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13 - How the UBC Young Women for Science inspires students to study STEM

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Two years ago, I founded the UBC Young Women for Science, a volunteer outreach club based in Vancouver, which brings female UBC STEM undergraduate students from various fields into high schools to speak about their subjects and research while including demonstrations and activities. Our goal is to reduce the gender gap in STEM by inspiring and encouraging more young girls to pursue STEM. There is a significant lack of female role models in STEM, especially in fields like physics. The UBC Young Women for Science shows students that there are actually many great women studying all STEM fields, so that girls feel more confident in studying STEM too!

As a physics student, I believe it's especially important to encourage girls at the high school level to study physics, because there is already a significant lack of women studying physics at the undergraduate level (which is not present in many other STEM fields).

So far, we have done 42 presentations at 14 schools in Vancouver, West Vancouver, North Vancouver, Burnaby, and New Westminster, speaking to over 1000 students! About half of the students we present to are girls. We have received an NSERC grant to do presentations in the Okanagan Valley at the end of April (2019), and currently have 12 presentations booked at 4 schools.

This year, we also hosted the UBC Women and STEM Conference on March 2, 2019. There were 49 attendees, including high school, undergraduate, and graduate students, as well as alumni, faculty, and working professionals from Sutherland Secondary, New Westminster Secondary, Langara College, SFU, BCIT, Capilano University, UBC, SCWIST, and the Government of Canada. Our three main speakers were Dr. Janis McKenna (Physics, UBC), Kristin Wilkes (CIO of Capilano University), and Dr. Lesley Shannon (Computer Engineering, SFU & NSERC).

The conference was put together and run entirely by our undergraduate executive team and aimed to create a stronger dialogue about the gender gap in STEM throughout all levels of education and to encourage ways of addressing the disparity.

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