

## **Transition; females and computing – a double disadvantage.**

Is transition from secondary school to university is more difficult for students entering a degree where they are a minority, in this case females entering computing degrees where their gender can be less than 10% of the first year intake?

### **The Approach**

First year female undergraduates in computing degree courses at an Australian University made comments in response to questions about their perceptions on entering a non-traditional area, apparent differences in male and female lecturing styles, their experiences in computing laboratories during tutorials and free time, as well as what they perceived could enhance their transition from secondary to tertiary education. Comments were made in focus group discussions. All students were enrolled in a computing degree course, or were studying a computing major within a science, engineering or mathematics course. The participants were in the age bracket of 18 to 22 years at a multi-campus university. The focus group meetings were held in second semester. There were six focus group meetings in total, held on four campuses, involving nineteen students in total.

### **The substance**

Females are underrepresented in computing degree courses. All first year students have to deal with the transition from secondary school to university with regards to changes in environment, learning and teaching styles and making new friendship groupings. Females in computing courses also have to deal with gender related transition issues because they are a minority group in a non-traditional field. They perceive differences in teaching style of tutors and lecturers and the assumed knowledge base of students. They are also not comfortable in the laboratories because often the males are dominant and rowdy. They are often unprepared for this environment and this makes their transition to tertiary learning even more difficult.

### **Conclusions**

Transition is more difficult for females in this discipline. There are specific areas of concern that lecturers, tutors and transition program managers need to be aware of. An adoption of a transition or mentoring program that addresses these areas of concern would ensure that females entering computing courses are not doubly disadvantaged..