

Data Incomplete: Canadian Women in Computer Science*

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Summary Computer science was an open program to both women and men at Canadian universities. However, women's enrolment was never as high as men's. Enrollment dropped significantly in the 1980's for both sexes, yet was notable for women since their numbers were already low. Enrollment has steadily increased, yet has never been on par. This research aims to discover the historical reasons for low female enrolment at Canadian universities. Through quantitative research methods and qualitative interviews, this study will seek to provide a historical narrative of the history of computer science programs at Canadian universities.

1. Relevance

Current computer science programs are seeking to increase female enrolment in computer science. With a historical approach, we aim to find the deep-rooted reasons for a lack of women in this field in the hope of providing solutions to current issues within computer science programs at Canadian universities.

2. Aims & Objectives

Computer programming was a university program largely open to women in the early years, but enrolment has never been on par with men's. This research aims to discover the reasons this has come to be using archival documents and interviews with those working in computer science.

3. Methods

Archival sources were used to find out the history of the department. Interviews with pioneers and current men and women working in computer science provide a qualitative element to the research. Lastly, Qualitative research using statistics has provided a look at the enrolment statistics. This research will use a feminist lens to look at the founding and continuation of computer science at Canadian universities.

4. Results

There have been four general assumptions as to the problem with low female enrolment. 1) Masculinization of computing 2) Lack of female mentors 3) Encouragement of boys and not girls in computer science 4) Men are tech savvy and women are not. Based on the current research, one reason has been added based on the current findings: 5) Enrollment was capped by universities requiring high scores and experience with computers before applying, eliminating women before they could enter.

5. Conclusions

This is a foundational study which focuses on Canadian computer science and the women who have contributed to building the program at university. There has been no other known study that considers the social aspect of the history of Canadian computer science, especially focusing on women's involvement. The drop in enrolment is a key point, but it will provide current women with information on the pioneers in the computer science field, promoting mentors for women who seek to study in a field traditionally dominated by men.

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