

BARRIERS, ROLE MODELS, AND DIVERSITY - WOMEN IN IT

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Abstract Despite the growing need for IT professionals all around Europe, women are still severely underrepresented in IT-related fields. According to Eurostat, female IT specialists constitute only 16.5% of the workforce in the EU28 countries. Gender imbalance, however, is conspicuous already in higher education: only 23% of students majoring in IT are women. The reasons why girls are reluctant to consider a career in IT are complex. Based on the analysis of recent literature review papers about young women's barriers, we can differentiate four basic obstacles that keep girls from IT: social, educational, labor market, and self-efficacy factors. In order to overcome obstacles such as gender stereotypes linking IT with masculinity, girls' low self-efficacy due to such stereotypes and consecutive computer anxiety, or non-inclusive IT instruction ignoring diversity, the necessary tools are the presence of role models, the promotion of diverse IT paths, and inclusive teaching environments. The present research aims to introduce a case study conducted within the settings of a non-degree, tertiary Computer Science program, with the usual scarcity of female students and a high dropout rate. As part of their program, students also need to attend an interdisciplinary course, in which they are exposed to an inclusive teaching environment, the presentations of role models, and diverse career paths. Before, during, and after the course, students were asked to reflect on the issues of barriers, diversity, and role models, which were analyzed in a quantitative and qualitative manner. As a follow up, female graduates of the program, already working as software developers, are surveyed about the same questions, in order to explore what women who do end up in IT careers share.

Keywords: gender, women, barriers, IT, IT education, role models

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