An Evaluation of the 2003 Diversity in Information Technology Institute Workshop for Teachers and Counselors

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Abstract: To increase the involvement in information technology (IT) of traditionally under-represented groups (e.g., women, minorities, persons with disabilities, and people in traditionally non-technical fields), the Diversity in Information Technology Institute at the University of North Carolina at Charlotte sponsored a one-week summer workshop in 2003 for selected middle school teachers and counselors. Objectives of the workshop included enhancing participants' technology-related knowledge and skills, increasing their awareness of IT careers, demonstrating IT as a helping profession, dispelling the notion that IT is only for computer "geeks" and persons in other negatively stereotyped categories, and providing positive role models of people who have successfully combined an IT career with family and personal life. This presentation reviews the goals and activities of the workshop and evaluates the workshop's effectiveness.

The Diversity in Information Technology Institute (DITI) is an organized effort coordinated by the College of Information Technology at the University of North Carolina at Charlotte. The institute's goal is to increase the size and diversity of the Information Technology (IT) workforce across a wide range of disciplines by bringing together IT and educational researchers, K-12 educators, and industry and community leaders to address DITI initiatives. A fundamental objective of the institute is to increase IT participation by traditionally under-represented groups, such as women, minorities, and persons with disabilities, as well as to increase IT participation of highly talented persons in traditionally non-technical fields, such as education, music, art, law enforcement, nursing, and architecture.

The DITI vision is based on three beliefs. First, IT is transforming the way we live, work, and play. Educating the next generation of IT professionals in a broad range of disciplines to guide this transformation is crucial to our national health, security, and quality of life. Second, strength in IT promises to dramatically improve our lives within our diverse culture, but only if the creators of IT are representative of the diverse users of IT. Third, women and men of all races and with varied physical disabilities should share equally in the opportunity for economic prosperity and in the opportunity to impact social decisions afforded by lucrative, high-impact IT careers.

To support these goals and beliefs, the College of Information Technology, in conjunction with the College of Education at the University of North Carolina at Charlotte, sponsored a one-week summer workshop in 2003 for selected middle school teachers and counselors from across the state of North Carolina. Funded by generous grants from the AT&T Foundation, Z. Smith Reynolds Foundation, IBM Corporation, and Time Warner Cable, twenty teachers and twenty counselors improved their K-12 technology knowledge while simultaneously learning how to enhance diversity in the field of IT.

Objectives of the workshop included enhancing participants' technology-related knowledge and skills, increasing their awareness of the scope of exciting IT careers, demonstrating IT as a helping profession, dispelling the notion that IT is only for computer "geeks" and persons in other negatively stereotyped categories, and providing positive role models of people who have successfully combined an IT career with family and personal life. Interspersed with hands-on activities designed to improve the teachers' and counselors' familiarity with technology in the schools, several distinguished speakers addressed a range of diversity-oriented topics, such as teaching and counseling in a multi-cultural world, advising without bias, pathways to IT careers, and crossing the gender divide.
An objective evaluation by an outside observer of the 2003 DITI Workshop was accomplished in order to assess the workshop's effectiveness. That evaluation revealed many strengths and weaknesses. The purpose of this presentation at the 2004 Society for Information Technology and Teacher Education International Conference is to review the goals and activities of the workshop and to present an evaluation of the workshop's effectiveness. Institutions and organizations interested in conducting their own workshops will be exposed to useful information that will enhance the likelihood of implementing successful workshops devoted to this topic.