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## IWU Biology Department to Host Feminist Engineer

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### **IWU Biology Department to Host Feminist Engineer**

BLOOMINGTON, Ill. – Alice Pawley, a doctoral student in industrial and systems engineering with a minor in women's studies at the University of Wisconsin-Madison, will speak on "The Woman Question, the F-Word and Engineering: Why History, Language and Participation Matter" at IWU's weekly natural science colloquium.

The talk, scheduled for Friday, Feb. 24 at 4 p.m. in the Center for Natural Sciences C101 (201 E. Beecher St., Bloomington), is free and open to the public.

Pawley, who earned her undergraduate degree in chemical engineering at McGill University in Montreal, encourages students, faculty and professionals in the field of engineering to question, rather than conform to, historical definitions of who engineers are, what they do and why women are so underrepresented in the field.

According to Pawley, only 20 percent of undergraduate engineering students and 10 percent of professional engineers are women. In recent years, women have been increasingly encouraged to pursue engineering. However, Pawley suggests that, in order to eliminate historical gender inequalities in the field, educators must revise the content of engineering curriculum itself.

Pawley's ultimate goal is to determine whether the boundaries of engineering are founded on gender-based discrimination, often so deeply embedded that it goes unnoticed, and to explore what effect these traditional limits might have on future engineering students. "The reason that there were so few women in engineering in the past may be because engineering was essentially defined as men's work," she said, explaining that engineers have historically been recognized as working in the public, industrial and commercial spheres. "Women's work that involved the same skills and technology was classified as home economics," she added.

Pawley explained that the field of engineering is constantly expanding, from the original "big four" branches of chemical, electrical, civic and mechanical engineering, to "dozens" of areas of study. She argues that now domestic and care-giving sciences, long ignored by engineering educators, should be formally included in curriculum for the field. "The term

‘engineering’ comes with status and power,” she said. “If that isn’t being directed to women across the world, then that’s a missed opportunity.”

IWU’s weekly natural science colloquia highlight the work of speakers from the Illinois Wesleyan community as well as scientists from across the nation and world.