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Laurier centre celebrates launch with Harvard chair visit

WATERLOO – Wilfrid Laurier University's Centre for Women in Science (WinS) is celebrating its official launch Nov. 8 with a visit from Melissa Franklin, Mallinckrodt professor of Physics and chair of the Physics department at Harvard University.

The centre's mission is to build a strong community for women in science as well as the mathematical social sciences through research, action and communication. Franklin is a fitting example of the centre's goals. Born and raised in Canada, Franklin is a pioneer as a scientist and a woman: she was the co-discoverer of the top quark, a fundamental particle of nature, and the first woman to achieve tenure in Harvard's Physics department.

In 2008, only 30 per cent of mathematics, computer science and information science graduates in Canada were female, which represents a decrease from 35 per cent in 1990.

"There is a clear gender difference in some university programs," said Shohini Ghose, professor of Physics & Computer Science at Laurier and director of WinS. "It's a complex problem that's related, in part, to women's and men's perceptions of identity – which can be influenced by the many communities we're a part of through our lives. This centre aims to build a strong community of female scientists and social scientists to improve these statistics."

WinS will provide grants and support to female scientists and to scholars studying the role of women in the sciences. In addition, it will organize seminars, workshops and conferences, develop partnerships with other educational institutions and with industry, facilitate networking and mentoring opportunities for female scientists, and support community outreach to female youth considering careers in science.

In addition to meeting Franklin, guests at the WinS launch will meet the centre's distinguished advisory board and faculty and students, and can participate in hands-on science demonstrations. The event takes place Nov. 8 from 4:30 p.m. to 6:30 p.m. in the Science Building atrium. Guests are asked to RSVP to apieon@wlu.ca. Media are also invited to attend.

Franklin will be delivering a public lecture Nov. 7 at the Perimeter Institute for Theoretical Physics.

Visit www.wlu.ca/wins for more information.

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