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Feminist poet kicks off Lecture Series

by Chris Bradley
Staff Writer

The Distinguished Lecture Series began the year Tuesday night when 330 packed into 101 English/Math to hear feminist poet Adrienne Rich.

The 8 p. m. address ended a day of smaller, informal meetings for the award-winning author, beginning at noon with an open discussion in the South Lown Room of the Memorial Union attended by 120 people.

The noon talk, co-sponsored by the Women in Curriculum program, focused mainly on the place of women's studies in the university.

"To show any interest in the study of women, gets one dreadfully labeled," Rich said. Women "are afraid to be called lesbian or feminist" because of the negative connotations the dominant American culture has placed upon those labels.

Rich, who has taught at City University of New York and Columbia University, said she has seen many friends fired for attempting to institute

women's studies. "Women fought and struggled for what now appear to be" less than significant programs, Rich said.

Administrators are not the only barriers to the study of women. Rich said she found that many times students were not receptive either. "It's hard to speak about issues about which you feel very passionately and meet absolute resistance," Rich said.

But, Rich said, "life radicalizes you" and she has received letters from former students who previously rejected her viewpoint but who now accept it.

It is important to view yourself, Rich said, as part of "a whole life process of a student of which you (as a teacher) are one experience."

Rich also spoke about her recent trip to Nicaragua and the implications of the Sandinista revolution. Rich said she went to Nicaragua to try to answer several questions for herself. These questions included the role of women in the revolution and the treatment of the Miskito Indians by the Sandinista government.

Rich said she confronted the "concrete reality of a very small country used by the United States as a

back yard to be ripped off for hundreds of years."

Issues that American feminists consider to be number one, such as abortion, are less central in such a situation, Rich said.

Despite problems like the forced relocation of the Miskito Indians, Rich said the Sandinista government has made tremendous strides forward. "Polio has been wiped out; the illiteracy rate has gone from over 50 percent to 12 percent; and there is a total commitment on the part of the government that the people shall be fed," Rich said.

"Women are incredibly important in the Sandinista leadership and I trust these women to set their own priorities," Rich said.

Rich believes the role women play in

movements such as the Sandinista revolution is important because "we have analyses of the oppression of different groups, what we are only beginning to develop is analyses of the simultaneity of oppression."

Rich prefaced her evening address by saying that she considered herself a political poet and that in America "Political art is suspect. People here feel that art is for elite people to study." But one of the first mottoes of the women's movement was "the personal is political."

Rich then read a selection of her poems, written since 1968. They included those in her most recent volume *A Wild Patience Has Taken Me This Far*, and some recently written unpublished poems.

Protestant Sunday Worship

11 a.m.

Lown Room, Memorial Union