



# Society for Canadian Women in Science and Technology

*Empowering and Supporting Women in Science since 1981*

SCWIST Newsletter

July 2008

## Message from the President



I recall my first SCWIST event in the mid-1990s. Fellow graduate students in the UBC Department of Physics encouraged me to join them for a talk followed by an evening of networking. The room was energized with women scientists and engineers meeting each other as the evening began. Instead of feeling inspired, I actually felt even more isolated. I didn't know my way "in", and I left after the talk and before the networking.

My first experience with SCWIST is in great contrast to my latest experience: being voted in as SCWIST President at the Annual General Meeting in June.

So how did I get from there to here?

I credit this change to people who invited me personally to be involved with SCWIST. Barbara Frisken, the Chair of Physics at SFU, invited me to be on the SCWIST board four years ago. She believed that I had something to contribute. Since then, I have developed friendships through working with women who were also contributing their time and energy to SCWIST. These are inspiring and thoughtful women who I would have never had the chance to meet otherwise.

Through working on the SCWIST board, I have been able to see the effect of developing and offering meaningful events to women. I have seen how contributing my time and energy enriches my life too.

I am honoured to be given the opportunity to lead SCWIST in 2008/09. I am excited to be working with visionary and dedicated women on the SCWIST board. In this next year, I look forward to developing more ways "in" for women who want to contribute to and benefit from SCWIST.

**Elana Brief,**

2008/2009 President of SCWIST

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SCWIST AGM  
was a great  
success!  
Thanks to all  
who attended!

Would you like to attend SCWIST  
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# Society for Canadian Women in Science and Technology

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## The 2008-2009 Board of Directors

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## Our Bodies Ourselves evening

SCWIST was delighted to partner on April 24th with the Women's Health Research Network and the CeMCOR (the Centre for Menstrual Cycle and Ovulation Research) to put on an evening that celebrated women's health. The evening began with an overview of women's health in Canada by Joy Johnson, Scientific Director of the CIHR Institute for Gender and Health. Abby Schwarz, one of SCWIST's founding members and an original author of *Our Bodies, Ourselves* introduced Judy Norsigian, the Executive Director of Our Bodies Ourselves (the not-for-profit that writes and publishes women's health books). Judy spoke compellingly about health issues facing women in Canada, the US and in developing nations. She showed how sharing women's health knowledge through publications like *Our Bodies, Ourselves* improves women's health and wellbeing. Lorraine Greaves, Director of the BC Centre of Excellence in Women's Health moderated the question and answer period. The evening ended with a summary from Jerilynn Prior, Director of CeMCOR. Jerilynn offered the powerful message of the evening: good health begins with **ourselves**.

After the talks, the speakers and audience members were welcomed to a reception with coffee and tea donated by Ethical Bean and cookies donated by Choices.

The speakers from the evening (left to right) Abby Schwarz, Lorraine Greaves, Jerilynn Prior, Judy Norsigian and Joy Johnson



**Membership lapsed? Renew online today so that we can continue to provide quality programs! Visit [www.scwist.ca](http://www.scwist.ca)**



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## IWIS update

Have you thought about mentoring? If you are interested in being paired with a scientific woman who has immigrated to Canada to share your experiences and expertise regarding your line of work, please contact [iwis2@sfu.ca](mailto:iwis2@sfu.ca) for further details.

## SCWIST bookkeeper wins award for her art

Nancy Strider is “creative” accountant, but not when it comes to doing the bookkeeping for SCWIST!

In 2003, at the age of 52, she was accepted into art school and quit her very full-time job as Controller of the Vancouver-Burnaby branch of the Canadian Mental Health Association. This spring she graduated from Emily Carr with a Bachelor of Media Arts. Her outstanding GPA her two awards: the Sophie Burnett Memorial Endowment award for the Media Arts Program; and the Governor General’s Academic Medal for the entire undergraduate class.

Nancy was very moved by the honour, but also surprised. She always assumed that somebody else in her year had to be getting better marks than she did. Going through art school was the most fun she’s ever had. A corollary of that pleasure was the consistent commitment to excellence that was reflected in her academic results. The recognition is icing on the cake.

