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PRESS RELEASE

Canada needs more women engineers—how do we get there?

OTTAWA, July 26, 2011—The **INWES Education and Research Institute (ERI)** has released a set of recommendations on how to increase the participation of women in the field of engineering in Canada. This report is the result of a national workshop, the **Canadian Committee of Women in Engineering (CCWE+20)**, held at the University of Ottawa this spring. CCWE+20 brought together key stakeholders from national and international organizations and associations, and decision-makers from industry, academia, and granting councils to shape the future role of women in engineering. The overall goal is **to raise young women's interest in engineering from 2.6% to 25% by 2016 and to 30% by 2020, and create wide-ranging incentives to increase the participation of women through special collaborations and partnerships, so as to bring new and ongoing projects to fruition.**

The national workshop examined a report published 20 years ago, *Women in Engineering: More Than Just Numbers*. Discussions focused on what has changed, what has worked and what needs to be done now to address the problem that persists: Canada continues to lack women engineers. The main issues that prevent young women from considering studies in engineering, even in 2011, can often be traced back to the early stages of education. Several factors dictate young women's postsecondary education choices, such as the popular culture of their generation, the guidance they receive on course selection in high school and the extent to which their parents, teachers and counsellors recognize engineering as an appropriate and legitimate career choice for women.

Several new recommendations targeting youth, universities, associations and employers were generated over the two-day group discussion. Over 70 participants reached a consensus on the **top three recommendations**:

- Communicate a **clear and exciting brand image** of engineering that appeals to students (from preschool to high school) and their parents, through contests, social media, films, TV and books
- **Enhance the knowledge** of engineering among teachers, counsellors and parents with specific information on the nature of engineering careers, outlining the steps required to be admitted into an engineering program and providing activities and tips for parents to encourage their daughters to consider careers in engineering
- **Enhance the image and the structure of engineering programs** to attract a more diverse group of students, with the aim of reaching an undergraduate enrolment rate of 25% female students by 2016 and 30% by 2020. Currently, this figure sits at 17%.

These recommendations were accompanied by a detailed guide to their implementation and a list of the organizations and individuals expected to participate. For more detailed information, please see the report on the ERI website (www.inweseri.org).



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Axel Meisen from the Canadian Commission for UNESCO/Alberta Innovates—Technology Futures stated that the CCWE+20 workshop “identified important new issues and shed new light on some old ones. I believe that we have made progress in transitioning from ‘chipping away at the problems’ to ‘cracking them.’”

Although a great deal of progress has been made to empower girls to pursue studies in engineering, there is still room for improvement. The percentage of female engineering students across the country reached 22% in 2002, but it has been in steady decline since 2003. CCWE+20 aims to strengthen initiatives to break down stereotypes in early education, universities, workplaces and professional associations.

This workshop was organized by **INWES ERI** in collaboration with a steering committee led by University of Ottawa professor Monique Frize, who is deeply committed to this initiative. In 1963, Frize became the first woman to study engineering at the University of Ottawa. She is widely recognized for her innovative work in biomedical engineering and for her dedication to issues related to women in engineering.

INFORMATION

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