

U of C engineering dean promoted

BY EVA FERGUSON AND SUZANNE WILTON, CALGARY HERALD MARCH 24, 2010 6:39 AM



Dr. Elizabeth Cannon, dean of engineering at the U of C.

Photograph by: Gavin Young, Calgary Herald

The University of Calgary is expected to name a new president today, with sources saying Elizabeth Cannon, dean of the Schulich School of Engineering, will be named to the top job.

An 18-member search committee has spent close to a year combing the country for the right candidate to replace outgoing president Harvey Weingarten.

Cannon, the engineering faculty's first female dean, would become the first female president at the U of C in its 43-year history.

"This sends the message that anything is possible. She's always been an excellent scholar, a solid administrator, and she would make an excellent president," said Anne Katzenberg, an archeology professor who formerly was an adviser to the university president on women's issues from 2000-02.

"Even in the faculty of engineering, she was very proactive for women."

Aritha Van Herk, an Alberta novelist and longtime English professor, is also thrilled with the choice.

"This reflects extremely well on the university," she said.

"Elizabeth is someone who is very competent, very ethical and full of integrity. "She knows the university well, she knows Alberta and Calgary well, and she has an energy and dedication that is phenomenal."

Cannon is well-known within the institution for a breadth of research and programs bringing opportunities for young women in science to the forefront.

Last September, Cannon was honoured by the Alberta Science and Technology Community for her work championing women in science and engineering.

But beyond Cannon's solid credentials, pundits say she will inherit the school's helm at a tumultuous time.

Hit hard by recessionary times, the U of C is facing huge losses to its endowment funds and has floated proposals to increase tuitions in some professional programs by thousands of dollars annually.

And earlier this month, up to \$81 million in research grants were put at risk after university brass issued a stern warning to researchers to take greater care with how they manage funding from three key federal agencies -- the Natural Science and Engineering Research Council, the Social Science and Humanities Research Council and the Canadian Institutes of Health Research.

In a February report, the agencies admonished U of C for having an "unsatisfactory" framework for ensuring grant funds are used according to federal requirements.

It's the second review in a row where the federal bodies have reached the same conclusion -- and a number of concerns raised in the 2006 audit still haven't been addressed, U of C officials conceded earlier this month.

Liberal MLA Harry Chase, who represents Calgary-Varsity, also gave Cannon high approval ratings, but warned that she faces huge challenges ahead.

"She's inheriting this post at a pretty turbulent time," Chase said, referring to the dramatic cuts in post-secondary funding coupled with controversies surrounding research grants. "She'll have a lot on her plate."

Cannon is an alumnus of the U of C, having completed three degrees there, all in geomatics engineering. She also has a degree in math and computer science from Acadia University in Nova Scotia.

She joined the faculty after completing a PhD in 1991 and took over as head of the department of

geomatics engineering in 2004. Two years later, she assumed her role as dean of the engineering faculty, where her husband is also a prominent engineering professor and researcher.

Cannon has earned an international reputation among her peers as a leading researcher in the area of satellite navigation for land, air and marine applications. The results of her research have been commercialized through the licensing of software to more than 200 agencies worldwide, according to her U of C biography.

"I think she's wonderful . . . she's an extremely capable person. She has been asked to serve on many institutions at a very high level," Cannon's husband, Gerard Lachapelle, said Monday when contacted about his wife's anticipated appointment.

Lachapelle could not confirm that Cannon was selected to be the next president and no announcement had been made yet to the faculty. But if she were to become the university's eighth president, Lachapelle said it would "not surprise me."

"That would be a very good choice for the university, but I'm biased because she's my wife," he said with a chuckle.

Cannon is well known within academic circles as an inventor and geomatics innovator for her work on global positioning systems, as well as blazing a trail for women in her field.

In 2001, she became the first woman to receive the U.S.-based Institute of Navigation's most prestigious honour, the Johannes Kepler Award.

In an interview with a campus publication in 2006, Cannon said aside from teaching and researching, a highlight for her in her career has been spearheading new programs to increase awareness about opportunities for young women in science and engineering.

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U Of C To Name First Woman President

Elizabeth Cannon: Her Calgary successes

1982: Begins her undergraduate studies at the U of C, completing three degrees in geomatics engineering

1991: Becomes a professor, U of C faculty of engineering

1998: Named one of Canada's Top 40 under 40 leaders by Caldwell Partners

2004: Appointed head of the department of geomatics engineering

2006: First woman named dean of the Schulich School of Engineering

2010: Expected to be named the first female president of the University of Calgary

Source: University Of Calgary Website

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