

2016 MANDELBAUM FELLOWSHIP – Doctoral Level

CITATION FOR KAREN MARIE OLSEN LAWFORD



Ontario Confederation of University Faculty Associations
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Read by Glenna Knnutson, OCUFA Executive Member at Large

Karen Marie Olsen Lawford is this year's Henry Mandelbaum Graduate Fellowship Doctoral Award winner. She is the fifth doctoral candidate to receive the Fellowship. In keeping with past award-winners, Karen is an exemplary community member, committed activist, and a dedicated scholar. She is currently pursuing her doctorate at the Institute of Feminist and Gender Studies in the Social Science Department at the University of Ottawa.

Karen's work is urgent and relevant to Canadians today; she is looking at the gap in Canadian maternal health care for First Nations women who live in northern communities. In particular, she is interested in the impact Canada's evacuation policies have on women (and their families) who must travel south in order to access birth services.

Karen's application starts with the statement, "Canada is in a maternity care crisis." It goes on to explain how this crisis effects First Nations communities. She highlights the inconsistencies between federal and provincial health care policies as they relate to First Nations people living in the north and notes that because the ways in which the policies are enacted aren't properly documented, there is little chance of change. Karen positions these policies as an effort to colonize or assimilate First Nations people and asserts that the policies had the effect of destroying birthing knowledge at the local level. In turn, this has made relying on a medicalized version of childbirth in the southern part of the country inevitable, thus perpetuating the cycle.

Karen is well positioned to take this crisis head-on as a trained and practicing midwife. She has grounded her research in feminist theory and uses institutional ethnography to describe how evacuation policies are enacted for women who travel to Winnipeg to deliver their babies. This work will inform her policy analysis and recommendations for change.



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Her commitment to others and her leadership in a multitude of areas impressed the selection committee. She has been active with the National Aboriginal Council of Midwives and has developed several foundational resources for that Council, including resources to bring birth closer to northern communities such as “Caring for the Caregiver,” which supports student midwives. Karen sits on many advisory committees; volunteers as a Taekwondo instructor; does service work to put together conferences; and has done support volunteer work for the Congress of the Social Sciences and Humanities.

Her reference letters indicate that she is an impressive scholar, a tenacious individual, and an impressive human being. According to one referee, “Karen’s work has the ability to change policy and practice, to fill gaps in our scholarly understand of First Nations’ women’s health, and to make Canada a more just country for all.” Her referees also note that she’s a selfless individual. As such, she embodies the characteristics that Henry Mandelbaum held so dear. Karen’s CV speaks for itself – she has an impressive number of publications, presentations, and academic awards that highlight the breadth and quality of her work. Her commitment to service is also inspiring. OCUFA is therefore pleased to add the Henry Mandelbaum Graduate Fellowship-Doctoral to her list of accomplishments, and we look forward to hearing more from Karen in the years to come.