

The problem of gender inequality in STEM education starts in childhood, continues through college

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Women are not proportionately represented in different career fields, and it has absolutely nothing to do with their intelligence. It does, however, have to do with preparation, especially when it comes to higher education: Women are not adequately represented in the sciences at universities, beginning a gender gap that endures into adulthood careers.

According to Tricia Berry, director of the Women in Engineering Program within the Cockrell School of Engineering, 24 percent of the engineering students at UT are women. In other words, one of the most prestigious programs at this school is dominated overwhelmingly by men. More disturbing, this percentage is an encouraging increase from last year - the editorial board of this paper recently gave the increase in women entering engineering at UT a "Horns Up." All this goes to show that there are not enough women in science, technology, math and engineering (STEM) fields at UT to ensure their equal representation in the workforce.

Historically, women have not been recruited or necessarily welcomed into engineering programs. However, in the last 22 years Cockrell has seen the enrollment of women in the school rise from 15 to the 24 percent it is at today, presumably due to programs like the one run by Berry. This year, The Cockrell School boasts a 30 percent female incoming freshman class.

It's great that UT is prioritizing this initiative. Our nation is taking it seriously as well: A White House initiative, called Women in STEM, aims to get more women involved in the field.

But is UT enrolling a class of engineers where less than a third are women really that impressive? Yes, there has been measurable progress in the enrollment of women in STEM, but it's frustrating that we have reached the 21st century without fully conquering institutionalized sexism in academia.

According to Berry, women are likely to go into fields where they can see themselves affecting change and bettering society. She says that women who come into the engineering program are as prepared academically as men, but the gender gap is still prevalent and caused in part by a lack of a direct and readily apparent connection between practicing engineering and improving the world in the way that there is in a field like social work.

Lisa Moore, the interim director of the women's and gender studies department, said that feminists and women should "determine where [they] can make the most effective contribution, given [their] own talents and interests, helping to create a more just world." Moore said that it is the responsibility of established institutions, and not the underrepresented, to bridge the gender gap.

Girls are taught from a young age to play with toys that emphasize appearance, not functionality. Boys get Legos and building blocks. According to an article in the journal *Information, Community & Society*, girls and boys develop different relationships with technology and logic based on the toys they are exposed to. Walk into any toy store and you will see aisles devoted to gender-specific marketing. Walk into any convenience store and you will see magazines separated by gender.

This preconceived and out-of-date representation of gender norms has no place anywhere, especially not on college campuses. When students are choosing the occupational directions that they want to go in, they should not be hindered by antiquated expectations of the roles they should fulfill.

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