DIMACS Highlight: Douglass-DIMACS Computing Corps

[November, 2013] The Douglass-DIMACS Computing Corps (DDCC) began its second year fueled by experience from last year and a new grant from AT&T Corporation to support and enhance ongoing activities.

A key goal of DDCC is to help close the gender gap that exists in computer science and related fields. Through this program, we hope to recruit and retain more women into computer science, computer engineering, and other computing-related majors at Rutgers and to inspire middle-school students in the local community to learn more about computing. DDCC is a partnership of DIMACS, the Douglass Project for Rutgers Women in Math, Science, and Engineering, and the Piscataway public schools.

DDCC focuses on helping women succeed in computing while providing them with the opportunity to give back to the community through leadership and mentoring. Throughout the year, undergraduate participants work with faculty and graduate students to design fun and interactive group activities to later use with middle school students to excite them about computing.

DDCC follows a multi-layered mentorship and leadership model, with faculty and graduate students acting as mentors for the undergraduate students, who in turn lead the middle school students to discover the excitement of computing. This structure provides role models to female students at several different academic levels while simultaneously building communities of like-minded students within and across levels.

DIMACS Director Rebecca Wright is faculty advisor to DDCC, and she sees DDCC as playing a role in changing perceptions through information and exposure. She says, “Middle school students often think people either have a brain for computing or they don’t. As a result, many students think they either have little interest in or little aptitude for computing, but we know that students can develop their skills in computing through practice. In many cases, if these students were to better understand what computing is and how varied its potential applications are, and if they were to see role models who are compelling to them, they may discover that they can develop both interest and aptitude. Through their outreach activities, DDCC undergraduates create a mechanism to interest the participating middle school students in computing, and they serve as real-world role models of students who are on a path to successful computing careers.”
DDCC aims to provide a supportive experience in computing to its undergraduate members so that they will choose and then thrive in a computing-related major, while also inspiring middle school students to remain open to pursuing related studies in college. DDCC is carried out as part of Rutgers participation in the STARS Computing Corps, a non-profit organization dedicated to building a larger and more diverse computing workforce. Members of the DDCC participated for the first time in the STARS Celebration, a yearly gathering of Corps from institutions across the country. Below is the poster presented by DDCC participants.

**DDCC poster presented at the 2013 STARS Celebration**

**Related links:**
- DIMACS: dimacs.rutgers.edu/
- DDCC: dimacs.rutgers.edu/DDCC/
- STARS Computing Corps: www.starscomputingcorps.org/