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# Strategically Recruiting Women into Your Undergraduate Information Systems Major

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## Strategically Recruiting Women into Your Undergraduate Information Systems Major

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### Abstract:

This tutorial will present research-based methods for successfully attracting women into an undergraduate computer information systems (CIS) major. Participants will be shown how to develop a comprehensive strategy for increasing the pipeline of high-achieving women in undergraduate computing programs using a “high yield in the short term” approach for recruiting. This approach encompasses strategies to help identify and evaluate a do-able and successful set of internal and external recruiting initiatives.

**Keywords:** Recruitment, Gender, Women, Diversity, Systemic Change

**Proposed session length:** 60-75 minutes

## I. INTRODUCTION

Active recruiting of women students works. As we witness tremendous growth in computing occupations’ size and influence over our lives, women continue to be underrepresented in these fields. Faculty have the opportunity to reverse this trend through both active recruitment and courses that engage and prepare women as well as men for computing careers. By reaching out to female students, and their influencers with messages tailored to appeal to them, faculty can attract more and better students to CIS majors. Many undergraduate computing departments seek to increase women’s representation among enrolled and graduating students. These departments seek gender parity to access strong students from a large applicant pool; contribute to the profession’s future viability and the improved innovation brought by diverse teams; improve the educational experience for all their students; and to fulfill their ethical commitment to diversity.

Most academic departments have outreach efforts to inform the public and potential students about computing. Most participate in a variety of events and produce materials to communicate with students, teachers, parents, and employers. Often, however, these recruiting efforts are selected in an opportunistic way rather than strategically. Often, little thought is given to the return on investment of this nontrivial use of scarce resources (money, time), the message provided to the particular audience, or to tracking the outcomes. Departments hoping to increase overall enrollments and proportion of women must act deliberately and strategically to get the greatest return on investment in the shortest time. We will overview and provide written resources for developing a set of recruiting initiatives, helping participants to specify several interrelated components for each. We will discuss how to:

- Identify and locate target audiences with aptitude and motivation – and those who influence them. The influencers of students are an excellent way to accomplish greater return on investment.
- Leverage and manage existing assets to determine how to take advantage of existing programs, better inform those who are already communicating on behalf of the department, and draw on the time and resources of others who can help.

- Align messaging with the present values, beliefs, expectations, or goals of each target audience. Some messages are likely to be needed for all audiences, while some audiences will need additional or less information.
- Reach audiences with media that are believable and have a high chance of being accessed.
- Track and report results to identify which efforts were worth the scarce resources.

## II. TARGET AUDIENCE

This tutorial is intended for faculty, department chairs, and academic advisors who want to increase the gender balance and diversity in computing.

## III. FORMAT

The facilitator(s) will describe the components of a comprehensive recruiting plan. Through a combination of brief lectures with slides and hands-on individual and group activities, participants will develop workable plans for identifying target audiences and influencers; developing contact strategies and persuasive messages; and including ongoing tracking of their results.

## IV. RESOURCES AND HANDOUTS

Participants will receive free, professionally produced materials from the National Center for Women and Information Technology (NCWIT). These resources include a workbook that contains examples, guidance, and templates for developing a strategic recruitment plan; practice sheets that summarize research on active recruiting; Top 10 resources; Programs-in-a-Box; Talking Points; statistics summaries; and more.

## V. BIOS

**Leisa D. Thompson** is the Director of Research and Consulting for the NCWIT Extension Services for Undergraduate Programs and conducts research on systemic reform that focuses on recruitment, retention, and advancement of underrepresented groups in undergraduate computing and engineering programs. Dr. Thompson has an undergraduate degree in Computer Science and over 15 years of corporate experience in computing and engineering. She received her Ph.D. in Educational Leadership from the University of Nevada, Las Vegas.

**Lecia J. Barker** is an NCWIT Senior Research Scientist, Associate Professor in the School of Information at the University of Texas at Austin, and a Principal Investigator of the NCWIT Extension Services for Undergraduate Programs. Dr. Barker conducts research and evaluation in two areas: 1) attracting, retaining, and advancing groups underrepresented in professional computing careers; these studies focus on social climate, identity/belonging, faculty adoption of alternative teaching and curricular practices, and sustainable organizational change; and 2) uses of IT in education; these studies focus on how situational factors influence use and usefulness of the technologies.