Girls who Code at UIC is hosted by the College of Engineering’s Women in Engineering Programs for two hours every Saturday throughout the school year in the Computer Science labs on campus.

CS Dept. increases diversity awareness with help of BRAID

The UIC Computer Science Department is looking to almost double the number of students it will send to the Annual Grace Hopper Celebration (GHC) taking place in Houston later this fall. This is due in part to additional funding provided by the BRAID (Building, Recruiting, And Inclusion for Diversity) program and the College of Engineering through Dean Pete Nelson. He was able to experience GHC this past October and see the impact it had on creating more diversity within Computer Science.

The number of students, faculty and staff will increase to over 60 participants, giving UIC Computer Science a large presence at the conference. Also new this year, the CS Dept. will be a Silver Level sponsor for the 2018 school term. This allows UIC CS a booth at the GHC career fair to showcase the graduate program and opportunities available within the department.

GHC is hosted by AnitaB.org which also started the BRAID program in which UIC has been a part of since its inception in 2014. The program aims to increase the percentage of women and underrepresented minority students in undergraduates computing majors. The overall goal is to improve diversity of computing talent at the professional level.

Each of the current 15 BRAID schools are required to address specific commitments:

- Modify introductory CS courses to make them more appealing and less intimidating to underrepresented students.
- Lead outreach programs for high school teachers and students to build a diverse pipeline of students.
- Build confidence and community among underrepresented students.
- Develop and/or promote joint majors in areas like CS and biology that are attractive to underrepresented students.

The CS Dept. has addressed these commitments by:

1) Introducing three sections of CS 111 with interest areas including Bio, Law and Multimedia.
2) Prof. Dale Reed as Dir. of Recruitment has collaborated with local high school teachers to help raise awareness of CS as a major in college.
3) CS Student Affairs, Prof. Joe Hummel and Prof. Reed have worked hard at investing resources into Women in Computer Science, Girls Who Code, Hour of Code and specifically targeting underrepresented populations in CS for Fall 2018 recruiting.
4) Developing and/or promote joint majors in areas like CS and biology (Bioinformatics) that are attractive to underrepresented students.

This large effort has been supported and led by CS Dept. Head Robert Sloan who has been focused on promoting diversity within the CS Dept.

“The reason we were awarded this opportunity to be a part of BRAID is because of Prof. Sloan,” said Program Coordinator for CS Student Affairs, Elena Lathos. “His leadership has driven us this far and his commitment to supporting women and underrepresented groups in CS has been relentless and received well.”

As a result, BRAID schools are seeing an increase in the percentage of women and underrepresented minorities enrolled in their undergraduate computing courses. This is a trend that the UIC CS Dept. will continue to nurture as the department expands into the future.