

## The Rebecca C. Lancefield Professorship

### ❖ About Rebecca C. Lancefield



Rebecca C. Lancefield, 1985-1981

Rebecca C. Lancefield, an early pioneer in microbiology at the Rockefeller Institute for Medical Research, made extensive contributions to the field of infectious disease research. Her investigations were crucial to the development of more effective antibiotics for the treatment of strep-related infections. The discoveries she made are the underpinning of many of today's strategies to fight drug-resistant organisms. Dr. Lancefield's mentors were Drs. Oswald Avery and Maclyn McCarty, two of the Rockefeller scientists who discovered that genes are made of DNA.

### ❖ Why Recruit a Woman Professor?—Women Scientists and the “Glass Ceiling”

Recent Studies have shown that, over the last three decades, increasing numbers of women have chosen to pursue careers in the sciences, entering doctoral programs and receiving appointments at junior faculty ranks. At the same time, however, the proportion of women to men scientists in top-ranking and leadership roles has remained the same, and in some instances even decreased. A 2001 **National Council for Research on Women** report—*Balancing the Equation: Where Are Women and Girls in Science, Engineering, and Technology?*—summarized a wide array of studies whose findings point to a glass ceiling that impedes the academic advancement of women in the sciences. These findings include the following:

- At a *National Academy of Sciences* symposium in 2000, it was reported: “The percentage of women assistant professors (in science and engineering fields) has increased from just under 10% in 1973 to over 30% in 1995, and the proportion of associate professors grew from just over 5% to almost 20%. But for full professors, the rate of increase ‘does not keep pace with expectations.’”
- *A Study on the Status of Women Faculty in Science at MIT*, released in 1999, found that junior women faculty feel well supported within their departments but the need for role models who are senior women with tenure is great. Senior women professors play a critical role in mentoring both young male and female scientists. The Committee found that, as of 1994, the percent of women faculty in the School of Science (8%) had not changed significantly for at least 10 and probably 20 years.

The findings of these studies are in keeping with the situation at The Rockefeller University. Twenty of the 33 students who arrived at Rockefeller in September 2001 are women, as are 40 percent of the nearly 300 postdoctoral investigators on campus. Of the 169 graduate and biomedical fellows enrolled in Rockefeller's Ph.D. and M.D.-Ph.D. programs, 50 percent are women. However, the picture begins to change with regard to tenured and tenure-track laboratory heads. Of 19 assistant and associate professors, five – or little more than 25 percent – are women. Of 49 full professors, only four – or 8 percent – are women.