

WISE offers a safe haven for female science students

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WISE is a living-learning community for female freshman on campus who are majoring in a science, math, or engineering program. Photo by Jean Dixon.

Science and engineering are often considered male driven fields. In an atmosphere where they are outnumbered by men, sometimes it may be difficult for women to find a sense of community for themselves. This is what the Women in Science and Engineering (WISE) program aims to create.

“Sometimes it’s hard for really bright women who are interested in math and science to find others who are like them,” said Gina Tempel, the

WISE director. “This (program) gives them a chance to really get to know other women well and connect with them well.”

WISE is a living-learning community for female freshman on campus who are majoring in a science, math, or engineering program. This year there are 34 girls in the program. They all live together in one wing of Argenta hall, and Tempel believes that this is a solid beginning.

“Because they’re all living on the same dorm floor and they also happen to have an RA who is a former WISE student from two years ago they have that sense of community,” she said.

Emily Wozniak, the dorm RA, was one of the first girls to get involved in WISE her freshman year. She stands by the program and the support it offers the women in such a competitive field.

“This community for women on campus is a really great opportunity for these girls to grow socially, to grow academically, and to have that social network and that support that they need in those really difficult classes,” she said.

Having women in male dominated fields is important. According to Tempel, gender diversity in scientific disciplines is vital.

“We talk about diversity in a lot of ways,” she said, “but I think in the sciences and engineering women bring a different point of view that men don’t inherently have.”

That is one of the main purposes of WISE: to keep women in these fields. According to Tempel, they hope to enhance the number of women who get involved in science and engineering degree programs and to keep those women there.

“Studies have shown that when women develop a sense of identity within their discipline that they have a tendency to stay,” Tempel said.

This is an idea that Wozniak agrees with.

“If you don’t have a support system in those classes you would probably end up just dropping the class,” she said, “but with that network, those study groups, I think that keeps (women) in those classes.”

The girls do a lot together. Aside from living in the same wing of the dorm, they also had a 24 hour retreat at Lake Tahoe after orientation for the girls to get to know one another. They took part in Race for the Cure, and plan on doing the Relay for Life next spring as well. Not only are these activities to bring the girls closer together, but Tempel also hopes to raise the community’s awareness of the program.

“Hopefully we’ll have people asking about what we are,” she said. “We would like to raise our profile.”