris YOUNG | General Practice | | |
| 1997 | Jaynie ANDERSON | Fine Arts (Herald Professor) | | |
| 1998 | Mary-Jayne GETHING | Biochemistry (Medical) | | Res. 2005 |
| 1998 | Catherine BULL | Landscape Architecture | | |
| 1998 | Margaret BRITZ | Food Science | | |
| 1998 | Cynthia HARDY | Management | | |
| 1999 | Lenore MANDERSON | Public Health | Fed. Fellow | |
| 1999 | Sandra REES | Anatomy | | |
| 1999 | Gabrielle LAKOMSKI | Education | Promoted 1/7 | Ret 2008 |
| 2000 | Elizabeth SONNENBERG | Information Science | Promoted | |
| 2000 | Marcia LANGTON | Indigenous Studies | | |
| 2000 | Loane SKENE | Law | Promoted | |
| 2000 | Elizabeth MALCOLM | Irish Studies | | |
| 2000 | Gillian TRIGGS | Law | | |
| 2000 | Philippa PATTISON | Psychology | | |
| 2001 | Mary GALEA | Physiotherapy | | |
| 2002 | Carol KULIK | Human Res. Management | | |
| 2002 | Johanna WYN | Education Policy | Promoted | |
| 2003 | Dawn TALBOT | Rural Medical Education | | |
| 2003 | Rachel WEBSTER | Physics | Promoted | |
| 2003 | Verity BURGMANN | Political Science | Promoted | |
| 2003 | Janet McCALMAN | Public Health | Promoted | |
| 2003 | Linda JOHNSON | Nursing | | |
| 2003 | Jennifer MORGAN | Law | | |
| 2003 | Judith SAVIGE | Medicine (Northern Health) | | |
| 2004 | Anne FREADMAN | French | | |

Appendix 1. A complete list of female professors of The University of Melbourne. cont'd.

| Year | Name | Department | Status | Employment |
|------|-----------------------|----------------------------|-------------|------------|
| 2004 | Sioban NELSON | Nursing | | |
| 2004 | Vera MACKIE | Veterinary Science | | |
| 2004 | Joy DAMOUSI | History | | |
| 2005 | Susan SAWYER | Adolescent Health | | |
| 2005 | Camille CAMERON | Law | Promoted | |
| 2005 | Belinda FEHLBERG | Law | Promoted | |
| 2005 | Anne ORFORD | Law | Promoted | |
| 2005 | Kate DARIAN-SMITH | Australian Centre | Promoted | |
| 2005 | Lyn YATES | Curriculum | | |
| 2005 | Sheila FITZPATRICK | History | Fed. Fellow | |
| 2005 | Lorena BROWN | Microbiol. and Immunology | | |
| 2005 | Stephanie TRIGG | English | Promoted | |
| 2005 | Ingrid SCHEFFER | Paediatrics | | |
| 2005 | Louise BURRELL | Medicine (Austin) | Promoted | |
| 2005 | Frances SEPAROVIC | Chemistry | Promoted | |
| 2005 | Alison YOUNG | Criminology | Promoted | |
| 2005 | Meg MORRIS | Political Science | | |
| 2006 | Jane GUNN | General Practice | | |
| 2006 | Adrienne STONE | Law | | |
| 2006 | Deirdre COLEMAN | English | | |
| 2006 | Gillian WIGGLESWORTH | Languages | Promoted | |
| 2006 | Julie BINES | Paediatrics(Smorgon Chair) | | |
| 2006 | Cathy HUMPHRIES | Family Welfare | | |
| 2007 | Patricia DESMOND | Radiology (Rouse Chair) | | |
| 2007 | Sheena REILLY | Speech Pathology | | |
| 2007 | Jeanette HOORN | Culture and Communication | Promoted | |
| 2007 | Lorraine GREEVES | Women's Health | | |
| 2007 | Karen JEHN | Management | | |
| 2007 | Nicola LAUTENSCHLAGER | Psychiatry | | |
| 2008 | Anne KAVANAGH | Population Health | | |
| 2008 | Robyn GUYMER | Ophthalmology | Promoted | |
| 2008 | Jill KEEFE | Ophthalmology | Promoted | |
| 2008 | Antonia FINNANE | History | Promoted | |