



## Grace Hopper Celebration of Women in Computing - Birds of a Feather Proposal

### **Birds of a Feather – Mentoring Makes MAGIC for Middle & High School Girls**

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#### **1. BOF Description**

The number of girls entering the computing and high tech arena is continuing to drop, with women comprising only about 28% of the technology workforce today. Furthermore, the number of girls dropping out from computing/technology, in college, is significant. This is a serious issue, and recognized as such by many. It is also universally accepted that this shortage of women in technology is not due to a lack of talent, but due to a plethora of discouraging factors that exist in our society today. While there are many grassroots efforts to address this problem, both as ongoing activities as well as one-time seminars and conferences, information about this strong support is not widely available. Additionally, this support is limited to certain areas in the country and/or certain segments of the population. What is needed is a mentorship program throughout the country, available to everyone. We believe that we need to start with middle school girls, and foster in them a positive attitude towards computing, since the high school level might be too late.

This mentorship program would be run by women with careers in technology, for middle and high school girls. Girls would use it for getting advice, asking questions, and for getting a mentor (either short- or long-term). The mentoring women would use it to exchange notes among themselves, and to offer themselves as mentors. Mentorship would be on both technical and personal subjects, including work-life balance, role of girls in our society and how that is changing, how to avoid the technology stereotype, etc. For purposes of this proposal, and the BOF itself (if accepted), let's refer to this program as MAGIC (MoreActiveGirlsInComputing).

It is to be noted that there are many mentoring organizations in place today, including MentorNet, International Telementor Program (ITP), and KidZone, to mention a few. However, none of these focus specifically on providing mentorship to middle and high school girls on a nation-wide basis, as MAGIC proposes to do. We strongly believe that a mentorship program dedicated to these girls is necessary to address the problem of decreasing participation of women in the technology workforce today.

Establishing a program such as MAGIC can be a challenging task, but if successfully executed, has the potential for significant impact on women in particular, and our society in general. Not to mention that something like it is absolutely necessary at this point in time. What is needed for setting such a program successfully is an exchange of ideas and proposals from as many segments of the population as possible. A Birds-of-a-feather (BOF) session at the Grace Hopper Conference (GHC) on Women in Computing, provides an ideal forum for jumpstarting this discussion and such a program.

A BOF discussion on this topic could focus on many aspects of such a program. We propose the following topics as the main ones that we start the BOF with: challenges, implementation details, and resources to leverage. For each topic, we will present ideas and invite discussion on the same, as well as proposal of new ideas on that topic.

Challenges of setting up MAGIC include:

- (1)How do we start something like this?
- (2)How do we sustain it?
- (3)How do we manage its scope?
- (4)How do we publicize it, so this resource is available to the target audience?
- (5)Who is going to manage it? This is going to be a volunteer body, it will probably work best if coordination/management is distributed. However, ownership is a must, else there is risk of mismanagement/not meeting expectations. This needs to start with a small group of volunteers (core mentors).
- (6)What can businesses/corporations do to encourage girls? The supply is dropping, but can a higher demand drive a higher supply?

The implementation details of setting up MAGIC include:

- (1)Cost (both financial and process) need to be kept low.
- (2)Mentors make phone calls, utilize emails as much as possible, use chat facilities.
- (3)Mentorship process should be structured
  - Periodic meetings (phone, face to face meetings, emails, chats) need to be established



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- Mentee sets the agenda, sends it out beforehand
- (4) Use middle/high school types of technologies (ex. MySpace)
- (5) There needs to be introductory web-based training for both mentor and mentee.
- (6) Specify concrete project/project goals, use mentee's interests to formulate this.
- (7) Present mentorship findings/work at women conferences such as GHC.
- (8) Establish framework for matching mentor/mentee relationship.
- (9) The network should have backups, in case the mentor becomes unavailable for some reason. We can't allow "dropouts".
- (10) Work with local schools to give "cool" presentations/demos.
- (11) Advertise in creative ways, interview/recruit other girls.
- (12) Create a wiki on mentee's MySpace page and adding comments as a means of communication.

Finally, resources to leverage include:

- (1) KidZone - gURL Tech : partner with them?
- (2) MentorNet - leverage their framework?

We believe that mentoring young girls and motivating them to go into computing is a topic dear to the heart of most technical women. Not only is a discussion on setting up a program like MAGIC of critical significance at this time, it is also a subject that will provide a lively discussion. Finally, such a BOF would provide the opportunity needed to kick off such a worthy program!

### 2. BOF Expected Audience

We expect that this BOF session will attract all GHC participants; girls/women of all ages as well as men who might be attending. Anybody who believes that more girls should go into computing, and is interested in making that happen, will want to participate in this discussion, and hopefully in this endeavor. Of special interest will be any middle and high school girls who might be attending GHC. Their participation and perspective will ensure a well rounded discussion during the BOF.

### 3. BOF Session Leader Qualifications

Five senior women at Sun have come together to make this proposal. They are: Ira Pramanick, Robin Wilensky, Meenakshi Kaul-Basu, Sue Young and Foz Saeed. All five women have been very active in mentoring younger Sun employees, both men and women. Additionally, they have actively participated in external mentorship activities.

Dr. Ira Pramanick is an architect in the Solaris Cluster group at Sun, and has been at Sun for 8 years. She was invited in March 2007 to be the keynote speaker at the Technology Powered by Women conference in Kansas City, which was held for middle and high school girls and their parents. Ira has a B.Tech. in Electrical Engineering from the Indian Institute of Technology and a Ph.D. in Electrical and Computer Engineering from the University of Iowa.

Robin Wilensky is an engagement architect covering the Insurance vertical market, and has also been with Sun for 8 years. She participated in the UN Youth Summit Conference in 2006 for young delegates from each UN country, and presented to a group of over 100 high school seniors from Rutgers' "Governor's School" summer program. She has also served as a Big Sister in her community's Big Brother Big Sister chapter for over 2 years. Robin has a B.S. in Marketing and Business Administration and an M.B.A. in Management Information Systems.

Meenakshi Kaul-Basu is a senior engineering manager in the Solaris Cluster group at Sun, and has been at Sun for 8 years. She has been a mentor in Sun's mentoring program, and is also a marathon runner. Meenakshi has a B.S. in Physics from the Indian Institute of Technology and an M.E. in Electrical Communication Engineering from Indian Institute of Science.

Sue Young is a senior hardware program manager at Sun after transitioning from various Sun software for 20 years. She has been a mentor and mentee within Sun and is an avid cyclist. She is currently active with the non-profit Girls for a Change initiative, whose mission is to empower middle and high school girls for social change. Sue has a B.S. in Agricultural/Managerial Economics from the University of California, Davis.

Foz Saeed is the manager of infrastructure planning in the SPARC platform group at Sun, and she is responsible for program management of all fault management development in systems. She has been with Sun for 3 years. Foz has an MBA from Wharton and an MS from the Univ. of Strathclyde.