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Faculty Grants: Gail Price

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GAIL PRICE

Some of the most rewarding aspects of teaching are the conveying of knowledge and the opening up of new horizons. Gail Price of the Mathematics and Computer Science Department is just one of those pathbreaking teachers. Gail is the Project Director of a summer enrichment program at Bridgewater State College entitled the SCI-MA Connection. With a two year \$253,000 grant from the National Science Foundation, Gail has set out to bring the joys of mathematics and science to 40 sixth grade girls who otherwise might not be inclined to pursue an interest in a field dominated by males.

Gail is a firm believer that girls have been the victims of peer pressure and a general lack of support in the schools and at home in the areas of science and math. The more fashionable term to express this problem is gender bias and Gail is determined to use her grant to attack the problem head on. As someone who started out as an art major, only to find her true love in mathematics and computer science, Gail knows the problems associated with an educational process that does not support the science and math interests of young girls.

With her co-director, Professor Uma Shama, Gail Price reduced 500 applications for the summer program to 40 area girls to attend the six-week workshop at Bridgewater. The girls came from varied socioeconomic and racial backgrounds and were not associated with the gifted and talented programs in their schools. Rather, Gail was interested in bringing to Bridgewater what she calls "the second tier" student whose potential is sometimes overlooked and who would benefit from individual attention and encouragement. Once at Bridgewater, the students attended two classes a day and participated in a

number of hands on and group learning experiences which helped them live science and math. Computer programs were used to enhance learning as the girls studied about physics and mathematics by constructing animated Lego buildings. There were also field trips and special sessions with female role models who had succeeded in the fields of science and mathematics. Gail also brought in the parents on a few occasions to participate in family math problem solving as mother and father and siblings worked cooperatively to find that elusive answer.

At the conclusion of the six weeks, the program was in many respects only beginning. Gail linked up each girl with a faculty mentor in her home school and monitored her progress and course selection. Gail's objective was not only to evaluate the progress of the girls but to begin a network among other girls for the appreciation of science and mathematics. As the program progresses, Gail hopes that the mentor program will increase the awareness of teachers, both men and women, of gender bias and the importance of encouraging young girls to enter the fields of science and math.

The success of the SCI-MA Connection can be seen in the fact that Gail is beginning to pore over 1,000 applications for this summer's program. With only 42 girls permitted into this summer's program, the selection process is quite competitive. Gail is also reapplying to the National Science Foundation for an extension of

the grant for an additional two years so that a larger number of girls can benefit from the six-week immersion program.

As if the SCI-MA Connection program is not enough work, Gail is also heavily involved in a statewide \$10 million grant to develop new science and math programs in neighboring communities. The PALMS program - Partnerships Advancing Learning of Mathematics and Science - is designed to link six colleges in Massachusetts with specific school districts, a local museum and business partners to strengthen the teaching of mathematics and science. Bridgewater is one of the six schools and Gail and her colleague, Professor John Marvelle, are working with the New Bedford School system to revamp their mathematics and science curriculum.

Gail Price's work with SCI-MA and PALMS is an example of Bridgewater's commitment to take the lead in the revitalization of education. Gail is excited by the progress achieved so far in advancing science and math skills for girls and is stimulated by the opportunities that the PALMS grant presents to develop new ways of learning. As Gail would be the first to admit, there is much that needs to be done and many obstacles that have to be overcome. But the initial steps have been taken and Gail is now moving forward quickly and with confidence to make the learning of math and science bias free and rewarding to all.

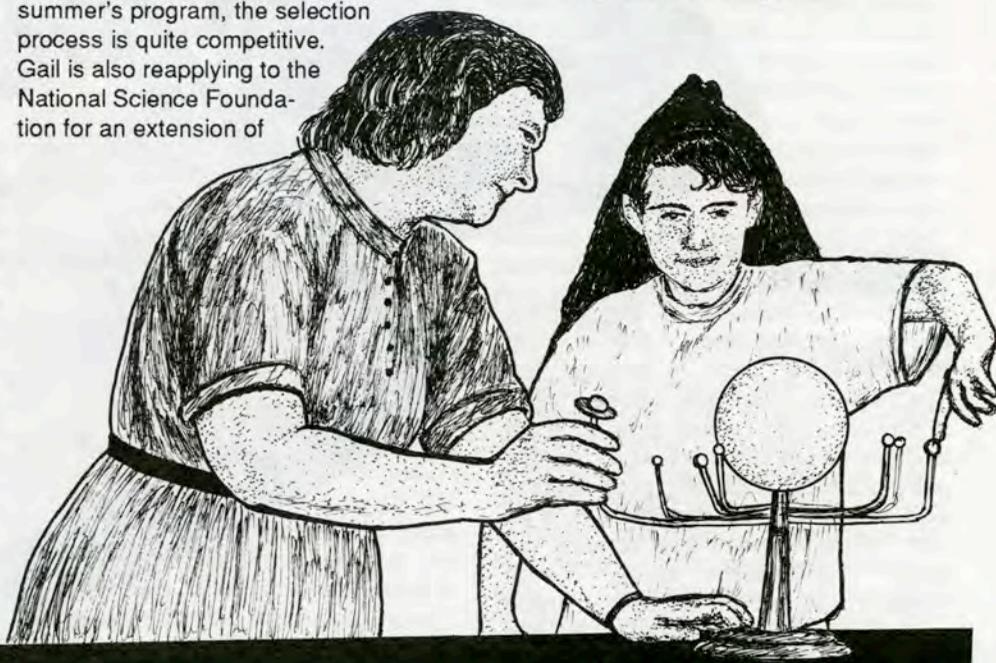


Illustration by Jason Fallis