Now that she’s a “post-institutional pre-emergent” artist, she looks forward to continuing to exercise her mind with bi-brain lifestyle. Her work with SCWIST is a good fit for her. She intends to use her accounting and administration skills part-time, concurrently with her non-commodified and socially-engaged art projects.



## ms infinity update

“Schools out! Summer’s here!” Variations of these joyful exclamations have been heard all across our country these last few weeks. The ms infinity programming is closely linked to the school year by providing students with Tele-mentoring, workshops and conferences, so when the students go on vacation our program shifts focus. During the summer months we begin our planning, promoting and recruiting for our conferences.

We have 3 different conference formats – ms infinity, Quantum Leaps and Girl Guide Science Days. The ms infinity conference is for younger grades and is focused on hands-on science workshops. The Quantum Leaps conference is for senior high school grades and is focused on post secondary education and career exploration. The Girl Guide Science Days are for girls aged 6 – 18 and focus on earning various STEM (science, technology, environmental and mathematics) badges. All of our events provide girls an opportunity to succeed at science and to meet female scientists.

We believe programming for girls delivered by women is necessary and effective. Girls need to see women scientist role models (National Science Foundation, 2007). Despite the fact that girls are on par with boys in math and science proficiency scores (Girls Inc, 2006) females continue to be under represented in SETT careers (Statistics Canada, 2006). One way SCWIST’s ms infinity program will continue to address this inequality is with our female volunteers.

At ms infinity we are always recruiting volunteers; actually our volunteers are officially called Role Models because when you share your experience you provide a powerful picture for a girl who may have difficulty seeing herself as a scientist. They are many ways to be a role model at ms infinity – you can lead a workshop, be a Telementor, give a keynote address or host a tour of your workplace. We have a variety of resources available for our Role Models, such as a quarterly newsletter, manuals and workshop outlines. We also have some strong partnerships with other volunteer agencies with whom we share resources, including training sessions, workshop supplies and experiment protocols.

Would you like to be a Role Model with ms infinity? We have begun to plan conferences in Nanaimo (Oct ‘08), Prince Rupert (Oct ‘08), Terrace (Oct ‘08), Whitehorse (Apr ‘09) and Victoria (Oct ‘09). And it is only the beginning of July! There may be a few more booked by the end of the summer. Some of these conference events will have up to 300 participants; as you can well imagine, we will need a lot of Role Models. This is an opportunity to encourage a girl and to perhaps be reminded of why you enjoy science.

If you are interested in being a ms infinity Role Model please contact [ms00@sfu.ca](mailto:ms00@sfu.ca)





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## Transitioning After the PhD: What I learned at the V. Srivastava Career Mentoring Workshop—Dr. Kim Hellemans

As a typical grad student, I moved quickly from one decision to the next. It never occurred to me that change might be difficult, or that I could use the transition time after receiving my doctoral degree to reconnect with what is truly important. That's why it was such a great opportunity to be part of the Vivien Srivastava Career Mentoring Workshop on May 3, 2008, chaired and organized by Associate Dean Anne Condon and Special Initiatives Director Carola Hibsich-Jetter, both in the Faculty of Science at UBC, and greatly supported by several UBC Science members. Close to 100 graduate students attended the event, roughly 75% women and 25% men. Attendees could sign up for two of the following four breakout sessions, which ran in parallel and twice that day: Building your Professional Network, Making the Most of your Graduate Training, Transitioning after the PhD, and Balancing Professional and Personal Life.

