



## News & Media

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### **IU computing women seek to dispel geek mythology**

When members of the Women in Computing at Indiana University organization sought to increase the number of female students in computer science they soon discovered that many prospective students already ruled that out as a possibility.

Undaunted, WIC@IU, an IU School of Informatics-sponsored group, looked at ways they could reach out to regional middle and high school students and persuade them that IT-related studies and jobs were not the exclusive domains of men – and that those entering such fields were not just pocket-protector wearing geeks.

Their solution was *Just Be*, an interactive program largely developed by graduate students Katie Siek and Amanda Stephano. The program was inspired by the *Roadshow*, created at Carnegie Mellon University by their women in computing to promote that academic discipline.

*Just Be* takes IU students, faculty and researchers into the schools to talk about what motivated them to study computing or informatics, and to tell young female students about IU's groundbreaking IT research. They also engage students with an interactive quiz designed to break down stereotypes associated with computing.

"When we first meet with the kids, we ask them to close their eyes and describe what they see when they imagine a computer professional at work," says Siek, a computer science doctoral student. "They usually conjure up images of a male, socially-challenged nerd working in isolation at a computer. We show them pictures of real computer people at work, at play, and that they can just be themselves and still computing professionals."

*Just Be* is entirely student run and organized, and its volunteers have presented at various schools throughout the Midwest, as well as local and national conferences. Earlier this year, in fact, Siek visited Purdue University to explain how *Just Be* works. This visit inspired Purdue to begin putting together a program that mirrors the IU model.

"The end goal of *Just Be* is to promote a positive image of computing to all youngsters, female and male, and the myriad opportunities awaiting them if they pursue IT professions," says Stephano, who is pursuing master's degrees in computer science and human-computer interaction design.

"And we want them to know they can begin that journey at Indiana University," adds Stephano.

*Just Be* members will share their experiences Saturday, April 8, at the Computing

Outreach in Indiana (COIN) Workshop on the IU Bloomington campus. The daylong event, geared largely for educators, will show how to start a K-12 program based on the *Just Be* model. The event is drawing participants from Indiana University-Purdue University Indianapolis, Ivy Tech Community College, Butler University and Rice University in Houston, Texas.

COIN gets under way at 10 a.m. in Lindley Hall room 102 with a demonstration of the high school version of the *Just Be* presentation, followed by breakout sessions and special presentations.

WIC@IU was launched in spring 2002. It has grown into a large organization since then with students, faculty members and staff from the School of Informatics, its Department of Computer Science and the School of Library and Information Science.

Siek and Stephano were co-authors of an article appearing in the April issue of *Learning & Leading with Technology* journal. The article addressed young women's misperceptions about technology careers. Other co-authors were graduate student Jacki Bauer, and IU computer science faculty members [Kay Connelly](#), [Suzanne Menzel](#) and [Beth Plale](#).

More information about WIC@IU and *Just Be* is available at [www.cs.indiana.edu/cgi-pub/wic/index.php](http://www.cs.indiana.edu/cgi-pub/wic/index.php).

#### **Indiana University School of Informatics**

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