

Glass blowing more than hot air

by Rob Galbraith

"So you're a glassblower. You make beakers and test tubes and stuff?"

Peter Lea has heard this more than a few times in the twenty-two years he has spent in U of A Technical Services glass shop. As supervisor of one of only three shops in the province, he is accustomed to telling visitors, "No, we don't make flasks or the like—that's done by the big commercial firms."

In fact, what Lea and his apprentice Murray Cormons do make could not be further removed from beakers and test tubes.

"We manufacture specifically designed glass instruments. One day we'll make an apparatus for keeping a kidney alive, the next day tubes for the (Engineering Department's) laser. Our tasks are extremely diverse."

Though he describes every assignment as "their most difficult", Lea has no trouble picking out their most unusual one.

"A fellow wanted to gather information about how much oxygen was used by microbes in the Arctic. There's millions of these things to the shelfful. The only way he could do it was to have us build an apparatus something like a small syringe. The outside diameter was 1 mm, and the whole thing was 1 cm long. It was a real challenge. We made fifteen or sixteen, all identical, and he took them up in a matchbox. That was his lab!"

Lea emphasizes that the skills involved in successfully completing such an assignment do not come quickly. He estimates that it takes at least twelve years of apprenticeship at the U of A before a novice glassblower can handle the range of tasks he is called on to do.

"Apprenticeship here might be a bit longer, but you end up with an advantage over fellows trained elsewhere. There is such a large cross-section of research being done on campus and at the U of A Hospital that an apprentice acquires so much more experience. Most

other shops are channeled into just one kind of research, but not here."

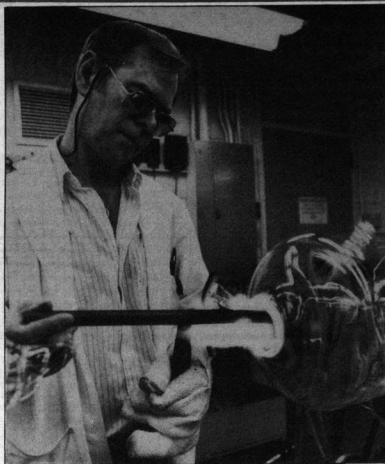
Lea says this diversity has made his shop one of the best.

"With the level of research being done on this campus you have to be good. We are among the best in North America, second to none."

The volume of research has also made Lea's shop one of the busiest. Lea says that a current increase in demand stems from the \$100 million Heritage Fund for Medical Research established by the Alberta government. "Extra research is now being conducted and, consequently, business is brisker for us."

Lea is not concerned by predictions that synthetic materials may soon replace glass in his field.

"Ironically, the same predictions were being made in 1956, and I wasn't worried then. And that was the beginning of the plastics era. We're busier now than we've ever been, and I'm confident that will continue for a good, long time."



The steady hand comes from a twelve year apprenticeship

Photo: Bob Galbraith

Pay equity benefits more than women

interview by Roberta Franchuk

"If the province is going to address the whole idea of pay equity it should get its mind out of the little trench that says that pay equity only looks at the concerns of women," says Ronald Capell. "Instead, they should require that organizations institute job evaluation systems that have been tested for bias against all possible measures, one of which is gender."

Ronald Capell creates such job evaluation systems. He has worked for companies and government organizations in Manitoba to design systems to comply with the province's pay equity legislation.

Capell will be at the University of Alberta on December 1 to discuss pay equity. His talk, the "Pay Equity Primer", will outline the processes involved in job evaluation, as well as look at the ways gender bias affects evaluations. It will also address some of the major complaints about pay equity.

"Pay equity is simply the product of good job evaluation," he notes.

Job evaluation, says Capell, is based on four factors: skill, effort, responsibility, and working conditions. A statistical procedure called

A job that requires a high level of fine motor skills should, all factors considered, be worth more.

For jobs within an organization that have "equivalent levels of demands or skills, efforts, etc...", pay equity will ensure that those jobs have equal access to compensation for the particular level of demand," says Capell.

However, "it's not socially acceptable to look at pay equity in the broadest sense."

Pay equity has become almost inextricably linked with the gender issue, says Capell. This "represents the consistent approach to pay equity across Canada, Quebec, Ontario, Manitoba, and the federal government have all instituted pay equity legislation aimed specifically at addressing the concerns of women in the workforce."

Capell notes that this is "a fairly narrow approach."

Because women have more political "clout" than other minorities, women's issues are politically acceptable, says Capell. Therefore,

the government of Alberta sees pay equity as of benefit only to women.

Some groups, to illustrate conditions of women in the workforce, cite a forty percent difference in the salaries of men and women performing equivalent jobs. This

The 40 percent wage gap is a 'biased statistic.'

"wage gap" is "a biased statistic," says Capell. "It is not entirely nor strictly the result of gender bias," he says. "It's the result of a number of things, like length of service, performance, number of years in the workforce, level of the organization, and so on. Only four to six percent can't be explained by any other variable, with the exception of sex."

It's not socially acceptable to look at pay equity in the broadest sense.

linear multiple regression analysis is used to "determine the extent to which each of these factors predicts an increase in job worth."

This form of job evaluation looks at the components or skills required for a particular job, and to what extent these skills must be applied. Common components for all jobs in the organization are then determined, and are tested to see if they correlate with the increase in job worth. Factors that correlate strongly with increased job worth are weighted heavily in that organization. For example, if the need for fine motor skills increase as job worth increases, then fine motor skills can be used to predict the worth of a job in that organization.

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