Women gather in Spencer for computing conference
Companies like Google, Microsoft recruited at event

by Sonia Rana
Indiana Daily Student

Published Monday, February 6, 2006

More than 130 women from 19 colleges and universities in and nearby Indiana gathered this weekend to discuss significant issues surrounding women in the computing field.

The Women in Computing group sponsored the second Indiana Women in Computing conference for undergraduate and graduate women this weekend. The conference was held at the Canyon Inn at McCormick's State Park in Spencer, Ind.

IU, DePauw University, Hanover College, Indiana State University, IU Purdue University Indianapolis, Rose-Hulman Institute of Technology, Earlham College and Taylor University were some of the colleges and universities participating in the event.

Suzanne Menzel, sponsorship chair of the conference and professor of computer science at IU, helped organize and coordinate the activities of the conference. The event spanned the course of two days. Activities included a keynote speaker from Rose-Hulman Institute of Technology, "cutting edge" discussions about information related to gender issues in computing and opportunities to meet students and faculty from other schools and area industry leaders, Menzel said.

The conference also provided opportunities for participants to share their personal research with the computing community through proposals written on posters. Most proposals derived from class projects and undergraduate and graduate research, Menzel said. The poster proposal topics ranged from Digital Identity Management and Trust Negotiation to a "Finding Nemo" Video Book. More than 14 poster proposals were submitted and IU graduate student Narmada Jayasankar was awarded $100 for her poster, titled "Machine Learning Approach to Predicting Peptide Fragmentation Spectra."

Participants were given yet another opportunity to share research through Lightning Talks, discussion sessions named for their brevity. These activities allowed participants to the chance to learn what's going on in research and computing. It was also a way to network and gather support from students and faculty from other schools. The activities were completed in small groups so that the students could get to know each other, Menzel said.

Mona Gandhi, a graduate student of Informatics at IU, submitted a poster proposal and led a discussion session on the subject of phishing, a method of identity theft through the creation of a Web site that mimics a legitimate company.

"The conference is a one-in-a-billion opportunity for women in the field of computing to get together and discuss various new projects and research avenues," Gandhi said.
Microsoft, Google and Eli Lilly were among the other sponsors of the conference, Menzel said. Microsoft
donated a Microsoft Pocket PC as a prize for the audience favorite among the Lightning Talks. Google's
representatives delivered sessions on how to interview effectively, how to apply for and receive internships
and how to network within the industry, Menzel said.

Students were also encouraged to bring their resumes as the representatives of Google, Microsoft and Lilly
recruited at the conference.

"It's kind of like a mini-
career fair. It gives the graduate students an opportunity to explore the job market while still in school,"
Menzel said.

The theme of the conference was INterconnect, said Katie Siek, co-chair of the program committee for the
conference.

"We want everyone to get to know each other, meet people from other schools and network," she said. "I was
the only woman in my class. This conference is an opportunity to let women see that they are not alone in
this field."

Siek constructed a plan to get students out of their comfort zones and meet new people during dinner. She
named each table in the dining room after a well-known woman in the computing field. Before the dinner,
participants picked a name out of a container to determine at which table they would sit. The table also
included a brief biography and accomplishments of the woman after which it was named.

Lisa Kaczmarczyk, assistant professor of computer science and software engineering at Rose-Hulman
Institute of Technology, was the keynote speaker at the conference. Kaczmarczyk's speech was titled,
"Computing is RAPPID," which stands for reasonably advanced preparation and personal instinct
development.

"The theme of the speech is that if you learn to recognize and trust your instincts in order to help you make
your decisions, you will be more successful than if you made those decisions by following others,"
Kaczmarczyk said.

Gloria Childress Townsend, conference chair and chair of Computer Science at DePauw University, thought
of the idea of a conference as a way to generate interest in the field in the early 1990s. Townsend was
inspired by the drop in numbers of women in computing in the 1980s.

"At that time, there were only three women teaching in the field in the whole state," Townsend said.

The conference is based on the format of the Grace Hopper Celebration of Women in Computing, an
international conference. The event is held every two years, usually on a coast and the registration fees are
about $500, Menzel said. The purpose of InWIC is to provide similar opportunities and experiences for
women in computing who don't have the funding to attend major conferences like Grace Hopper.

Siek said she hoped the conference would provide support for women in the field.

"This is changing the culture of a department. We want to let women know they do belong and that you don't
have to be one of the guys to fits in," Siek said.
More information on Women in Computing can be found at www.cs.indiana.edu/cgi-pub/wic/index.

"Women gather in Spencer for computing conference"
© 2000 Indiana Daily Student