

**Report on the “Webbing Cyberfeminism” research cluster
Submitted by Kris Blair (cluster facilitator)**

Cluster continuation and membership:

This academic year, the “Webbing Cyberfeminism” cluster entered its second year as a research cluster at ICS. The cluster followed through on events they had planned during the previous academic year and continued to do research and make plans for the future.

The following faculty and graduate students participated regularly in the cluster this academic year:

Jen Almjeld, Ph. D. student, English
Julie Barnes, Professor, Computer Science, Associate Dean A&S
Kris Blair, Professor, English
Erin Dietel-McLaughlin, Ph.D. student, English
Dena Eber, Associate Professor, School of Art
Meredith Graupner, Ph.D. student, English
Jen Sader, Ph.D. student, Higher Education and Student Affairs

“The Digital Mirror”: A Cyber Camp for Girls:

Perhaps the biggest event facilitated and hosted by the “Webbing Cyberfeminism” cluster during the 2007-08 academic year was “The Digital Mirror.”

From Aug. 8-11, BGSU hosted “The Digital Mirror,” a computer camp for girls in grades 6-8. The four-day camp was intended to pique girls’ interest in digital literacy at a critical age developmentally, and allow them to explore the ways they define themselves within technological environments.

Co-sponsored by the Department of English and supported by BGSU’s Institute for the Study of Culture and Society, COSI Toledo, and the American Association of University Women, the camp was a huge success with twenty girls from Northwest Ohio gathering for four days of fun and learning on Bowling Green’s campus.

One important objective was to attract a range of girls from varying cultural backgrounds and school systems; as a result, participants included junior high girls from Toledo, Maumee, Otsego, North Baltimore, and Bowling Green schools.

The twenty participants stayed in campus residence halls to enhance the intensive mentoring and training environment. Thus, one goal of the camp was to create a safe haven for girls to experiment with the newest literacy technologies and to create a digital presence that they could continue to sustain beyond the camp itself.

Participants in “The Digital Mirror” engaged with the following resources and activities:

- a blend of hands-on computer lab work in web writing and design, digital imaging, and video and audio editing
- mentoring by University women involved in careers in technology across campus
- access to the resources of COSI Toledo
- learning and experimenting with a variety of software including Adobe Dreamweaver and Photoshop, Apple iMovie, and GarageBand
- developing personal webpages and blogs and filming and editing movies to embed on their websites
- using computer tools and programs to create their own songs, scan pictures of family and friends, and link to their favorite sites on the Internet, allowing for a sense of creativity and individuality
- a discussion of cyber safety and privacy
- participating in a studio review showcasing their digital portfolios, complete with homepage, personal weblog, and a video clip about the role of technology in their lives, to one another and visitors
- an exploration of how technological literacy is a vital part of their academic and professional careers

In addition to Kristine Blair, Chair of the English Department and a specialist in educational technology and gender equity, other English Department participants include English Rhetoric and Writing doctoral students Jen Almjeld, Erin Dietel-McLaughlin, and Meredith Graupner, and Creative Writing MFA alumna Julie Platt.

The camp was also co-sponsored by a number of other campus units, including the Graduate College, the Office of the Executive Vice President, the School of Art, and the Student Technology Center. Additional supply donations came from Atomic Learning, Verizon, the University of Findlay's Teaching, Learning and Technology Center, and the BGSU University Bookstore.

Ultimately, the outcome of the camp was to help adolescent girls feel more confident about their ability to use technology in educational contexts, and that rather than being seen as something “boys do better,” technology is indeed a girls’ activity as well.

Given the success of the camp and the enthusiasm of both the participants and their parents, it’s no surprise a number of the girls attending this year would like to attend next year.

After “The Digital Mirror” and Beyond: Future Plans:

Since “The Digital Mirror,” Professor Blair and English PhD students Meredith Graupner, Erin Dietel-McLaughlin, and Jen Almjeld have presented about the camp at the BGSU Research Conference, the Battleground States Conference, the Conference on College Composition and Communication, and the Rhetoric Society of America.

The cluster has also written a community action grant for external funding from the national American Association of University Women (AAUW).

An article about the camp appeared in *Dimensions: College of Arts & Sciences* magazine. Since the article’s publication, the cluster has had a number of individuals express interest in having their daughters participate in next year’s camp.

The cluster is currently at work on plans for the next “Digital Mirror” camp. The cluster has met once a month during the Spring 2008 semester for planning and research purposes. As the cluster coordinator and camp director, Professor Blair often makes presentations about the camp for funding purposes, including to the AAUW, and attends training sessions related to camp director duties, including a Residence Hall orientation and an upcoming Risk Management Training session.