

Professor Profile:

Shannon Younker chats with Bio prof Dr. Donna Giberson

Dr. Donna Giberson is the newest member of UPEI's Biology Department. She began teaching here in 1992 and her current schedule includes teaching invertebrate zoology, ecology, limnology, and entomology. She also hires honours students for exciting mucking-around-in-swamps-and-collecting-insects jobs, wins prestigious NSERC grants, does environmental impact assessments, and on Friday, September 17, she talked to me on behalf of the *X-Press*.

Before arriving at UPEI, Dr. Giberson was teaching in the position of a post-doctoral fellow at Mount Allison University in Sackville, N.B. As well, she has worked for several years in the field of Environmental Impact Assessments dealing with pesticide evaluations. When asked how she likes working in a university known for its small population and liberal arts philosophy, Dr. Giberson told me this is just the type of institution she likes. She feels that UPEI's lack of ongoing research may make it more difficult for professors to keep current. It is also unfortunate that many biology majors (and perhaps others) see UPEI as a prep school for professional programs. Dr. Giberson maintains that a university education has an intrinsic value, as does knowledge itself, that is more than a stepping stone to a productive career.

It may be a cliché, but in a province where the phrase "lady doctor" is still heard, I had to ask Dr. Giberson whether, as a woman, she had been treated any differently in her scientific training. The short and simple answer was "yes." Dr. Giberson graduated with her Bachelor of Science in 1978 - a time when there were very few women in science, and even fewer who wished to work in the field. There were definite gender-based problems finding employment, to the point of some male employers refusing even to read applications submitted by women. Once hired, there was still an uphill battle to be won. The question of whether someone who can barely reach the top of the chalkboard could put the 12 foot aluminum boat on top of the 4X4 by herself then became important. Dr. Giberson told me, "I could and I did but I had to prove it over and over and over again." I wonder if a 5 ft 4 male scientist would have the same problems. It was encouraging to hear that while studying for her M.Sc., Dr. Giberson had much

less of a problem with discrimination. Approximately 75% of the graduate students in entomology when Dr. Giberson was at the University of Manitoba were women and there was a female faculty member. UPEI's undergraduate classes are not far behind. In Biology 301, one of Giberson's classes, 39 of the 59 students are women.

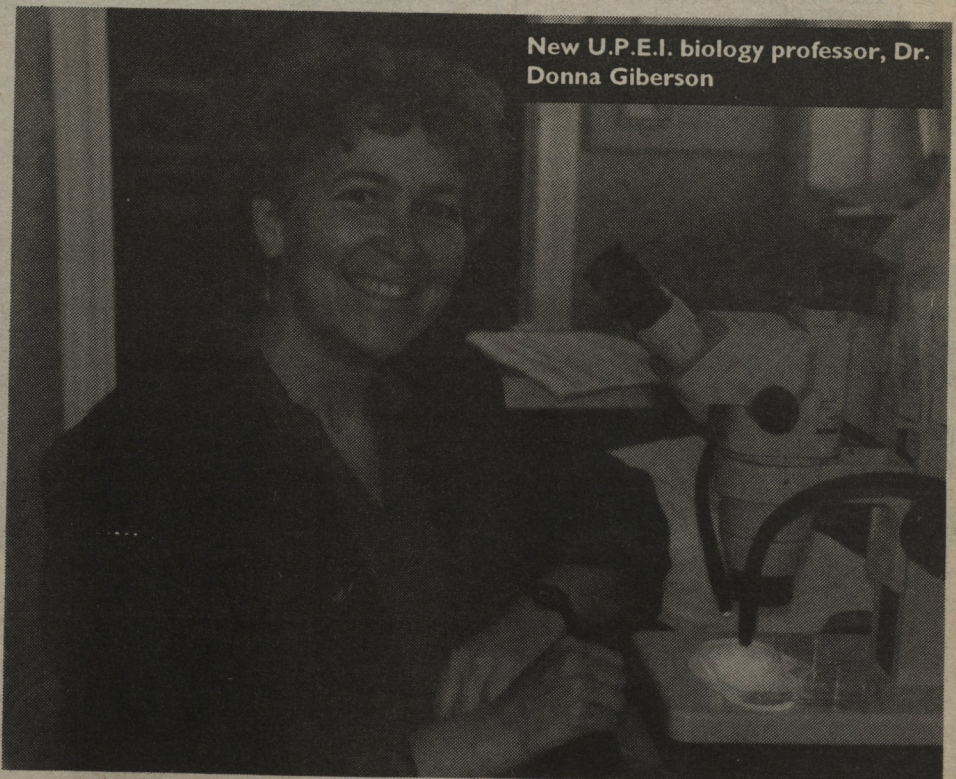
The issue of women in science leads into the tricky question of affirmative action policies, which Dr. Giberson tells me she does not believe in. And as a neophyte scientist, I tend to agree. Dr. Giberson told me "I was in situations where I didn't get a job because I was a woman....and that if I tried to do anything about it I'd never get a job in that field." This situation was common in the early seventies. (I am only hoping that the situation is better now.)

Twenty years later many of the newest minority, able-bodied white males, are not finding jobs and are very bitter. Dr. Giberson warns that this situation can turn personal when at a conference you discover that "very good friends are now not such good friends." One of the problems with affirmative action is that no one

will know if some very capable women would have been hired outside of the program. Dr. Giberson suggests that this is something that my generation may have to live through and work out in order to give our daughters a fairer chance. (Of course I have looked for very few jobs in the natural sciences and may change my mind when facing the real world.)

One gauge of Dr. Giberson's knowledge and success is that she was awarded an NSERC grant (National Science and Energy Research Council of Canada) the first time she applied. As well she was awarded money from the province, Canadian Wildlife Service, Wildlife Toxicity Fund and the Department of fisheries and Oceans through four other sources and this previous summer had a total of eight students working for her in various capacities. These projects are related to Dr. Giberson's primary research project, Catamaran Brook in New Brunswick and the ecological repercussions of pesticide use.

In this writer's opinion, her commitment to this sort of field work and teaching at the same time make Dr. Giberson an example worth noting.



New U.P.E.I. biology professor, Dr. Donna Giberson