

# Year of Curie-Skłodowska in Poland and France

In January 2011, Poland's Senate unanimously adopted a resolution which, on the 100th anniversary of awarding Maria Curie-Skłodowska the Nobel Prize in Chemistry, designates 2011 as the Year of Maria Curie-Skłodowska to acknowledge her great contribution to the global development of science.

Curie-Skłodowska (1867-1934) is the only woman honored with the Nobel Prize in two different scientific fields. In 1903, together with her husband Pierre Curie, she received the Nobel Prize in physics for research on radioactivity. In 1911, she was awarded the Nobel Prize, along with her husband, in Chemistry

for discovering two new elements: polonium and radium.

In 1911, Curie-Skłodowska was awarded her second Nobel Prize; in 2011, the United Nations declared that this year would be the International Year of Chemistry, in large part because this is the 100th anniversary of Curie-Skłodowska's Nobel Prize in Chemistry.

The opening ceremony to celebrate the 100th anniversary of the Nobel Prize in Chemistry awarded to Curie-Skłodowska was held at the Sorbonne on January 29, 2011. ∞

*"Marie Curie is, of all celebrated beings,  
the only one whom fame has not corrupted."*

*~Albert Einstein*

## A Remarkable Woman

Beata Paszyc and Melissa Szwanke

Born in Warsaw, in the Russian partition of Poland, on November 7, 1867 to a school principal mother and teacher father, Maria Skłodowska was one of 5 children. She was an excellent student who loved physics, chemistry, math, biology and music. She spoke Polish, Russian, French and English. Maria left Poland for France at the age 24 and studied at Sorbonne. Living on pennies a day, she devoted her life to her scientific work.

She fell in love with Pierre Curie through a shared love of their work. Married July 26, 1895, they had two daughters, Irene and Eve. In France, she changed her name to Marie Curie, however Poles often refer to her as Curie-Skłodowska. Maria was very patriotic, travelling to Poland frequently to keep the Polish language and heritage alive.

Maria obtained Masters degrees in physics and mathematics and, later, her Doctorate in physics. Her determination led to the discovery of Polonium and Radium. Perhaps the most famous of all women scientists, Maria Curie-Skłodowska is notable for her many firsts, including: she was the first to use the term radioactivity for this phenomenon; she was the first woman in Europe to receive her doctorate of science; in 1903, she became the first woman to win a Nobel Prize for Physics; she was also the first female lecturer, professor and head of Laboratory at the Sorbonne University in Paris (1906). In 1911, she won an unprecedented second Nobel Prize (this time in chemistry) for her discovery and isolation of pure radium and radium components; she was the first person ever to receive two Nobel Prizes and win the award in two different fields and only person to win the award in different

sciences; she was the first mother-Nobel Prize Laureate of daughter-Nobel Prize Laureate. Her oldest daughter Irene Joliot-Curie also won a Nobel Prize for Chemistry (1935).

Under Curie-Skłodowska's direction the Radium Institute in Paris became a world center for the study of radioactivity (1919). Thanks to the initiative of Maria, the Radium Institute was opened in Warsaw (1932).



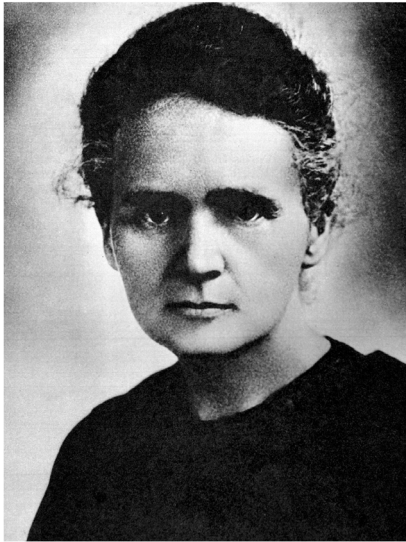
Pierre and Marie Curie

Maria Curie-Skłodowska died on July 4, 1934 of a disease caused by prolonged exposure to radiation. She was buried twice: on July 6, 1934, in the same cemetery in Sceaux with Pierre. Over 60 years later, the remains of Pierre and Maria Curie-Skłodowska were re-interred in France's national mausoleum, the Panthéon, in Paris. She is the first woman which has been laid to rest under the famous dome of the Pantheon in Paris (1995) for her own merits. Her tombstone reads "Marie Curie-Skłodowska. In her lifetime, Maria received 15 gold medals, 19 degrees, and many other honors.

Truly a remarkable woman. ∞

# Students Discover a Polish Heroine

Melissa Szwanke



Maria Curie-Skłodowska

On April 1, 2011, students and faculty of Florida International University were captivated by the history that is Madame Maria Curie-Skłodowska.

Honorary Vice Consul of the Republic of Poland, Mrs. Beata Paszyc was invited to speak to students in a free event arranged by Le Cercle Français, Pi Delta Phi and the Department of Modern Languages. Invited by Professor Maria Antonieta Garcia, professor of French language, Mrs. Paszyc shared the story of an extraordinary Polish woman.

Mrs. Paszyc prepared a special presentation entitled *Madame Maria Curie - Skłodowska: The Daughter of Poland, A Scientific Genius of the World*. In a crowded conference room, with standing room only, over 25 students learned of the scientific work and monumental discoveries of Madame Curie-Skłodowska and her husband, Pierre Curie. Additionally, each of the participants received a copy of *Madame Curie: Daughter of Poland* by Robert Woznicki, a book published by AIPC.

Students represented majors including chemistry, psychology, English, economics, French and international relations; faculty members represented the Departments of Medicine, Radiology and German Language.

The audience posed very interesting and insightful questions about her as a scientist, who never patented any of her discoveries and as a working mother of two, demonstrating their captivation in the story and testifying to how much was learned that day. ☺

*“Nothing in life is to be feared, it is only to be understood. Now is the time to understand more, so that we may fear less.”*

*~Maria Curie-Skłodowska*



Beata Paszyc and FIU students

## Suggested reading:

*Madame Curie: A Biography*,  
by Eve Curie (Doubleday, 1955)

*Madame Curie Daughter of Poland*,  
by Robert Woznicki (American Institute  
of Polish Culture, 1983)

## Polish laureates of the Nobel Prize for Science

**Maria Skłodowska-Curie, Physics (1903)**  
**Marie Skłodowska-Curie, Chemistry (1911)**  
**Tadeus Reichstein, Physiology or Medicine (1950)**  
**Roald Hoffmann, Chemistry (1981)**  
**Georges Charpak, Physics (1992)**