

# Martha Trescott Prize 2020

---

## Recipient 2020

### **Laura Ettinger, Nicole Conroy & William Barr II**

“What Late-Career and Retired Women Engineers Tell Us: Gender Challenges in Historical Context,” *Engineering Studies*, 11,3 (2019) 217–242;  
<https://doi.org/10.1080/19378629.2019.1663201>.

The committee chose this article because of its clarity and its subtlety, with regard to both substance and method.

The question it addresses—why engineering, unlike all the other professions (including the clergy)—has not seen a sustained improvement in women’s workforce participation since 1980—has interested a small army of researchers.

The answer this article provides is based on “open-ended written survey responses,” which were completed by 251 North American women engineers who went to engineering school between 1970 and 1980: the so-called affirmative action generation of women engineers. Their often-lengthy responses were analyzed by the three authors using the qualitative research method, applied thematic analysis, commonly used these days by social psychologists, sociologists and anthropologists.

Their conclusion, broadly stated, is that affirmative action programs are not sufficient to wipe out the subtle discriminatory effects of what the authors call “gender issues that are deeply entrenched in our interpersonal relations and social structures.” This leads to a very “leaky pipeline” between graduation rates and lengthy workforce participation for women in engineering.

The prize committee was impressed with the wealth of evidence the authors draw from the women’s responses, so as to reach and buttress their conclusion. The authors do so with exceptional perceptiveness, originality, thoroughness, and attention to detail. This is research in the social sciences applied in exemplary ways to the historical and social study of technology.

Historians of technology concerned about gender issues will want to read the article both because of its wealth of evidence and its very salient conclusions. All historians of technology, we think, should also pay attention to the method the authors have used because it is a novel method (at least to historians) of drawing conclusions from oral history interviewing,

We also want to commend the first author, Laura Ettinger, Associate Professor of History at Clarkson University, who was the PI on the NSF grant that funded this research, for giving her research assistants co-authorship.