

Teens discover technology and food is a recipe for fun

By Kari Peterson
SPECIAL TO THE ENTERPRISE

Never underestimate the fun a group of enthusiastic girls can have when combining art, culture and technology.

Indeed, that is precisely the message Parto Aram wishes to impart to her students — girls between the ages of 10 and 16. Aram is the director of ISIS Education, a Davis-based nonprofit she founded five years ago dedicated to promoting equity in science and technology for girls.

Aram's passion for engaging girls in technology is not accidental. She has degrees in electrical engineering and gender studies, in addition to an MBA, and worked for 15 years in computer design. She and her husband are raising two daughters in Davis.

"Research has shown that girls like science just as much as boys in elementary school and are just as good at it," Aram said. "Early in their school years, girls' science test scores match boys'. But as they get older, cultural stereotypes enter the picture and suddenly girls are taught to believe they are not as science-savvy as boys. This misperception results in far fewer girls pursuing careers in science and technology."

In fact, statistics show that only 18 percent of computer science majors are girls.

"Another significant fact is that girls learn differently," Aram added.

She suggests that in order to effectively engage girls in science learning, there needs to be a different approach to teaching.

"Research shows that girls enjoy learning technology a lot more if there is a creative element, if technology is used to help others or if technology brings people together. Girls prefer to work collaboratively on projects."

Aram's workshops offer an opportunity for girls to learn about technology in a way that appeals to them, and the projects in her classes are carefully chosen with those key principles in mind. The results are impressive.

Take, for instance, Aram's latest class. Isabella Ainsworth, Bianca Aram and Sawyer Norton, all ninth-graders at Emerson Junior High School, signed up for a web design and animation course this summer. They expected to spend their time in a computer lab, which they did, but Aram wanted to spice things up a bit and she had a plan.

She contacted the International House and was given the names of visiting scholars and spouses who might be willing to work with Aram's students on a cultural exchange project. Nathalie Minya from Zimbabwe was game.

After the girls completed the web design and animation classroom sessions, Aram arranged to have them meet with Minya on a Saturday morning to share stories about her country, its culture and especially its cuisine. Minya agreed to help the girls plan, shop for and prepare a typical Zimbabwean meal.

"What does this have to do with technology?" Aram laughs. "Well, I told the girls they'd have to document the entire experience on a website, using their newly acquired web design and animation skills. They were instructed to interview Minya and take lots of photos and videos. Most of all, I told them to be creative and have fun!"

According to Aram, when technology is the means rather than the end, it is far more interesting and much less daunting.

Isabella, Bianca and Sawyer met with Minya. After an engaging hour of conversation that covered history, politics and social traditions, the focus shifted to food and meal planning. They settled on two typical Zimbabwean dishes: Sadza is a traditional mixture of cornmeal and water, eaten with the hands, and served with a variety of stews. Muriwo Une Dovi is a stew made of kale and peanut butter.

Minya and the three girls then rode their bikes to the Davis Farmers Market to shop for ingredients. At the market, they also talked to vendors and farmers to learn a little about their jobs. Staff from the Dixon-based Everything Under the Sun farm talked with the girls about the produce they grow and helped them pick quality ingredients for their meal.

They returned to Aram's house to cook together. They videotaped Minya as she demonstrated techniques and made notes about dish preparations. The highlight of the day was sitting down with Minya to share their meal, continuing their conversations about life in Zimbabwe.

After a rich and fascinating day of cultural immersion, it was time for the girls to return their attention to the task at hand — creatively recounting the adventure using their new technology skills and tools.

Aram was very pleased with their work. "The girls did a wonderful job," she said. "They put together a set of web pages that includes photos, cooking demonstrations, facts about Zimbabwe, and, of course, the recipes. They had fun with the design elements, choosing colors and motifs commonly used in Zimbabwean fabric and art. Their website tells the story of their day beautifully. And, most importantly, they had a really good time doing it."

Said Sawyer: "My favorite part of the class was meeting Nathalie, talking to her about her family and the Zimbabwean traditions. The food was really good. The animation part of the class was completely new and

Bianca Aram, right, chops kale for a traditional Zimbabwean dish. Sawyer Norton, Isabella Ainsworth, Bianca Aram, Nathalie Minya, below, shop at the Davis Farmers Market.



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interesting to me."

