

**Professor Deborah Blizzard presented the recipient of the award in the area of Science, Technology and Society Lauren Ford.**

It is my pleasure to introduce Ms Lauren Ford as the recipient of the 2006 Kearsse Award in Science, Technology, and Society based on her paper, "The Gender of a College of Science Laboratory Bench" as submitted in the course *Gender, Science, and Technology*. The course and paper were designed to challenge students to see the explicit and implicit ways in which gender shapes science and technology and the ways in which science and technology shape gender. For this paper students were asked to critique an artifact on campus through gender analysis. No limits were set on the artifact – it was up to the creativity and interests of the student to determine what he or she wished to analyze.

Lauren's decision to critique a laboratory bench in room 1125 of the College of Science was an excellent choice. I was particularly pleased that Lauren identified an artifact that effects so many men and women and did not limit her analysis to a personal item. By merging course readings and concepts with human height statistics from the Center for Disease Control, Lauren demonstrated that though the laboratory bench is seemingly innocuous, it also suggests that a "hidden curriculum" still exists at RIT. Gender scholars argue that this curriculum is one in which the built environment, course content, and pedagogical approaches frequently favor men over women in higher education, particularly in the sciences. Lauren's research found that the bench at 37 inches tall was perfect for the average male who stands 67 to 70 inches tall, but not appropriate to the average woman standing 64 inches tall. The 37 inch tall bench poses a structural and safety problem for many women who cannot lean over it without potentially contaminating an experiment and a psychological problem when they realize that the lab bench was not meant for them.

Lauren states in her paper: "women learn that this world was not designed for them and that women will have to struggle to get around these inherent presumptions. This world that I speak of is the world of science where women are historically unwelcome."

In short (pun intended), I found Lauren's decision to critique the lab bench and her approach in so doing to be clever, innovative, and insightful; her writing was succinct and to the point. Both of these qualities were the aim of this assignment.

In the context of the Kearsce award, that honors papers of outstanding quality within a discipline, it is important to note that STS critically analyzes the integration of science and technology in their social context. Lauren did precisely this – and perhaps most important, after creating this essay, I believe that she will never look at “scientific equipment” the same way. Her willingness to critique the world around her – even the most seemingly mundane parts -- suggests the beginning of life long learning. And, ultimately it’s this goal that transcends any discipline.

Congratulations Lauren on an excellent paper, an insightful mind, and the courage to look at the world around you and to ask why it is as it is. Because by asking these questions you take the first steps in changing it.