COMMUNITY COLLEGE CORNER

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ACM-W Embraces Community College Participation

THE MISSION OF ACM'S WOMEN IN COMPUTING (ACM-W) states that it "supports, celebrates, and advocates internationally for the full engagement of women in all aspects of the computing field, providing a wide range of programs and services to ACM members and working in the larger community to advance the contributions of technical women" [3]. In July of 2012, Dr. Valerie Barr, Professor in the Computer Science Department and Director of Interdisciplinary Programs at Union College in Schenectady, New York, took over as chair of ACM-W. As part of her vision as chair, Dr. Barr reorganized committees with varying charges to help fulfill the mission of ACM-W such as regional conferences, chapters, awards, communication, scholarships, and last but not least community colleges. Dr. Elizabeth Hawthorne, Senior Professor of Computer Science at Union County College in Cranford, New Jersey, and Chair of the ACM Committee for Computing Education in Community Colleges [1] was selected to serve on the ACM-W Council [2] as the community college representative. The governing structure of ACM-W also includes a strategic advisory board with representatives from the National Center for Women & Information Technology (NCWIT) [11] and the Anita Borg Institute (ABI) [6].

Every year since 1994, ABI has conducted the national Grace Hopper Celebration of Women in Computing Conference, designed to bring the research and career interests of women in computing to the forefront. Based upon ideas from these Grace Hopper Celebrations and with seed money from the National Science Foundation, ACM-W created regional conferences with the goal of eliminating "the isolation of women in computing by covering a map of the United States with Small Regional Celebrations, so that no young woman is 'left out' of opportunities for support and encouragement" [4]. These small regional conferences were the brainchild of Professor Gloria Townsend at DePauw University, and currently are being coordinated by Professor Jodi Tims at Baldwin Wallace University.

On 29–30 March of 2013, the first ever community college regional conference of Women in Computing was held in Berea, Kentucky, at the unique and very charming *Historic Boone Tavern*, a hotel and restaurant of Berea College [7] staffed mainly by their students. The successful *Kentucky Community College Women in Computing Celebration* (KYCC-WiC) [10] was organized by two talented and dedicated women from Bluegrass Community and Technical College: Cindy Tucker and Melanie Williamson, both Associate Professors of Computer & Information Technologies. Most of the eleven faculty members in their department attended KYCC-WiC, demonstrating collegial and diverse support for the conference. Cindy and Melanie worked tirelessly for months to locate a suitable venue, raise corporate sponsorship, and plan an engaging conference program to provide both students and faculty with an insightful and inspirational experience. Besides ACM-W, corporate sponsorship included funding from Microsoft, DMD Data Systems, Raytheon, and Pearson Publishing. The keynote

KYCC-WiC Participants at Berea College's Historic Boone Tavern, Berea, Kentucky

speakers who shared their professional and personal journeys were Angie Anderson of Microsoft, Associate Professor of Psychology, Kelly Hagan at Bluegrass CTC, Professor Elizabeth Hawthorne of ACM-W and ACM CCECC, and the founder and owner of LexTech Corporation, Basha Roberts.

Like many other states, Kentucky has a state-wide system of community and technical colleges throughout its 120 counties. The Kentucky Community and Technical College System (KCTCS) has 16 colleges with 68 campuses [9]. Almost half of the KCTCS colleges were represented at KYCC-WiC with faculty and student participation from:

- Bluegrass Community and Technical College (CTC) with campuses in Lexington, Danville, Lawrenceburg, and Winchester;
- Elizabethtown Community and Technical College with campuses in Elizabethtown, Springfield, and Fort Knox;
- Gateway Community and Technical College with campuses in Florence, Covington, and Edgewood;
- Jefferson Community and Technical College with campuses in Louisville, Carrollton, Shepherdsville, and Shelbyville;
- Madisonville Community College with campuses in Madisonville and Central City;
- Owensboro Community and Technical College with three campuses in Owensboro; and
- Somerset Community College with campuses in Somerset, London, Liberty, Albany, Russell Springs, and Whitley City.

Moreover, faculty and students from two of the state universities with articulation agreements with Kentucky's community and technical colleges also participated in KYCC-WiC: Northern Kentucky University, located in the greater Cincinnati region, and the University of Kentucky, a comprehensive, land-grant research institution located in Lexington. Cindy and Melanie are already planning the second KYCC-WiC scheduled for 2015, and are also working diligently with Professor Maureen Doyle of Northern Kentucky University to offer a community college track at next

year's 2014 Tri-WiC Celebration (tri-cities of Cincinnati, Louisville, and Lexington community of Women in Computing Celebration). Tri-WiC attracts faculty and students from area colleges and universities as well as local businesses in the three adjacent states of Kentucky, Indiana, and Ohio.

Regional conferences are just one of many ACM-W projects. Another initiative, now led by Professor Townsend and Professor Paula Gabbert at Furman University, is the Student Chapters Program [5] that is designed to help retain and recruit women in computing. Forming an ACM-W Student Chapter helps members focus on:

- Activities to educate women about the opportunities in the computing field;
- Engaging women students in exciting computing activities;
- Connecting students with women leaders in the field;
- Encouraging students to promote the field of computing to young girls;
- Promoting the activities of ACM;
- Networking with other ACM-W Chapter leaders and members;
- Mentoring programs for Chapter members and pre-college girls;
- Broadening the computing community; and
- Extending the conversation about why it's important to increase the number of women in computing.

During the 2012-13 academic year, Bluegrass CTC formed one of the first ACM-W chapters for community college students. Ms. Holly Thompson and Ms. Gina Perez Arambula were elected to serve as the Chapter's first student officers. Congratulations to you both!

According to the National Center for Women & Information Technology [12], a persistent misperception exists in higher education that community college students are less capable and do not have the skills to succeed in four-year CS/IT programs. The reality, backed by research and solid evidence, is that once community college students transfer to baccalaureate-degree granting institutions, "they graduate at nearly the same rate as those students who began at the four-year school, and do well enough to garner similar job opportunities and wages as the

'native' four-year students" [8]. Furthermore, many four-year-eligible students are choosing two-year colleges to help defray the high costs of a college education.

ACM-W applauds all the efforts of the faculty at Bluegrass CTC for helping to eradicate this all-too-common myth about community college students. I also extend a personal shout out to Cindy and Melanie for taking the initiative and committing the countless hours to launch the inaugural community college regional Women in Computing Celebration and to begin an ACM-W Student Chapter. Bluegrass CTC has laid the first foundation and is leading the way - other community colleges across the nation can learn from its trailblazing model. Please contact me if you are interested in forming a student chapter at your two-year college, organizing a WiC celebration in your region, or experiencing the magic of an established conference. I will be glad to forward your inquiry to the appropriate contact within ACM-W. **Ir**

References
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