

Biochemist Encourages Science Scholars

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When she started college, Judith Voet aspired to be an astrophysicist. But “I also had advisers telling me that I had a great personality [and asking] what I was doing wasting my time in the sciences,” said Voet, a biochemist who spoke at the Lavin-Bernick Center on the Tulane uptown campus on Thursday (April 24).



A leader in the field of biochemistry, Judith Voet speaks at the Lavin-Bernick Center as this year's Daspit Lecturer, sponsored by the Newcomb College Institute. (Photo by Cheryl Gerber)

Voet actually was laying a foundation to become a leader in her field. She has written two biochemistry textbooks with her husband, Donald, and taught at Swarthmore College for 26 years.

She shared her experiences with Tulane science faculty and students as the 2008 Dorothy K. Daspit Lecturer, hosted by the [Newcomb College Institute](#). Voet's talk focused on the importance of incorporating effective teaching methods in college classrooms and labs, especially with science knowledge expanding at an astounding rate.

“So much more is known about these topics than was known 40 years ago. The textbooks get bigger and bigger and we believe all this information is important to know,” said Voet, who is Swarthmore College's James Hammons Professor of Chemistry, Emerita. “This stuff was barely known when I started in biochemistry. Most of it I had to learn before I could teach it.”

To help students become critical thinkers, Voet said some professors are using interactive-engagement techniques, such as problem-based learning, instead of lectures. “People are trying to figure out how a facilitator can teach biochemistry without lecturing,” she said. “It puts the responsibility of learning on the students.”

Voet also discussed her experiences as a woman in science. As a graduate student at Brandeis University, she said, “My class was twice the size of the others and had 10 women. So I did not have an issue of being in an environment that was not kind to women.

“The one thing I'd like to say to women in science is choose your husband well,” Voet added. “Everyone needs support but men need different support than women do.”

Even with her husband's support, Voet did not go directly into a faculty position “because I didn't think I could handle children and being on the faculty,” she said. “Things are different for women today.”

Sponsored by Newcomb Student Programs, the Daspit Lecture Series is named for Newcomb College alumna and physics professor Dorothy K. Daspit. The series brings accomplished female science scholars to Tulane.

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