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## CompuGirls founder named Champion of Change by the White House

CompuGirls founder Kimberly A. Scott will be named a STEM Access Champion of Change at the White House during an event on Feb. 26 to honor people who are working to support and accelerate STEM opportunities for African American students, schools and communities.

Scott, Women and Gender Studies associate professor in the School of Social Transformation at Arizona State University, founded and leads CompuGirls. The program combines advanced computational skills learning with key areas of social justice, creating skills and interest among adolescent girls in technology and computer science.

Girls use technology as a tool through the program to address complex issues such as child abuse, indigenous language and culture loss, and gentrification. Starting as eighth graders, girls who participate are from underserved school districts and are predominantly Hispanic, African American and Native American.



"Being named a STEM Access Champion of Change is not only a distinct honor, but also an acknowledgement of the need to teach girls technological skills in an engaging and transformative way," Scott said. "Bringing girls from underserved communities into the digital world ultimately will add intellectual diversity and talent to our country's workforce."

The Champions of Change program began in 2011 when President Barack Obama called for recognition of citizens doing extraordinary things at a local level. Champion of Change honorees are chosen through a rigorous nomination and selection process.

Scott saw the need for a program to teach girls advanced technological skills in 2007 when she started CompuGirls and only 10 percent of middle-school girls rated the computer science profession as a "very good" choice for them, according to the National Science Foundation. A new analysis of test-taking data recently reported in Education Week found that no female, African American, or Hispanic students took the Advanced Placement exam in computer science in Mississippi and Montana. Overall, of the 30,000 students who took the exam last year, less than 20 percent of those students were female.

A 2012 study by the National Center for Women and Information Technology reported that African American and Hispanic women represent only 3 percent and 1 percent of the United States computing workforce. Native American women majoring in computer and information sciences represent less than 1 percent.

Part of the issue is that girls see programming or other technology careers as culturally irrelevant, not as a tool to reach their goals, Scott said. When they are engaged in social justice issues that are important to them, girls learn the technology as a means to build their projects.

By providing fun programs where participants learn the latest technologies in digital media, game development and virtual worlds, girls learn skills such as digital media production with photo editing software, documentary filmmaking, game design and simulations with Scratch and virtual world creation with open-sim technology.

Self-esteem is boosted through the program, as Mitzi Vilchis discovered when she overcame a fear of making public presentations through the program.

"The culture in CompuGirls is really positive," Vilchis said. "It was definitely challenging, but we all felt really empowered about our topics."

CompuGirls allowed her to address domestic violence and taught her technological skills that gave her confidence to help others when they have a problem with computers, something she never would have done before. Currently a freshman at ASU, Vilchis is working toward a degree in secondary education and English.

Scott originally developed CompuGirls with support from the Arizona Community Foundation. Recently, the National Science Foundation awarded multiple large grants to bring the program to girls in school districts in the Phoenix-metro area, including at the Gila River Boys & Girls Club in Sacaton and Komatke, Ariz., part of the Gila River Indian Community. The program has since expanded to Colorado.

Scott is also co-leader of STEM For All with Kevin Clark of George Mason University that brings together a diverse group of researchers, practitioners, funding organizations and policy analysts to work on developing a forum where an interdisciplinary team shares knowledge and devises agendas and action items that lead to broadening understanding and pragmatic solutions for traditionally underserved students to enter and persist in STEM fields.

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