Advancing Women Careers by Improving Communication Skills at the Undergraduate Level

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Computer Science is primarily a male dominated field and in order for women to survive, it is extremely important that females at an undergraduate level sharpen their communication skills before entering the workforce. Because employers' expectations for graduating seniors include good communication skills, interpersonal skills, and the ability to produce in a teamwork environment[4], educators must take responsibility to improve and nurture these skills. In addition, since men and women have different ways of communicating[1], it is important that educators know these differences and know how to use them to improve working relationships between the sexes. Recruiters and business managers will unconditionally tell the public that communications skills are the single most important element for success. Many college seniors lose job offers because of their inability to write and speak at the expected level while other face a slow career development due to their inability to communicate adequately[5]. Almost without exception, communication skills, not technical skills, will prove to be the single biggest factor in a student's career success or failure[5].

This paper discusses communication information and sample assignments based on this information. It is the hope that these assignments may help faculty members to improve communication skills for women and at the same time make men aware of the differences in the hopes of improving the retention rate of women. Of course, these assignments not only help women, but in addition men's communication skills are improved and at the same time women learn about how men communicate. If men and women can learn early on that they communicate differently, this may encourage women to continue in the computer science curriculum. In addition, it may make both parties aware that they need to understand how they communicate first before excluded the other. Starting this process while they are in training (school) should decrease the miscommunication between the sexes and at the same time encourage more women to join the computer science field of study.

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[4] Gray, Gordon, "Job Choices" *CEI Newsletter*, spring 1995.
[5] Whitten, J and Bentley, L. *System Analysis and Design Methods.* Boston: McGraw Hill, 1998. 23.