

ONR encouraging women to pursue STEM careers

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(PhysOrg.com) -- While an Aug. 3 government study shows women still lag behind men in high-tech educations and careers, the Office of Naval Research (ONR) has been working to narrow that gap within the Department of the Navy.

ONR is coordinating the Navy's response to emphasize and encourage K-12 students to pursue education and careers in science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM). The science and technology organization works closely with nonprofits, academia and industry developing STEM programs, many with an emphasis on girls.

ONR is not just focusing on young women, said Dr. Michael Kassner, ONR's director of research. His office oversees the STEM effort. There is also a need to provide STEM outreach to underserved youths.

"We're aware of the conclusions of the report and are proactively developing solutions," Kassner said.

The "Women in STEM: A [Gender Gap](#) to Innovation," released by the Commerce Department this week, concluded that women continue to be "vastly underrepresented in STEM jobs among STEM degree holders despite making up nearly half of the U.S. workforce and half of the college-educated workforce."

Although the percentage of men in the workforce outnumbered women 52 to 48 percent, in STEM related fields, a three-fold difference exists,

with men occupying 76 percent of the jobs, according to the study.

"The findings of this report provide evidence of a need to encourage and support women in STEM," the Commerce Department concluded.

ONR is making special efforts, for example, to raise the visibility of its Young Investigator Program among women, and partnering with academia and educational nonprofits to develop specialized K-12 programs aimed at school-age girls.

Some of ONR's partnership efforts to support the Navy's diversity and STEM outreach to K-12 girls include:

- The Iridescent Technovation Challenge promotes [women](#) in computer science and technology by developing entrepreneurial skills and confidence through the development of smartphone applications, or apps. National winners work with Google to professionally develop and distribute their apps via Google's Android Market.
- Girls Day Out, sponsored by the Space and Naval Warfare Systems Center Pacific, provides free keynote speakers, campus/lab tours and interactive activities to promote STEM among middle-school girls and their parents.
- Expanding Your Horizons, scheduled to begin in October, nurtures middle- and high-school girls' interests in STEM-related courses and career pursuits through its mentor network and hands-on activities.
- Crime Scene Investigation Summer Camp, in partnership with Southern Methodist University, exposes middle-schools girls to science applications in simulated crime-scene analysis as well as hear from experts in the field.

"These programs geared toward girls didn't exist for the most part last year," Kassner said. "They are a result of ONR's active support of Navy diversity and an awareness of gender disparity in [STEM](#)."

Provided by Office of Naval Research

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