

# What Do IT Program Websites Reveal about Woman Friendliness?

## Summary of Study

As a recruitment device, a school's webpage is second only to a campus visit in its impact. Understanding the possible implications of this medium is important within the larger conversation on gender recruitment and equity. This research addresses several questions: At first glance, do websites give gender cues, whether intentional or not? Do applied fields differ in their online recruitment practices from more traditional Computer Science and Engineering departments? Using content analysis over 90 elements were recorded on 104 web pages, including accomplishments listed, quotes, navigation elements, word usage, linking behavior, photograph characteristics, and more.

## Results

Computer Science pages contain elements which indicate a sincere effort to reverse low enrollment statistics and projected an environment of inclusion. However, the underlying website structure indicates the possibility of a more male oriented culture.

- Higher numbers of and links to female specific organizations
- More photographs highlighting informal and interpersonal settings
- High percentage of females represented in group photographs relative to overall enrollment numbers
- More posting of diversity statements, as well as mentorship programs to make such efforts a reality.

Applied departments contain elements which better suit female information processing and culture preferences. However, fewer departments chose to include elements indicating gender equity as a high priority.

- More photographs of women in both individual portraits as well as the group pictures
- Page designs which better match female information processing strategies, with consistent layout throughout sites, more sitemaps, and a high use of search boxes
- More ways to contact people on the sites

## Take Home Findings

A comprehensive set of standards is beyond the scope of this study. However, some initial guidelines include:

- Consider the representation of females in website photographs. Also, candid photographs and images with people making eye contact provide a glimpse into the culture of the department.
- Departments should have diversity statements and post them on their sites.
- Link to female oriented organizations from departmental pages, indicating that such groups are supported by the department.
- Maintain a consistent layout on pages and include search boxes to lower cognitive load while information searching. This is especially helpful to females who engage in more comprehensive information processing strategies.
- Always include a way for a site visitor to have interpersonal contact with departmental representatives.