WHERE are ALL the Women in Tech?  

By Dori Farah (Oklahoma City)

Did you know that early car airbags failed to protect women – and in fact, sometimes killed them – because they were not designed with the female anatomy in mind? Or that initial voice recognition software could not recognize women’s voices because it was created and tested only by men? Women comprise 18 percent of U.S. undergraduate computer and information science graduates and fill just 26 percent of computing occupations. Of that 26 percent, black women comprise three percent and Latinas only one percent. Doesn’t it make you wonder how the world would change if women were not so absent from technical innovation? What problems would we solve that aren’t even being addressed – let alone thought about – today?

With an expected 1.2 million computing-related jobs to fill by 2022, inspiring and supporting the largely untapped talent pool of future female technologists is a major domestic issue. As women building strong girls, every Gamma Phi Beta should be equipped with talking points and strategies to help close this gender gap.

Why the focus on the ‘T’ in science, technology, engineering and math (STEM)?

• Women’s participation in STEM is low, but increasing across many disciplines; however, women’s participation in computer science has been on the decline since the late-1990s. Meanwhile, computing professions are predicted to grow at a faster rate than the science, engineering and mathematics average.

Why does this matter?

• Increasing representation is not a “women’s issue.” Everyone stands to benefit from expanding gender norms and including diverse perspectives in the creation of technology.
• This is a business issue. The bottom line thrives when underrepresented groups occupy innovative roles. When racial and gender diversity increases, sales, customers and market share follow.
• This is an equity issue. Computing jobs are among the fastest-growing and highest-paying, yet few women are enjoying these benefits. This gap exacerbates social inequalities and barriers to girls’ future life opportunities.

How can I help?

• Build awareness: Partner with your university’s computer science department to host an event to build awareness on campus. For example, your chapter can host a screening of “CODE: Debugging the Gender Gap,” followed by an intro to coding workshop. Visit CodeDoc.co to get started.
• Be an activist: Get engaged in your community and advocate for a computer science curriculum in your local K-12 schools. Go to CSEdWeek.org/Help to learn how you can make an impact.
• Encourage young girls: Don’t mistake experience for ability. Expose girls to computing experiences (the earlier, the better) and help them see how it ties to their other interests. The National Center for Women & Information Technology (NCWIT) provides talking points at NCWIT.org/YoungWomen.
Women in Information Technology: By the Numbers

57 percent of professional occupations in the U.S. workforce were held by women in 2014, but only 26 percent of professional computing occupations were held by women.

5 percent of the computing workforce was Asian women in 2014.

3 percent of the computing workforce was African-American women in 2014.

1 percent of the computing workforce was Hispanic women in 2014.

6 percent of corporate chief information officer (CIO) positions were held by women in 2014.

1.2 million U.S. computing-related job openings expected by 2022.

56 percent of Advanced Placement (AP) test-takers in 2014 were female but women only represented 20 percent of AP Computer Science test-takers.

57 percent of 2013 bachelor’s degree recipients were women. However, women only made up 18 percent of Computer and Information Sciences bachelor’s degree recipients.

*Source: National Center for Women and Information Technology, “By the Numbers.”