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5-1-2012

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University Relations, "Female computer science majors go to MinneWIC Conference" (2012). *Campus News Archive*. 417.

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Contact

Melissa Weber, Director of Communications
Phone: 320-589-6414, weberm@morris.umn.edu

Jenna Ray, Editor/Writer
Phone: 320-589-6068, jrray@morris.umn.edu

Female computer science majors go to MinneWIC Conference

Summary: The MinneWIC conference is part of a nationwide effort to address the decline of women who choose careers in the field of computer science.

(May 1, 2012)-Morris computer science majors Fiona Biessener '13, St. Paul, Kathryn Grandbois, Moorhead, and Ashley Koch '13, Lakeville and assistant professor of computer science, Kristin Lamberty attended the Second Regional Celebration of Women in Computing in the Upper Midwest (MinneWIC) February 24-25, 2012. The regional meeting was held in Keller Hall at the Twin Cities campus.

The MinneWIC conference is part of a nationwide effort to address the decline of women who choose careers in the field of computer science. The event brings together students, faculty, and technology leaders from across Minnesota and neighboring states to discuss the role of women in today's computing and technology fields, share experiences and strategies for success, and explore issues common to women working in these fields. The goal of the event is to give young women the chance to explore opportunities in computing, to network with other women from academia, industry, and government, and to create friendships among women in the region who share the same interest and passion for computing.

Lamberty's students were able to meet female computer science majors from St. Olaf, St. Scholastica, and Gustavus Adolphus, and enjoyed a variety of panels. "I really enjoyed the panel called *Fun, free, and girl friendly! Computing outreach tools for girls of all ages*," said Koch, "It talked about all the different ways the women involved in the panel were working on getting more girls interested in computing before they get to college. It gave me some fun outreach ideas that we could possibly implement here (at Morris)."

"For me, the two most interesting presentations were the keynote presentation by Caitlin Kelleher, from Washington University in St. Louis, and the invited talk by Jacquelyn Crowhurst, the director of developer tools for Microsoft," says Lamberty.

The panels and presentations were meant to be enlightening for graduate and undergraduate students looking at careers in computing academia or industry, and to show female students examples of women who have succeeded in the field of computer science.

"It's hard to know what to expect going into any field for any person, but since there are so few women in computing, it's especially nice to have the opportunity to hear from women who have experience in the field. They can provide lots of guidance and mentoring," said Lamberty, "There is a lot of variety in the field, and only a small amount of that can be represented at a school of our size on a regular basis, so it's great to be able to have these opportunities from time to time."

The MinneWIC conference proved to be a fruitful experience for Lamberty's students, in terms of gaining more information on potential career choices, and in feeling connected to a larger community.

“(The conference) gave me a reason to talk to Professor Lamberty about my future, as well as meet upperclassmen and network, even just with people from my school, so it was a big deal,” said Grandbois, “I am really interested in the issues that face women in technology specifically, so going to the conference was important to me. It was nice to bond with other girls that are doing exactly what I’m doing and getting to know more women because there aren’t that many girls in computer science here (at Morris). I hope the conference gave all us a feeling that we are not alone in our ambitions.”

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