I co-led the session entitled 'Transitioning after the PhD', along with Sally Halliday, M.A. (Counselling Psychology), a registered clinical counsellor who works with individuals and groups to manage change and make effective career decisions. Graduate school is certainly a period of much transition, particularly for those who may be contemplating starting a family, moving to another location to pursue a post-doc or tenure-track position, or even struggling with the identity change from 'student' to 'researcher'. As such, the Transitions workshop that Sally designed focused on issues surrounding change: Do we embrace change? Resist it? How do we do endings? The main point was not to teach, but to illuminate; the answers of how we transition from a PhD to post-doc, industry, academia, or other, is not a formula, but rather a journey of self-exploration. For our first activity, we had students pair up to tell a story about a previous transition they had made (see Box 1). As an example, I told Sally a story of transitioning from my post-doc at Cambridge to my current position at UBC. As my partner had been living in Vancouver throughout my tenure at Cambridge, I was excited at the prospect of finally living in the same city and sharing a life together. It never occurred to me that leaving Cambridge, my friends there, my lab, and my amazing mentor, and beginning a life in Vancouver with a new supervisor, new lab, and (at the time) no friends, might be difficult. Soon after I moved here, I was faced with unexpected sadness and loss. Eventually, I managed to navigate through the transition to come to a place of happiness. **Interestingly, when Sally asked what contributed to the success of my transition, I realized that it was in part due to my increasing involvement with SCWIST, as it had provided me with personal (meeting and working with amazing and talented women) and professional (gaining skills in governance and activism) fulfillment.** Now, on the brink of yet another transition (I am moving to Ottawa for a job), I am able to reflect back on my feelings of leaving Cambridge, and know that in order to embrace my ending in preparation for the next beginning, I need to acknowledge the loss of leaving Vancouver and my community here. For those of us who are unused to exploring these 'soft skills', the workshop can be cathartic, revelational. Too many students leave a research or academic career because of lack of support and mentoring. However, events such as the Vivien Srivastava Career Mentoring Workshop provide the time and space to discuss important issues such as transitions; let's hope this becomes an annual event!

The event was generously supported by the Vivien M. Srivastava Memorial Endowment Fund. For more information on the VM Srivastava Workshop, please visit <http://science.ubc.ca/ws/>.

**Box 1 Transitioning Activity.** This is an activity you can do with a friend, spouse, or family member. Find a quiet place and reflect on a major transition you have made in the past - one that may have seemed scary at first, but turned out well in the end. Once you've located yourself in the story, tell it to your partner. While your partner is listening, it is important that they do not interrupt or criticize; they may record on a piece of paper any major themes, skills, values, interests, or strengths that come out of the story. Once the story is finished, the partner can provide this feedback, which should assist you in revealing what the important factors were in mediating your successful transition, while providing insight to guide the future.

### Who was Vivien M. Srivastava?

Vivien M. Srivastava (1931 – 2004) was a science pioneer. Against significant barriers to women, she achieved many firsts as a woman in science: the first woman to receive a PhD in Zoology at the University of British Columbia (1964) and the first woman scientist to be hired by both the Fisheries Research Board of Canada and the Bedford Institute of Oceanography (Canada's largest centre for ocean research; Dartmouth, NS). "I did not actively campaign for the rights of women but was determined to be treated as someone with a job to do," was her way to put it. Srivastava had a full and varied career, combining research, teaching and service to her community; she worked—enthusiastically and cheerfully—in academia (University of Alberta), for government labs, and on CBC radio and TV. In 2005, Mount Saint Vincent University awarded an honorary doctoral degree to her posthumously, in recognition of her contributions to science and to the welfare of society.

### Vivien M. Srivastava Endowment Fund

The Vivien M. Srivastava Memorial Endowment Fund was provided to UBC's Faculty of Science by the family of science pioneer Dr. Vivien M. Srivastava. Later in her life, Vivien Srivastava expressed interest in helping women to cope with the challenges of a science career. The goal of this endowment is to support participation by women in graduate and post-doctoral research in the sciences and to help facilitate their entry into professional research careers by addressing systemic barriers to full participation.



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## V. Srivastava Career Mentoring Workshop—Perveen Biln

On May 3, 2008, I was excited to take part in the Vivien Srivastava Research Career Mentoring Workshop. The day commenced with a keynote address by Barbara Keyfitz, Director of the Fields Institute for Research in Mathematical Science at the University of Toronto, and Professor at the University of Houston. Keyfitz spoke about her career progression from a successful, but naïve, PhD student at the University of Toronto, through periods of confusion and frustration at two other institutions in the US, and eventually back at the University of Toronto, this time a confident and self-assured researcher. What resonated for me was her admittance of failure in the face of what was clearly a successful career trajectory: denied tenure at two locations, a failed marriage, her own sense of discouragement and fear, and perhaps most importantly, the confession that she didn't know how to start a research program but was afraid to ask for help. Toward the end of her talk, Dr. Keyfitz emphasized the importance of striving for a work / life balance. Interestingly, this idea was challenged by a member of the audience, who argued that individuals should be allowed to work a 90 hour week if they "feel passion for their work". Dr. Keyfitz responded to this challenge with grace and wisdom, stressing that working 90 hour weeks are not healthy for anyone, male or female.

