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STAFF EDITORIAL: A Fish with Tenure

Inequity threatens Columbia's future.

February 04, 2005

On New Year's Day, Rosalind Krauss and Jeremy Waldron were officially awarded the title of University Professor, the highest level of standing available to Columbia faculty. We congratulate them both on this achievement. However, as Professor Krauss is currently the only woman among the eleven University Professors, we see her appointment as but a small step forward for Columbia's egregiously backward hiring practices.

Krauss, the Meyer Schapiro Professor of Modern Art and Theory, is only the second female Columbia professor ever to be given University Professor status. Addressing the underrepresentation of women at high levels in the University, Krauss wrote in an e-mail last week that she has felt "somewhat marginalized."

Unfortunately, this problem seems to be endemic in the Ivy League. Harvard President Lawrence Summers' recent comments suggesting that a biological or innate difference in women may be responsible for their lack of advancement in fields of science and math is representative of a broader bias against female faculty. Seeking to address this problem, Princeton recently appointed a faculty panel that reported on "unprofessional" behavior female faculty routinely experience.

So, while the issues confronting Columbia are not unique, the lack of public response or outcry is. Columbia is still in court with professor Graciela Chichilnisky, with whom the University has had to settle multiple times, only to return to court for not meeting their legal obligations. For a university that pontificates on its standing as a center for progressive study, ample evidence---including that gathered by the Columbia Student Senate---suggests an appalling lack of equity in salaries and hiring practices of women

This discrimination is especially appalling given the caliber of so many female professors. Professor Chichilnisky is a perfect example. She is, after all, the director of Columbia's Program on Information and Resources and director of its Center for Risk Management. The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization endowed an academic chair for her, as she has helped set economic and environmental policy for the UN, the World Bank, and many other prominent NGOs, and was a lead author of the Intergovernmental Program on Climate Change and the resultant Kyoto Protocol.

Every day, Columbia's female professors do work at the same level as their male peers, and every day they are reminded that to Columbia they matter less. Regardless of how much money alumni contribute, how many new buildings are built, or how many world leaders visit, without a world-class faculty Columbia cannot remain a world-class university. By continuing to discriminate against more than half of the population, the University is ensuring that it won't.

