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IT program targets diverse populations

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 By [Lori DesRochers](#)



Photo by Lori DesRochers

Director of the visual communications lab, Tyra Robertson, left, manages the technical and training aspects of the lab as well as works with students such as junior Simi Dhillon (right).

Technology-related fields have struggled through the years to diversify in terms of race and gender, but a number of recent efforts may begin to improve the situation.

The School of Informatics hosted a new event in October, "Bring IT On," with IT referring to "information technology." The program organizers invited 20 students from Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCU) to the campus in late October.

Through speakers, workshops and brainstorming sessions, the students learned about opportunities in graduate school and were encouraged to continue pursuing their studies in computer science.

"I would be just thrilled if we could get just two of those kids to come to IU," said Informatics assistant professor Kay Connelly, who conceived the program and helped plan the weekend's activities. "There was a lot of excitement and momentum. It was

really amazing."

Connelly estimates that only 10 percent of the faculty in Computer Science are women. She participates in a group called Women in Computing that provides information, mentoring and support to young women in the field, but has found that many of her female students lack the self-confidence of their male peers and end up dropping out.

"We're trying to break the stereotype that you have to be a geeky white male to be a computer programmer," said Connelly. "It's not like women can't do it. They just don't always see that it's more than just sitting at the computer. It's also helping people."



Chris Ogan

Professor of Journalism and Informatics Chris Ogan helped in the planning of the conference and also sat on one of the panels.

"I used to teach at a historically black university, and I know that when you're from the south, IU seems like a foreign country," she said. "When they came here, they saw that there was a community they could fit into and not feel like a stranger. It was overall a tremendous experience."

Ogan would like to see a program modeled after Bring IT On implemented in the School of Journalism, which is predominantly white. In terms of gender, however, the School of Journalism faces almost the opposite problem, as over 75 percent of students are women. In particular, there is no shortage of women entering into the field of broadcast journalism--a field that demands considerable technological expertise.

This preponderance of women in the classroom has brought about few changes in the workplace.

"The real issue is about moving up into managerial positions," said Ogan.

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Adjunct lecturer Ann Shea has worked as a reporter and anchor at an NBC affiliate in Indiana for the past 10 years and consistently faced stiff competition with other women reporters for jobs that men could get far more easily.



Ann Shea

"Less men are willing to accept the low starting salaries of beginning TV jobs," she said. "That means that if you are only a decent male reporter, you're going to move up a lot faster than a more experienced woman. There's always a need for male reporters."

While she has seen more women moving up into managerial roles in recent years, she finds the culture of the news studio to still be male-dominated. Women comprise 40 percent of the workforce in television news, but only 25.2 percent of news directors and 15.2 percent of television's general managers are women, according to the Radio-Television News Directors Association.

Moreover, women account for only 29 percent of on-air reports, according to the Center for Media and Public Affairs. These percentages are good news in the industry, given that they top the number of women in these positions from previous years, and yet they still do not reflect society at large, let alone the numbers of women who are qualified to fill these positions.

The School of Journalism has been working to combat these issues. For instance, the multimedia lab in Ernie Pyle is the only one on campus headed by a woman. Tyra Robertson has served as director since February 2005 and loves the opportunity to show other young women that they have the ability to master technology.

In particular, she credits the fact that J210 Visual Communications Lab is a required course for encouraging all students to get excited about learning how to use complicated equipment and software.

"You do have to embrace technology here," said Robertson. "It's not something you have to do if you're an English or humanities major."

Still, Robertson often finds that she is treated differently from her male colleagues.

"Last Friday I got called up to help with a problem, and as I was working on it, the woman kept asking if my {male coworker} could help," said Robertson. "They doubt I can solve problems and go to our system admin, who is male."

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