Following the keynote, the attendees were able to sign up for one of four workshops, run in parallel; the workshops were repeated after lunch so attendees could attend two workshops in total. I attended the Making the Most of your Graduate Training workshop in the morning and the Transitioning from the PhD workshop in the afternoon. As a former grad student (I completed an MSc in 2006 from SFU) I was aware of many of the pitfalls / mistakes that new graduates make, having made a lot of them in the past. As I sat in the morning workshop and participated in the exercises what kept going through my mind was "I wish this had been in place when I started my Masters". I had learned many of the skills they had talked about through trial and error. I am sure that less tears would have been shed if I had taken that workshop years ago. As Patricia Schulte stated eloquently in the afternoon panel, many new graduate students are transitioning from learning about knowledge to learning to create knowledge. This is sometimes a hard transition to make and the morning workshop provided a lot of insight on how to make the transition less painful.

The afternoon workshop was facilitated by Sally Halliday and Kim Hellemans and was also illuminating in the way that it required me to be so introspective. When I started my PhD, I was 6 months pregnant with my son and was also on the board of SCWIST. I was so consumed getting projects finished before I went on mat leave that I did not take the time to appreciate the change that was about to happen. It seems so crazy to say, but although I knew I was about to be a mom, I did not realize how drastically I would change as a person or how that change would affect my feelings about being a mom. Sally used retrospective story-telling techniques in order to allow us to access our own core values and decision-making related to our career path. Using Bridges Model of Transition, which involves 3 steps: an ending; the 'neutral zone'; and a new beginning, Sally deftly taught us how to embrace endings, revel in the 'neutral zone' (the place of creativity, research, reflection) and to look forward to new beginnings. It was a revelation to explore these issues – particularly amongst a group of women who were used to learning, criticizing, and theorizing, not feeling, sensing, or emoting.

I sincerely hope that the Vivien Srivastava Research Career Mentoring Workshop can become an annual event. I am confident that Vivien Srivastava herself would be encouraged by the prospect of supporting young men and women graduate students at UBC through workshops such as these.

## THANK YOU VOLUNTEERS!

A big thanks to some AMAZING volunteers:

**Seedlings Studio** continues to donate its services providing web support for the new site. [www.SeedlingsStudio.com](http://www.SeedlingsStudio.com)

**Michelle La Haye** compiles all of the BrownBag data each month so that we can post concise minutes on the website.

**Queenie Chan** is coordinating the BrownBag series for us this year.

**Mayu Ishida** for "personing" the SCWIST booth at the Technology & Technology Sales Career Fair on May 28, 2008.

**Andrea Pals, Jill Lam, Mojdeh Shakiba** for assisting with registration at the **SCWIST AGM** on June 18, 2008.

All the women at **Women in Engineering (Vancouver Region)** who collaborated with **SCWIST** on the July 10th financial workshop *Connecting Your Money with Your Values*.



## Recognizing Our True Selves: Gender Differences in Self-Assessment

Have you ever felt less confident in your abilities than male colleagues appear to be? Have you ever noticed female colleagues underrating their contribution? For a forthcoming article in a teaching and learning journal, I examined the gender implications of the introduction of innovative methods of assessment in higher education. What I found in the psychological and pedagogical (teaching) literature, in terms of gender differences in self- and peer-assessment, is something that some of you might relate to, and serves as a "note-to-self" for us all!

The evidence suggests the existence of significant gender differences in self-evaluation. **Male students tend to overestimate their performance, whilst female students tend to underestimate their performance, despite female students actually being equal or outperforming male students.** This overconfidence extends to general cognitive testing, where there is a higher level of miscalibration between confidence in accuracy and actual accuracy for males. In terms of peer-evaluation there is also cause for concern about gender biases. Shockingly, there are significant differences in subjective assessment of cognitive ability level dependent on the sex of the person being rated. For example, males and females consistently rate male family members as more intelligent than female family members. Thus, despite recent generations growing up in a more gender equal society, the evidence suggests the persistence of a **stereotypical notion that men will perform better than women on intellectual tasks.**

You can read the full SCWIST article about these issues [here](#). In the article I discuss the evidence for gender differences in self- and peer-assessment and why I think this raises important questions, not only in terms of current changes in higher education, but also in the workplace. I urge you to read the article and consider whether the points raised apply to you and/or your female colleagues – it might lead you to give yourself a pat on the back at the very least!

