

## QUIET PRESENCE

## Professor Florence Karlstrom: teacher, scholar and feminist

By Cheryl Couture

With her quiet presence and soft-spoken manner, Dr. Florence Karlstrom is a prime example of one who can succeed by using intelligence and grace, rather than aggression and force.

Karlstrom, recently promoted to full professor of sociology at NAU, began teaching here in 1965 and from day one, her primary concern has been her students — teaching them, learning from them and most of all, encouraging them to grow.

"I especially like the involvement with students," Karlstrom pointed out. "I feel a very strong respect for students and have a very firm conviction that we all learn together rather than me (as a teacher) dishing out something. I would hope to be a resource, but the students are also a resource."

Karlstrom said she likes to conduct classes in a seminar-like fashion, with students seated in a circle when possible. Although the official University course load per semester is 12 hours, she taught six hours this past spring because of her involvement with Faculty Fellows. Faculty Fellows is "sort of a think tank of faculty persons that work with the Office of Professional Development to further teaching efforts at NAU," Karlstrom explained, adding wryly that "some of the Fellows are not fellows."

It is interesting to note that Karlstrom, with her long and distinguished career in academe, never intended to be a teacher. In fact, she noted, "I grew up determined not to be. My father was an educator and my brother was, but sociology was so interesting to me that I was very excited to discover it. By the time I had a master's degree in sociology. ... I found that teaching was the most common way to use that degree and that turned out to be quite exciting."

Karlstrom, who obtained a bachelor of science from the University of Alberta, Edmonton, Canada; a master of art in sociology from the University of Chicago, and a Ph.D. from Arizona State University, was recently honored for her 25 years of

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teaching at a recognition dinner hosted by NAU President Eugene M. Hughes.

A longtime advocate of feminism, Karlstrom said even though she had a traditional background, which included many years of marriage and the raising of four children, one of her utmost concerns is how women are treated in today's society.

"I have always felt very strongly that women ought not to be devalued and that many of them are devalued," she said. "It's true that there's a lot of anger in the feminist movement, and a lot of it is thoroughly understandable, but I tend to think of feminism as very much in harmony with seeking the best interests of men and women both."

"In other words, I think of it as humanism in the best sense, because essentially feminism is a movement that seeks to give people full possibilities of reaching their potential."

As an example, Karlstrom pointed out that many women who return to school in their thirties and forties come back with very low



## SEMINAR-LIKE CLASSES

Dr. Florence Karlstrom, professor of sociology, interacts with students Diana Glennon (left) and Linda Jaurequi from her "Feminism and the Family" course this spring. Karlstrom, who recently marked her 25th year on the NAU faculty, likes to conduct her classes in a seminar-like fashion. (Photo by John Ziebell)

recognition of their own talents. "It's been quite frequent that women students have started with a course in pottery or something like that and then put their toe in a little more by taking a course in Women's Studies, and they begin to discover they really are at home in the world of scholarship. ... A number of those same women have gone on to major in sociology and others have gone on to do well in other fields."

Citing a personal incident, Karlstrom

recalled, "I taught here for a number of years with a master's degree and when I said I wanted to arrange some time off to complete my doctorate, the man who was then chair of the department, said, 'Florence, what do you want to do that for?'"

Attitudes like these prompted Karlstrom to study the issue of sexism, as well as focus on finding a solution to eliminate the problem at NAU. "There was a meeting between women faculty and the Women's Studies Advisory Committee ... to explore NAU's situation in terms of women students in particular, and minority women as well," Karlstrom explained. "There was a general feeling in the meeting that there was a great deal of sexism that perhaps wasn't recognized on campus — that women students were feeling the effects of sexism and often it was unintentional."

"We began, therefore, to talk about various measures we might try, and the idea of writing an information booklet to point out what some of the literature showed about the effects on women students and to give useful reminders to faculty on how to avoid sexism."

As a result, Karlstrom wrote a booklet titled "Creating the Non-Sexist Classroom at NAU," which was published in April.

Regarding her own experience with sexism, Karlstrom feels she has not been victimized in her professional life; however, she pointed out, "I suspect that's because I wasn't looking for it and I probably missed a few sexist elements in my environment because I was just barreling toward my goals."

She added that women professionals have a much more difficult time than their male colleagues. "A great deal is expected of them professionally and very little support is given for them in their child-rearing roles," Karlstrom said. "The big solutions to that are for fathers to be more involved and the employers to be more cooperative."

It is important for women professionals to have a support system, and to find mentors to assist them in knowing the informal demands of the job, Karlstrom stressed. "They should seek as much support as they can from family and friends. ... Men can be fine mentors for women, but we may also need an old girls' network to balance the old boys' network," she added.

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"I do feel very strongly about these matters. ... And I feel strongly about the fact that society in general does not take account of the special concerns that affect women, as well as children. Women and children's interests are so congruent; they really go together."

Karlstrom noted that just this spring she taught a course titled "Feminism and the Family," which dealt with the interests of women and children in today's family structure. "There was a real mixture of ages and that's a tremendous addition to the interest of any course," she said. "There was lots of experience assembled there."

Throughout the years, Karlstrom has received many accolades, including the President's Distinguished Faculty Award in 1985 and "Women Helping Women" award from Soroptimist International of Flagstaff, also in 1985. In addition, she was named one of three "Women of Influence" by The Arizona Daily Sun in 1984 and was elected to Phi Kappa Phi, a national honor society, in 1982.

During the 1988-89 academic year, Karlstrom participated in a faculty exchange at Wuhan University in China where she taught sociology. "The students were very excited and responsive toward sociology," she said, adding that a faculty exchange, particularly in a foreign country, gives long-term faculty such as herself a whole new perspective on teaching.

Asked why she has stayed at NAU for a

quarter-century, she replied, "For most of these years my family has been here (her son, Dr. Karl Karlstrom is an associate professor of geology at NAU) and I have felt very much at home here. I also have a loyalty to the University. I count myself very fortunate."