

NEWS RELEASE

Wilfrid Laurier
University



PROWIS exposes young women to careers in science and math *Laurier conference uses hands-on approach to stress importance of keeping options open*

For Immediate Release

**May 02, 2001
35-01**

Contact: Dr. David Peirson
Associate Dean, Faculty of Science
(519) 884-0710, ext. 2426

or Michael Strickland
Manager, Media Relations & Information
(519) 884-0710, ext. 3070

WATERLOO – Forty female students from high schools across southern Ontario will explore career options in male-dominated fields from May 8 to 10 as Wilfrid Laurier University runs Promoting Women in Science (PROWIS). Designed to encourage the Grade-10 students to study math and science at a time when many young women abandon those areas, the conference covers everything from animal behavior and astronomy to aging and artificial intelligence.

Laurier received over 100 applications from students with vastly different interests in science and math. Some know they enjoy the subjects while others are trying to determine whether or not to continue studying these areas. Limited to 40 participants, PROWIS uses an intimate, hands-on approach to encourage women in their formative, decision-making years to stick with science and math, and keep their career options open.

“Grade 10 is the critical time to impress on these young women that science-related careers are possible because, if they choose not to take math or science, they are closing off whole areas of opportunity,” says David Peirson, associate dean of the faculty of science. “The faculty members and Laurier students who run these programs are sincerely interested in sharing their enthusiasm for science, and piquing the interest of these young women is really the goal.”

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Professors in biology, chemistry, computing, geography, kinesiology, math, physics and psychology lead two-and-a-half hour interactive workshops. Each participant attends four of the 15 workshops being offered. This year's topics include "Tofu for You," which shows participants how to extract and use plant proteins, and "All the World in a Grain of Sand," which involves sifting and examining grains of sand to determine their origins.

"PROWIS 2001 will be an excellent opportunity to learn about the different science subjects that are of interest to me. I will be able to apply my existing knowledge as well as expand and learn new and different information," says PROWIS participant Amanda Hansford of St. Michael Catholic Secondary School in Stratford. "What I hope is that the experience I gain from being accepted into this program will help me in choosing the right career."

A highlight of the conference, which is sponsored by Bell Canada, is a banquet on Wednesday evening where participants will hear from 10 women who have pursued successful careers in areas related to science and math. Among the role models sharing stories of their challenges and successes are a veterinarian, a speech-language pathologist and a physiotherapist.

Now in its 11th year, PROWIS has exposed 400 young women to science- and math-related disciplines. Past participants have gone on to study in areas such as agriculture, aviation, biochemistry, civil engineering, environmental sciences, genetics, information systems, medicine, psychology and physics.