Linda Lanyon



View the entire article online at [http://www.scwist.ca/images/uploads/recognising\\_our\\_true\\_selves.pdf](http://www.scwist.ca/images/uploads/recognising_our_true_selves.pdf)

[1] The picture shows the **Rubin Face/Vase illusion**. The viewer has the mental choice of two interpretations of the image – either an **empty vase** or a (woman's) **face**. Often, the viewer sees only one of them, or only realizes the second after some time or prompting. It is difficult to perceive both objects at the same time – one occludes the other.

**Want to get more involved?**  
**Volunteer at SCWIST!**  
**Contact [scwist@sfu.ca](mailto:scwist@sfu.ca) for details.**

**No time to volunteer?**  
**You can still support SCWIST:**  
**Donate online (and receive a tax receipt)**



## **Harvard Business Review's Athena Report—Perveen Biln**

The Harvard Business Review published the Athena Report in June 2008, yet another depressing report about women leaving science, this time leaving industry for a variety of reasons, including a lack of life / work balance and a macho culture. My dear husband brought this article to my attention. He thought I would appreciate the article as it was discussing the issue of skilled labour shortage being amplified due to the number of professional women leaving the workforce, something that I have been talking about for quite a while. Unfortunately that is not how I read the news articles that summarized the results contained in the Athena Report. From reading the summaries at both yahoo news and in the Globe and Mail I have some thoughts not about the Athena Report but about how the news media and business responded to the report.

I was happy to read that there are some companies that are recognizing the challenges that exist and are embracing policies which address the concerns *both* women *and* men have about work-life issues and workplace culture. That is a good thing. Those companies should be applauded and encouraged to continue. What was disturbing about the article was that those companies were not in the majority and were not the major or the big players in industry. The big players (i.e. Microsoft, Intel, National Semiconductors) were not looking at the root of the problem. They were not attempting to establish HR policies that would enable intelligent, well-trained women (and men) to not have to choose between family and work. Instead these individuals were lobbying the US Congress to enable more foreign males (and females) to come to the USA. As opposed to making it less difficult for the citizens of their country, they are asking foreign workers to make the sacrifice instead. These individuals will be making significant sacrifices to come to a "better country". They will be leaving husbands/wives, children and extended support systems to come to the US (or Canada as I am sure we are facing similar challenges) with the hopes of gaining citizenship and providing a better future for their families. I have seen the emotional toll its has taken on these individuals. I have worked with people that left behind friends and family to come to Canada for either jobs or education. Here in Canada, there have been numerous studies done in the Filipino community examining the challenges faced by the women who leave their homeland (and children) to care for another's family. I am sure these challenges and repercussions are felt regardless of the field of work. The lack of work / life balance and the damaging effects of a macho work culture is a gender neutral issue; both men and women suffer in those environments. We as a scientific community need to re-evaluate the expectations we place on researchers and evaluate whether those expectations are leading to a loss of talent.

There is also another aspect to how this study was reported that needs to be discussed. We as a scientific and economic industry need to be willing to talk about these issues open and honestly.

Science, Engineering and Technology (SET) fields and business human resources issues relating to them are important both for our economy and our society. SCWIST in partnership with the Student Biotechnology Network (SBN) attempted to facilitate such a discussion at the Women in Biotechnology Roundtable. We purposely did not invite politicians to the event, in the effort to prevent partisan positions. We intentionally invited Dr. Paul Kershaw, researcher in public policy, along with Brenda Irwin from the Business Development Bank of Canada so that we could discuss the financial feasibility of different HR policies. Most importantly we had Colette Rivet, Executive Director of Biotalent Canada as the Keynote Speaker. We specifically asked Colette to discuss human resources issues, to quote our invitation:

