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Computer Science Recruitment in the 21st Century: Improving the Image of Computer Science with 4th-7th Graders, Especially Females

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Joint project with Kristen Loesch

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The goal of this project is to create a tool to aid in reversing the alarming trend of decreasing interest in Computer Science (CS) among American students, particularly females. The current generation of American female students tends to be attracted to fields with clear social relevancy. Middle school is a crucial time when students form their opinions about math and science; this is also the time when they begin picking elective classes and, in the case of female students, all too often not picking the math and science classes that would prepare them for a Computer Science career. Our tool will be software aimed at middle school students, with emphasis on female appeal, showcasing the social relevancy of CS through a series of highly visual games and puzzles, illustrating the careers of CS alumni. They will be connected in a manner inspired by "Where in the World is Carmen Sandiego?"

Laura is the daughter of Karen and Jeff Woodard of Rockton, Illinois. She is a senior at UMR majoring in computer science with a double minor in mathematics and psychology. Laura plans to graduate from UMR in May 2007. Laura is an officer in the Association for Computing Machinery Special Interest Group: Security. She assists with activities at the local middle school and high school such as Expanding Your Horizons and the Science Olympiad, and participates in a law enforcement internship program. In addition, Laura enjoys reading, cooking, and watching movies.