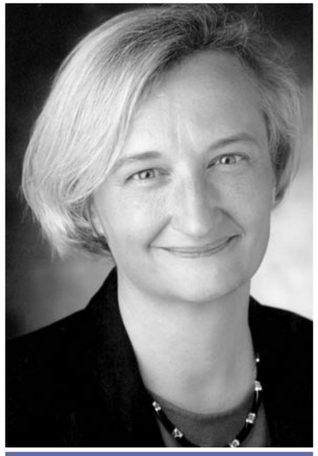

Christine M. Maziar

Executive Vice President and Provost
University of Minnesota
BSEE '81, MSEE '84, PhD '86

For her outstanding contributions as a teacher and scholar and as provost of a major university

Choosing Wisely

"I had no intentions of being an engineer," says Christine Maziar. "I was going to go into physics."

But a sharp advisor in the Schools of Engineering at Purdue intervened. "When I visited campus in the spring of my senior year, I was headed over to meet with an advisor in physics when I walked by the Engineering Administration Building and had a sense that I should go talk to the folks in Freshman Engineering. I met with an excellent adviser, Marie Knicca, who told me I could take as much physics as I wanted in engineering, and I would have more options with an engineering degree. She presented a compelling case."

As an engineering major, Maziar still took enough physics to qualify for Sigma Pi Sigma, the physics honorary, and she made time for other activities—Tomahawk, the Society of Women Engineers, Tau Beta Pi, and St. Thomas Aquinas Parish—and also qualified for Eta Kappa Nu, the electrical engineering honorary.

"I was a very strange freshman," she says. "I used to wear my chemistry goggles from my dorm to my 7:30 a.m. lab when the winter wind was blowing." During her freshman year as she was preparing her application to the co-op program, Maziar had to make another choice: what field of engineering should she study?

"I was torn between chemical engineering and electrical engineering. I went to the placement center and I started reading company recruiting literature. The companies that were recruiting chemical engineers had a story that went, 'Come work for us and you'll have a wonderful career in management.' The electrical engineering companies' story was different. It went, 'We have really neat technology and you'll get to work on neat stuff if you work for us.' I wanted to be part of that kind of creative environment, so I liked the electrical engineering approach. It was a total nerd appeal."

By her junior year, Maziar had made another choice: she wanted to be a professor. "There was something about a college campus that I found very compelling," she says. "It was the work of the university—teaching, research, and its focus on the future."

The Choices Ahead

An award-winning faculty member at the University of Texas for eleven years, Maziar has served on numerous review panels for the NSF and holds three patents. She is now a leading university administrator, serving as executive vice president and provost at the University of Minnesota.

"Now that I'm back in the Big 10, I have been known to wear a Purdue T-shirt under my Minnesota sweater," she laughs. "I miss the classroom and I miss the contact with my research students, but I went into engineering because I like to solve problems—and I have a lot of problems to solve as an administrator."

One problem Maziar cites is the rise in tuition at public universities nationwide. "Public university tuitions are on a path toward private-school tuition levels," she says. "I think that in the post-baby-boom period, the commitment to public higher education is faltering. Baby-boomers are not stepping up to ensure other generations have the same opportunities they had."

As a leader in the field, Maziar understands her challenge in reaffirming the role of the public university, to make it a priority. "Clearly, education plays a role in helping individuals develop the tools and background to deal with change, and the rate of change is not going to slow. Education is absolutely essential in preparing individuals for those changes. My biggest commitment is to fight for the support of public research universities by the public these extraordinary institutions serve.

"I'm very pleased with the level of energy I see at Purdue right now and the commitment to ensure its place as one of the top engineering schools in the future. I'm grateful to the leadership at Purdue for the new facilities and programs. I'm also grateful that places that were special to me—the Sweet Shop and the HKN student lounge and lab—have been preserved and taken care of. They are touchstones for me whenever I return to campus."

2002–	Executive Vice President and Provost and Professor of Electrical Engineering, University of Minnesota
1998–2002	Vice President for Research and Dean of the Graduate School and Professor of Electrical Engineering, University of Minnesota. Administered research program totaling $500 million and provided leadership for technology commercialization activities. Minnesota Technology Inc., Board of Directors and Minnesota High Technology Association University of Minnesota Committee
2000	Outstanding Electrical Engineer Award, Purdue
1995–98	Vice Provost, University of Texas at Austin
1992	Semiconductor Research Corporation's Technical Excellence Award
1991–95	Associate Professor of Electrical and Computer Engineering, University of Texas at Austin
1993	Visiting Research Professor, Intel Corp.
1990	NSF Presidential Young Investigator
1987–91	Assistant Professor of Electrical and Computer Engineering, University of Texas at Austin
1986	Visiting Assistant Professor, School of Electrical Engineering, Purdue

BSEE '81, MSEE '84, PhD '86, Purdue