Emily Taylor: Committed to Equal Rights for Women

By SARAH WOHLKABE

"Woman may be said to be an inferior man."

Emily Taylor, dean of women, has spent 17 years trying to dispel this notion. Taylor has maintained her administrative and teaching hierarchy of young women to become self-satisfied and self-sufficient. As a result, the number of female students and alumni aware of the issues has increased. Thelibrary's resources have grown, and the library is open for part of the day.

Taylor joined the Affirmative Action Board, attempting to provide economic justice for young women and their teachers. She attended a natural sciences class at the University of Wisconsin, Madison, and participated in seminars on women's issues.

Taylor stresses the importance of understanding the implications of the women's movement and the need for women to be aware of their rights. She believes in the National Women's Action League, National Organization for Women, and the American Association of University Women. Taylor is a major speaker, organizer, and supporter of the women's movement.

Emily Taylor
contributor to each of these groups. Taylor says she accepted speaking engagements several years ago for many of these groups but has since been forced to turn down many offers because of the time involved.

Her favorite speaking series is the “Feminist Perspective” radio program she started in January, 1972 with KANU. Taylor is moderator of the weekly half-hour program.

MANY PEOPLE have the impression that she has changed her philosophy on the women’s movement, she says. Taylor maintains she has not changed her ideas and approach in the slightest.

“It’s just that more people are listening now so that it makes it seem as though there has been some change,” she said.

Although Taylor has gained recognition at KU because of her commitment to the women’s movement, she does not consider herself a radical feminist. In fact, Taylor calls herself a conventional feminist concerned with equal opportunity for women in the labor market and with equal access to training for jobs.

She says radical feminists want to restructure society whereas her special interest is with the American society as it exists. This society, she says, offers more opportunity to change whatever needs to be changed to make things more fair for everyone.

Taylor refuses to use the term “women’s liberation” which she says has an emotional connotation that identifies it with the New Left of the ’60s.

The phrase, she says, gives many women satisfied with traditional roles the impression that someone is going to force everybody to get out and work, to force them to give up the choice they have made and that is certainly not what it’s all about.”

“WOMEN’S MOVEMENT” OR “Women’s Rights Movement” are the terms Taylor prefers to use because “they clarify what we are talking about, and, after all, every rights movement boils down to a choice of alternatives.

“There is nobody in the feminist movement that I know of who is saying that all women ought to do the same thing, that all men ought to do the same thing, that all humans ought to do the same thing,” Taylor says, “What they are saying is that they should all have an open choice and that they should come to recognize that choice and recognize that they are making choices even if they think they’re not.”

The acceptance of alternatives and the equal opportunity to choose are the goals for which Taylor is striving. She says there still exists discrimination in educational access, in pay and in job promotion, and will exist until the ratification of the Equal Rights Amendment.

The fact that several-equal pay and opportunity laws exist today, Taylor says, has led her to believe that the women’s movement is an inevitable process. Taylor says the women’s movement has finally gone beyond enforcing basic civil liberties to attacking the roots of discrimination in the “economic mainstream of society.”

“Women could manage to live with being barred from many public places, but they never will stand for being barred from the places where economic and political decisions are being made,” she says.

TAYLOR HAS always been committed to the women’s movement in the economy. She has never accepted a job anywhere without asking whether the employer was committed to the principle of equal pay for equal work, she says.

Taylor is extremely concerned with equal job opportunity because she elected not to marry and instead remained in the labor market when women were being forced back into the home after World War II.

“I did not have the problem of somebody saying ‘you have a husband to support you, and you should be in the home,’ she says.

Taylor is a woman who succeeded on her own. After receiving a bachelor’s degree in English and history and a master’s degree in counseling from Ohio State University, she earned a doctorate in personnel administration at Indiana University. Taylor came to KU in 1956 after being associate dean of women at Miami University in Oxford, Ohio.

TAYLOR’S CAREER has been so deeply imbedded in the progress of the post-World War II women’s movement that her thoughts on the movement and its history seem to be identical.

As existing myths about jobs befitting women and the inadequacies of women have gradually changed. Taylor feels that she has also grown and changed psychologically. Her usefulness has increased and her ideals have been realized, she says.

“We want equality now, not way off in the future sometime,” says Taylor. “We want it now so that none of you have to go through a phase as I did where someone can tell you that you are only worth two-thirds as much as someone else just because that person took on responsibilities which the rest of us have ended up paying for.”