



School of Engineering

News Archive

Fairfield University Clare Boothe Luce professor in engineering named

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This fall, Fairfield University will welcome a promising new faculty member, thanks to a \$404,439 grant from the Henry Luce Foundation's Clare Boothe Luce Program. The grant that made Dr. Shanon Reckinger's position possible comes at a time when the need for more young people carving out careers in the sciences and engineering - especially women - has become more urgent in the United States.

Dr. Reckinger, who will receive her Ph.D. from the University of Colorado at Boulder in August, will be named the Clare Boothe Luce Professor of Mechanical Engineering, teaching fluid dynamics and numerical methods at both the undergraduate and graduate levels. Dr. Jack Beal, dean of Fairfield University's [School of Engineering](#), said Reckinger will enter at the rank of assistant professor. "Dr. Reckinger will work closely with female students not only in the School of Engineering but elsewhere at Fairfield. She will also work in the STEM (science, technology, engineering, and mathematics) disciplines with faculty members Drs. Shelley Phelan, Amanda Harper-Leatherman, Amalia Rusu and others."



The grant was specifically earmarked for Mechanical Engineering, the largest department in the School. The grant covers three years of salary, three years of benefits, and five years of support for a career development fund. Reckinger has a very high level of expertise in the area of fluid flow and fluid dynamics - one of the fundamental sub-disciplines within Mechanical Engineering. In addition, she has very high-level skills in advanced computational methods for solving complex engineering problems.

In one respect, the awarding of the grant celebrates the vibrant community of women scientists and engineers at Fairfield. At the same time, it is an affirmation that an investment in the future of a young female scholar in engineering is a wise one, signaling the university's further commitment to women in the sciences. "Fairfield is poised to provide a supportive environment where the talents of the new scholar will be nurtured," said University President Rev. Jeffrey P. von Arx, S.J. "We envision the Clare Boothe Luce Professor excelling in her professional development here, inspiring students along the way."

Reckinger has been a co-instructor and teaching assistant at the University of Colorado, where she also earned her M.S. in Mechanical Engineering. Her professional research experience includes work as a research assistant at the Los Alamos National Research Lab in New Mexico. Her research focus is developing numerical methods for computational fluid dynamics and her thesis focused on improving numerical methods used in ocean circulation models, work she hopes to continue at Fairfield. Reckinger also hopes to branch out to some related experimental and observational work.

"I want all young people to know that they really can do whatever their hearts desire," she noted "It is something you hear all the time, but it is so true! Since I am in the field of engineering, I do want all underrepresented groups to be encouraged to join, and to then be warmly welcomed into the community. Diversity provides a perspective and breadth of knowledge that cannot be taught, which can only strengthen the advancement of science and technology."

Dr. Beal said several personal traits made Reckinger stand out - poise, maturity and self-confidence. Her undergraduate degree is from a university similar to Fairfield: the University of St. Thomas in the Twin Cities. "She knows the Catholic, liberal arts mission," Beal pointed out.

Dr. Reckinger said that her undergraduate alma mater is indeed reminiscent of Fairfield. "It is where I learned to appreciate the liberal arts education," she shared. "I was able to experience first hand the benefits of small class size, hands-on learning, and a university's commitment to excellent teaching. I am honored to be part of the faculty at Fairfield and excited to contribute to our future generations' education."

News of the award comes in the wake of the School of Engineering - in particular its program in Mechanical Engineering - having enjoyed an increase in the number of women graduates. In 2010, the School awarded 25 B.S. degrees, of which 28 percent were awarded to women, up from 14 percent in 2006. Simultaneously, the School awarded 20 percent of its master's degrees to women. These Fairfield graduation rates are the opposite of national trends which indicate the percentage of women graduates in engineering is declining, according to the university.

It is key to emphasize that the mission of Fairfield and the Clare Boothe Luce Program are complementary. In Clare Boothe Luce's bequest establishing this program, she sought "to encourage women to enter, study, graduate, and teach" in science, mathematics, and engineering. The 21-year-old program has become the single most significant source of private support for women in those fields. Clare Boothe Luce, the widow of Henry R. Luce, was a playwright, journalist, U.S. Ambassador to Italy, and the first woman elected to Congress from Connecticut. Fairfield is committed to permanently sustaining this professorship after the initial grant funding is completed.

Reckinger grew up in Omaha, Nebraska. "Ever since I can remember, I always really enjoyed math," she said. "In middle and high school, I started to like science, especially physics. Even though my dad is a civil engineer, he never forced me or expected me to follow in his footsteps. I think it is great that my interests took me along a similar path naturally."

Photo: Dr. Shanon Reckinger, who will receive her Ph.D. from the University of Colorado at Boulder in August, will join the Fairfield University faculty as the Clare Booth Luce Professor of Mechanical Engineering.

Media Contact: Meg McCaffrey, (203) 254-4000, ext. 2726, mmccaffrey@mail.fairfield.edu

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