

## Roberta Edgecombe Robb

This award is given in recognition of having “furthered the status of women in the profession, through example, achievements, increasing our understanding of how women can advance in the profession, or mentoring others.”

Roberta Edgecombe Robb has been an outstanding contributor and indeed pioneer in each of these areas, influencing a generation of women in the profession and, through her policy work, beyond it. One letter describes her thus: “She brings her passion for economics together with a vision of an equal workplace to everything she does.”

Her research and service to the academic and the broader community have centred around understanding the status of women in the workforce and how government or employer policies, including affirmative action, equal pay and employment equity policy and family policies, can affect the labour force participation of women and should be treated as issues of economic importance. Her research was pioneering at a time when women’s issues were not mainstream, especially her landmark paper “Earnings Differentials between Males and Females in the Ontario Labour Market, 1971” (CJE, 1978), which considered the role played by career interruptions and care responsibilities. Her research expertise is well recognized in the academic community:

- she was a member of the Editorial Board of the CJE (1978-81);
- she was promoted to Professor in 1993 – the Directory of Women in Economics that she helped compile in 1991-92 listed only 22 other women at that rank in the entire country;
- she was Chair of the Brock Economics Department (1986-89)
- from 1999 to 2002 she was Director of the Women’s Studies Program at Brock.

Roberta’s contributions to the policy world are described as epitomizing “solid evidence-based advocacy.” She has engaged in policy research work for a large number of organizations, including the Ontario Task Force on Hours of Work and Overtime, Employment and Immigration Canada, the Canadian Human Rights Commission, the Ontario Women’s Directorate, the Ontario Ministry of Labour, and the Canadian Advisory Council on the Status of Women.

Her advancement of women spans a wide-range of endeavors, including:

- outreach to girls still in high school in the early 1980s, encouraging them to keep their options open (especially by taking serious math classes);
- working on women’s committees and helping out with special events in the local community around the region from Niagara to Burlington (recognized in 2005 with a Brock University award for engagement in work to improve the recognition of women in society)
- establishing a network of young women involved in administration at Brock University
- serving on the Status of Women committee of the Ontario Council of Faculty Associations, and through work on the Canadian Association of University Teachers on affirmative action
- as a member of CSWEP and IAFFE;
- and most importantly from the perspective of Canada’s community of academic economists, by being one of the founders and driving forces behind the establishment of CWEN over a quarter of a century ago.

This last role deserves further comment. With Lorraine Eden, Roberta laid out the initial groundwork for establishing CWEN in the early 1990s (later, serving as President from 1997-1999). Creating an effective

nation-wide network is no small feat in a geographically large country, particularly when numbers are small (the first directory lists only around 90 women in tenured or tenure track economics positions). But very quickly, CWEN established a solid membership, a mailing list, regular meetings and a newsletter. CWEN quickly came to play an important role for women in the profession, in large part due to both the time Roberta put into it, and to her ability to welcome others into the organization. One letter comments that “Meeting and working with Roberta and the other wonderful women leading CWEN .. was as eye-opening as it was inspiring” for women who had often never had a female instructor.

Roberta was a leader in the movement to foster work-life balance. She has

- Written widely on the extent and valuation of unpaid work and the burden of care among a variety of groups;
- Promoted shared leave for parents in her workplace (before it was widely thought of as a good thing);
- With CAUT, worked on recognition of the role of part-time labour in the university sector.

This list of achievements, however, misses what has enabled her to have such an influence on the profession. Letters refer to her “warmth, generosity and kindness”; her empathy and commitment to fairness; and her grace. Along with her dedication and hard work, these qualities have been the key to why she has been such an important role model and mentor to many women, and why they have in turn gone on to follow her example and reach out a hand to help younger women.

The representation of women and the climate for female economists in Canada are better because of Roberta. We thank her for her outstanding contributions.