*Continued next page...*



*Panellists on the roundtable will be asked whether the biotechnology industry and academia are facing the same challenges as (in respect to a skilled labour shortage and diminishing populations) other industries and countries? What will the economic impact of these challenges be? Is encouraging professional women to re-enter the job market by improving access to quality childcare and instituting flexible work hours a solution to the impending labour shortages?*

When I asked whether Biotechnology was facing a loss of female talent, the answer was an emphatic no, biotechnology is all peaches and roses when it come to women's equality. This is in direct contrast to the recent Athena Report. The lack of real discussion about challenges women and men face and the possible improvement to HR policy with a realistic cost assessment was hugely disappointing. It was frustrating on many levels, mostly because the audience was full of young women who wanted to know what challenges they faced and what some solutions were; what could they do to make a difference. Instead we were told that there were no issues. The Harvard report clearly demonstrated that well qualified women, and men, are leaving SET fields because of an inability to find work / life balance. We are losing talented individuals and we need to figure out how to stem the flow. Sticking our heads in the sand and denying there is a problem doesn't do anyone any favours.

**Excerpt from FemaleScienceProfessor blog <http://science-professor.blogspot.com/> extra edition - Women In Science Summary Statement—Tuesday July 15th**

I write about life as a Science Professor, but my experience is profoundly affected by the fact that I am a woman. I am never just a Science Professor, as I am constantly made aware that I am a *Female* Science Professor (hence the name of this blog). Throughout my academic career, I have had negative experiences directly related to being female, and I know from discussions with female colleagues that I am by no means alone in these experiences ...

Summary: Discrimination, bias, and harassment of women in subtle and non-subtle ways are pervasive in the physical sciences.

The academic culture is set up in a way that makes it difficult (but not impossible) for women to have families and a successful career; academia is not alone in this, of course. Nevertheless, despite endless studies of why women drop out of science, the culture of bias and the family-unfriendly organization of the typical university make it unlikely that the situation will improve any time soon.

The question of 'female choice' -- as in, do women *choose* not to be scientists -- is not a relevant question; it is a diversion based on flawed data. Those of us who teach at universities have long had significant numbers of women in our undergraduate and graduate science classes. Many of these women are passionate about science, and they are very smart. It is bizarre to ask a question about whether women decline to pursue scientific careers because they aren't interested or whether they drop out because they don't want to work hard enough. The women are there, they are interested, and they are able.

The relevant question is: How can we change things to encourage these smart, motivated, hard-working women to stay in science? Additional examples are detailed in this blog.



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## SCWIST Member Benefits

### Are you getting all you can out of your SCWIST membership?

- **Workshops** for women in science and technology (receive reduced rates for members)
- **Leadership opportunities** in a supportive environment (telementor a girl interested in science, volunteer for a committee, offer an idea for an initiative or event)
- **News from our website** (post and learn about events of interest for women in science)
- **National communication** (contribute articles or ideas to the newsletter)

## SCWIST's charitable status

SCWIST is a registered charity and issues tax receipts for all donations.

We invite you to contact [scwist@sfu.ca](mailto:scwist@sfu.ca) if you wish to make a gift to support our programs for girls and women.

## What's the difference between a Sustaining and Professional Membership?

A sustaining membership (\$100) combines a professional membership (\$60) and a \$40 (tax-deductible) donation to SCWIST. Sustaining members truly sustain SCWIST by supporting the charitable programs we run.

## Who we are

The Society of Canadian Women in Science and Technology is a non-profit, voluntary association established in 1981 to promote, encourage and empower women working in science and technology.

## Our Mission Statement

- To promote public awareness of the opportunities for women in science and technology by providing information and resources which aim to influence public policy and present positive messages about women's achievements and potential in this area.
- To encourage the full participation of girls and women in all aspects of science and technology education, through the provision of programs and activities which are developed and implemented in partnership with relevant community members.
- To increase the representation, retention and status of women in the science and technology workplace by providing networking and mentoring opportunities and advocating for women-friendly workplaces and education policies.

## Membership Fees

Fees can now be paid online through: <http://www.scwist.ca>

Student/Retired/Unemployed	\$20/year
Professional	\$60/year
Sustaining (see panel)	\$100/year (including \$40 tax receipt)

## Let us know what you think

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