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CU's Girls who Code 2016 – Encouraging girls to consider a future in STEM careers while having FUN [1]

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According to The National Center for Women & Information Technology, 1.1 million computing-relating jobs are expected by 2024 and only 25% of computing-related jobs were held by women in 2015.[i] Computing-related jobs alone are expected to grow by 21.8% by 2020 at the same time as upcoming college graduates are moving away from these types of jobs at alarming rates.[ii] To aid with ensuring that women are not left out of this looming and lucrative career boom and to help fill this ever-widening skills gap, it is critical that girls are educated early in their schooling before they are supported in thinking the building blocks of a Science, Technology, Engineering or Math (STEM) focus is too hard and before the gender bias against their pursuing STEM careers happens in middle school.[iii]

This is where Girls who Code [3] workshops come into play. These fun and informative lessons bring together girls aged 10-13 to learn about computer coding and set them on the path early toward breaking the gender bias and overcoming the skills gap. This opens the door to fill the many technology jobs that will be waiting for them when they graduate college.

CU's Employee and Information Services (EIS) department just completed its second Girls who Code training program held July 25-29. Taught by University Information Systems' (UIS) Kevin Sarsen, Senior Service Oriented Architecture Engineer, 16 girls, 6 of whom were second-year attendees [4], learned how to code games and auto-generate art work in a fun and interactive way. The first year students focused on basic programming skills, while the second year students learned the more complex Java Script language. "The primary goal of the program is to teach creative problem-solving to reach an end goal, not just to code. So, the girls find their own creative ways to meet the goal," said Sarsen. And because there were second-year students who were there building on their first-year skills, these girls had the opportunity to mentor the new students on their work, reinforcing their own skills while learning the important ability to support and transfer knowledge to others.

The Girls who Code program will remain a key tool in preparing girls for careers in technology, especially while few schools include computer science courses in their curriculum.[iv] EIS is planning to hold another Girls who Code program fall of next year, with mobile programing under consideration for the third-year curriculum.

[i] National Center for Women & Information Technology. 2016. Women and information technology: By the numbers. Retrieved from https://www.ncwit.org/sites/default/files/resources/btn_03092016_web.pdf [5]

[ii] Science Pioneers. The STEM talent gap. Retrieved from http://www.sciencepioneers.org/sites/default/files/Kelly%20STEM%20Talent... [6]

[iii] Kendall, T. 2016. Experts: Collaborate to create next generation of women in STEM. U.S. News, retrieved from http://www.usnews.com/news/articles/2016-03-21/experts-collaborate-to-cr... [7]

[iv] National Center for Women & Information Technology. 2016. Moving beyond computer literacy: Why schools should teach computer science. Retrieved from https://www.ncwit.org/resources/moving-beyond-computer-literacy-why-scho... [8]

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