Reference Syllabi

Association for Information Systems (AIS)

Gender and the Global Information Technology Sector
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Recommended Citation


Background

The growing trend toward outsourcing, off shoring, and dispersion of work across national boundaries means that students entering the workforce in the twenty-first century must be prepared to deal with a global client base and global colleagues. Part of this preparation includes understanding the gender diversity of colleagues, clients and users with whom people will be working -- both virtually and face-to-face -- to develop, deploy and use information technology solutions. As such, part of one’s preparation for a career as an information technology (IT) professional needs to include an understanding of gender as it relates to the information technology field.

Understanding the gender and cultural diversity of both colleagues and users has ramifications for the way in which work is accomplished, user requirements for technology are understood, and interaction with computer-based tools is accomplished. However, to varying degrees around the world, women and gender minorities are underrepresented in the information technology field. They are underrepresented both in the information technology workforce and in the conceptualization of the IT user. Similarly, a dominant model of masculinity is associated with technology development, deployment and use. For these reasons, it is necessary for those working in the IT field to have an understanding of gender issues in order to have a complete understanding of users, and to work productively with colleagues.

Purposes and Objectives

This course integrates the field of gender studies with information technology (IT) studies. It provides an overview, analysis and critique of current issues related to gender and IT. It also introduces and critiques theories that are used to better understand and analyze the issues. In the process of doing so, this course shows how different theories affect the ways in which gender issues are understood and addressed in the information technology field. At the end of the course students will have a basic understanding of gender theories that are employed in the information technology field, and how socio-cultural factors of a country affect the role of women and men in it. A combination of learning approaches are used in this course, including: lectures, guest presentations, case studies, scenario analysis, independent research and personal reflection.

Upon successful completion of this course, students will understand:
- The difference between biological sex and gender
- The rationale for gender diversity in the information technology sector
• The dimensions of the gender imbalance in the information technology sector
• The ways in which the IT field is influenced by gender stereotypes about masculinity and femininity
• Gender theories that are used to explain the gender imbalance in the IT field
• Issues affecting the recruitment of women and gender minorities into the IT field
• Issues affecting the retention of women and gender minorities in the IT field
• Educational and workplace interventions being implemented to address the under representation of women and gender minorities in the IT sector
• The influence of a country’s socio-cultural factors on the recruitment and retention of women and gender minorities in the IT sector

Structure

UNIT I. GENDER AND TECHNOLOGY

Overview

This unit introduces the basic concepts, themes and theories related to contemporary research and writing about gender and information technology. These include an overview of the concepts of gender, gender identity and gender minorities. Two perspectives on gender and IT are introduced: gender as it relates to IT users, and gender as it relates to IT professionals. An overview of theories used to explain the gender imbalance in the IT field is provided.

Learning Outcomes

After the unit students are able to
- Understand the rationale for diversity and inclusion within the IT field
- Recognize how the conceptualization of the user by IT designers and developers can include gender stereotypes or biases
- Understand where information technology products are gender imbalanced in their consumer targeting
- Understand the common reasons given for the gender imbalance in the IT profession
- Understand masculine and feminine stereotypes associated with technology, and the impacts on both men and women
- Understand the ways that feminist thinkers explain the technology gender gap
- Understand three gender theories that are used to explain the gender imbalance in the IT field: gender essentialism, social shaping of gender and IT, individual differences theory of gender and IT

Material
- Trauth, E.M. 2012. “Are There Enough Seats for Women at the IT Table?” *ACM Inroads* 3,4, 49-54.
UNIT II. GENDER AND INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY ISSUES

Overview

This unit considers some of the key issues related to the gender imbalance in the information technology field. These are: technical self-efficacy, gender and IT identity, IT education, role models, and mentors. Following this is a consideration of interventions that can be employed in both academia and in the workplace to increase the gender diversity in both recruitment into and retention within the IT field.

Learning Outcomes

After the unit students are able to
- Recognize both overt and subtle gender barriers to entering the information technology field
- Understand how one’s individual characteristics (e.g. personality, interests) can be used to resist internalizing externally imposed barriers to inclusion in the IT field
- Understand the influence of gender on technical self-efficacy
- Understand how gender identity and gender roles affect career decisions about the IT field
- Understand the impact of role models, mentors and peer support on a student’s academic career
- Recognize various forms of gender discrimination in the workplace
- Recognize both conscious and unconscious forms of gender bias
- Understand the influence of work-life balance on IT career decisions
- Recognize educational interventions that address the gender imbalance in the IT field
- Recognize workplace interventions that address the gender imbalance in the IT field

Material

UNIT III. GENDER, INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY, AND GLOBALIZATION

Overview

This unit considers the gender and IT imbalance in a global context. Students develop a better appreciation of gender in other countries than their own by linking gender norms and values of a country to its policies, culture and societal infrastructure. This part of this course focuses on gender and IT in other countries than one’s own in order to reinforce concepts about socio-cultural influences on gender and IT.
Learning Outcomes

After the unit students are able to
- Recognize the influence of gender cultural norms and values on recruitment into the information technology sector
- Understand the ways in which cultural norms and values about gender can influence the retention of women and gender minorities in the information technology sector
- Understand the ways in which a country's public policies, economy and societal infrastructure can influence the recruitment and retention of women in the information technology sector

Material

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