

ICTC'S FIT PROGRAM GETS A GENDER-BASED LENS CHECK-UP

Attracting more females to Information and Communications Technology (ICT) work is a complex challenge and requires the commitment of the education system, colleges and universities, and the industry. In its role of acting as a catalyst to effect positive change in the ability of these stakeholders to address ICT human resources needs in Canada, ICTC is in a key position to make a difference to girls, such as through its Focus on Information Technology (FIT) program.

Formerly known as the Information Technology Support Associate Program (ITSA), FIT has been in development since 2001. It is directed at increasing both the number of high school graduates choosing and qualified for ICT occupations upon graduation and the number of high school graduates choosing to enter ICT programs at the post-secondary level. The FIT program outlines learning outcomes and provides materials designed for secondary school curricula related to ICT skills and knowledge, as well as essential and other useful business/ entrepreneurial skills.

A recent "gender-based analysis" of ICTC's FIT program focused on the needs and circumstances of girls in high school that might affect their decision to participate (or not participate) in the FIT program. Since this decision could be affected by the beliefs and concerns of parents, teachers and counsellors, these were also included in this analysis. The study was conducted in schools in the Toronto District School Board, where FIT is being piloted, and other jurisdictions where FIT will soon enter into pilot offerings.

Any gender-based analysis aims to learn how the experiences of males and females might or might not be different under similar circumstances to ensure that their different experiences are taken

into account when developing or designing policies, programs and materials. Ideally, any program or initiative should benefit both sexes, but in practice, they are often unconsciously designed so that the value derived is unequal. When there is a substantial under-representation or absence of one gender, a gender-based analysis looks specifically to determine why this might be the case and what could be done to address this differential. In the case of

FIT, it is girls that are under-represented in the program by their choice of other courses of study. The research shows that when it comes to technology, gender matters and there are important differences between males and females in their technology use and choices. A gender-based analysis of the FIT program can therefore be useful in guiding how the FIT program is further developed.

The study found that female underrepresentation in IT work and school programs is a global phenomenon that has been documented for at least three decades. In short, males dominate computer-related schooling and the IT sector is therefore predominantly male. Females are actually declining in the IT workforce. Solving this complex problem is much bigger than the FIT program, the study cautions that while it is a piece of the solution, the FIT program on its own will not be able to solve this problem.

"Through further, sensitized development of FIT, ICTC can and will help address systemic barriers faced by the education system, colleges and universities, and the ICT industry in addressing ICT human resources needs in Canada," reinforced Paul D. Swinwood, President of ICTC. "More than ever, it is time to do IT differently."

The gender lens review report on ICTC's FIT program will be available on the ICTC website in the Fall of 2009.

"More than ever, it is time to do IT differently."

***-- Paul D. Swinwood,
President, ICTC***

Computer Science Needs More Good Women

Women involved in computer science say more girls should consider a career in this exciting field

www.redorbit.com/news/education/1663094/computer_science_needs_more_good_women/

ICTC PARTNER NEWS

Government of Canada partners with CATA WIT Forum to support women in tech

The Honourable Minister Guergis, Minister of State for the Status of Women, announced Government of Canada support to CATA WIT Forum for a project entitled *Supporting Women's Leadership in the Advanced Technology Sectors*.

With the generous support of the Status of Women Canada Partnership Fund, the CATA Women in Technology (WIT) Forum is launching a national project designed to help women succeed in Canada's technology industries.

OTHER NEWS

Fun, new tech-inspired novel hits bookshelves



When Sheryl Steinberg pitched her editor at *Chatelaine* an article on women and technology, she had no idea what she was in for. A former tech publicist/writer who contributed lifestyle articles to the magazine as a freelancer, Sheryl wanted to show that tech didn't have to be intimidating, complicated or boring, as is often the stereotype.

Her editor told her that she liked the concept but the magazine's readers weren't ready for an article about tech.

So Sheryl decided to turn the article (and its fun, sexy *Cosmo*-like quiz sidebar) into a book for mainstream women, written in the same vein as novels by Helen Fielding, Emily Giffin and Sophie Kinsella.

Fast-forward five years: *Opportunity Rings* (Key Porter Books) has hit bookstore shelves across Canada. The laugh-out-loud story follows 35-year-old Erica Swift, marketing director at a fictitious smartphone company, as she bluffs her way through technology. When her husband leaves her for an older woman and her life falls apart, she goes on a fulfilling yet comical journey to find out what she wants out of life and love.

The backdrop of the novel is the tech industry (a twist to the more commonly used fashion and publishing environments), but Sheryl says *Opportunity Rings* is really about empowerment, touching upon a wide range of issues facing women today, including sex, singlehood and learning to be a modern woman in a wireless world.

Sheryl Steinberg is a Toronto writer who has worked in the tech industry for more than a decade. As a freelance lifestyle writer, she writes about women and technology for The Globe and Mail's Style section. She also writes for More magazine, Style at Home, Canadian House & Home, The National Post and Canwest newspapers across Canada. Please visit www.sherylsteinberg.com.

The CATA WIT project will be a focal point for women across Canada entering or working to advance in fields including ICT (Information and Communications Technology), engineering, and other technology-dependant fields such as defence, aerospace and biotechnology.

For more information, visit www.catawit.ca

Cisco Networking Academy commissions white paper on gender gap in ICT

In Europe, women account for only 9 percent of the student population. The Cisco Networking Academy recently commissioned a study to understand why uptake is so low and what influences women when they decide what to study and which career path to follow, as well as to set out recommendations on how to tackle this issue.

The study was conducted by EUN Schoolnet, a consortium of European Ministries of Education, in five European countries: the Netherlands, France, Italy, UK and Poland. The study surveyed girls and boys of secondary age (14-18), together with their role models: parents and teachers.

The primary findings are:

- Girls are roughly equal to boys in aptitude in ICT at secondary level.
- Most girls enjoy studying ICT however this enjoyment does not often transmit into careers.
- Female role models generally exert strong influence on girls making decisions about further study/careers.
- Both students and role models generally believe that technology is better suited to men.
- Neither girls nor role models see ICT roles offering them chances to fulfill career aspirations such as helping others or working independently. This suggests that in many instances, teachers and parents are poorly educated about what ICT jobs really entail.

The white paper, *Women and ICT: Why are girls still not attracted to ICT studies and careers?*, sets out a number of measures to address the issues identified and is a call to action to the industry, government and educators to do more to educate, enlighten and encourage young women into the sector.

The study can be downloaded at: www.eun.org/whitepaper

More info about the study can be found at:

http://newsroom.cisco.com/dlls/2009/prod_062409b.html