

Theme 7 Plenary Talk

[Lesley Ward](#), University of South Australia (Australia)

From the Marriage Bar to the Hypatia Scholarship: Women Working in Mathematics in Australian Universities



Lesley Ward is a past chair of the women-in-mathematics group, WIMSIG, of the Australian Mathematical Society. She is a recipient of the Mathematical Association of America's Alder Award for Distinguished Teaching. Her research interests are in complex analysis, harmonic analysis, and industrial applications of mathematics. She earned her PhD in the US and worked in several US universities before returning to Australia to join the University of South Australia in 2006. At five institutions she has initiated and sustained women's groups focusing on peer mentoring and research talks by participants and by visiting women academic staff. With Cheryl Praeger she has recently published a chapter on the history of women in mathematics in Australia, in the US Association for Women in Mathematics (AWM) book *Fifty Years of Women in Mathematics: Reminiscences, History, and Visions for the Future of AWM*.

Abstract

The first woman lecturer in the Australian mathematical sciences was appointed in 1921, almost 70 years after the first Australian university was established in 1852. Since then the proportion of women among mathematical sciences students and academic staff has gradually increased, though it has not reached 50% even at the bachelor's completion level. Why so low, and why so slow? What can we do now to create a more inclusive and equitable higher education sector that allows everyone to contribute more fully? What does the past tell us about what works? I'll outline some of the history of women working in the mathematical sciences in Australian universities, with a focus on the national Women in Mathematics Special Interest Group (WIMSIG, founded in 2012) of the Australian Mathematical Society. Drawing on that history, I'll offer insights into our evolving understanding of why women and others have been underrepresented, and the initiatives we've used to address inequity. In addition to describing the Australian historical, societal and legal contexts, I'll consider broader explanatory factors that have acted to inhibit participation of women and other underrepresented groups worldwide. Juicy topics such as the marriage bar and its impact, the female minimum wage, and the Jennifer and John correspondence study will be addressed.