"The whole experience was enlightening," Bianca said. "It was great to learn about a new culture from a native of Zimbabwe. Making the website was an important skill that I am sure I'll use later in life. We divided the website in different pages, and worked together."

And Isabella's impression: "It was fantastic to be able to learn about a new culture while at the same time learning about how to design a web page."

To see the girls' website, visit <http://isis-education.org/girlstechnologycommunity>.

Information about ISIS Education and upcoming classes can be found at <http://www.isis-education.org>. Aram will continue to offer technology-for-girls classes in the coming year. There will be similar workshops on organic gardening, the digital divide, and other community building and social justice subjects.

Aram seeks to extend this opportunity to as many girls as possible. She plans to offer scholarships, as well. Donations to the scholarship program may be made at ISIS-Education.org/Scholarship.html.

What's happening

Today

■ Learn all about **Grad Night** and how to be a part of this signature end-of-school event at 7 p.m., at Emerson Junior High School, 2121 Calaveras Ave. Grad Night is a safe and sober all-night celebratory event for graduating seniors from Davis, Da Vinci and King high schools and the Davis School for Independent Study. Grad Night 2014 will be on Friday, June 13, immediately following the DHS commencement ceremony. Contact Solveig Monson, Grad Night chair, at solveigmonson@gmail.com if you have questions.

Wednesday

■ The Davis High School PTA hosts "**What Colleges May Not Tell You — And You Really Need to Know**" from 7:30 to 9 p.m. in the DHS library, 315 W. 14th St. College admissions expert Sally Springer, author of "Admission Matters," will provide information on the college admissions process. For more information, contact Jennifer Creinen at mitchjen@comcast.net.

Friday

■ The Davis High School Advanced Treble Choir invites **talented singers to become a contestant at Davis' own singing competition, Community Idol**. Applicants must be at least 18 years old; applications are due Friday. Download applications from ATC website, http://groups.dcn.org/dhs_treblechoir. The competition will begin at 7 p.m. Saturday, Oct. 12, at DHS' Brunelle Performance Hall. Email questions to atcboard@gmail.com.

What you need to know about college admission deadlines

Timing is everything, as the saying goes. And, that is even more true in the world of college admissions.

There are only so many things within a student's control — grades, test scores, involvement in activities, to name a few. Many critical factors are out of a student's control — how many applicants there are that year, the competitiveness of the other applicants, what a school is looking for and who is reading the application.

With this in mind, it is important that students consider all options and be strategic about the things they can control, such as when to apply to college. This month, we'll address early action and early decision versus regular decision and rolling decision — what the various deadlines are and the pros and cons of each.

What are early action and early decision?

Application season stretches from about November to March. The University of California and California State University applications are due Nov. 30. Most public out-of-state school applications are due between the end of November and February. Typically, private college application deadlines vary from January to March.

Regular decision is by far the most common and straightforward way students apply to college. Applications are due in early winter and decision notifications occur sometime around April 1. **Examples:** All the California state schools except Cal Poly San Luis Obispo.

Rolling admission: When colleges offer this type of admission, there is a rather large span of several months within which a student can apply, often starting as early



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as August. Applications are reviewed as they are submitted so notification may be within weeks of submission. Students still have until May 1 to notify of intent to register. **Examples:** King's College London, Eckerd College, University of Colorado, Boulder

Early action: Students apply earlier than the regular decision time, usually in November, and then receive admission decisions earlier as well, usually in December. This type of deadline is "nonbinding" because it does not prevent students from applying early to other early action schools nor does it require the student to attend if they are accepted. Some schools offer two rounds, with the only difference being that the second round has a later deadline. **Examples:** University of Michigan and Gonzaga University

Restrictive early action, also called single-choice early action: This is relatively rare compared to other options but still a possibility. A student may apply early, and the decision is not binding, but the student may apply only to other schools through regular decision. **Examples:** Yale and Stanford

Early decision: Similar to the other early plans, a student applies early, however, it is a much higher-stakes route since early decision is binding. A student must attend if accepted and is not allowed to apply early decision to other schools. Students should use this route only if they are positive the

college is their first choice. If admitted via early decision, a student must then withdraw applications from other schools.

The only time a student may decline acceptance and go elsewhere is when the offered financial aid package is not sufficient. Some schools also offer two rounds of early decision. **Examples:** Pomona College and Carnegie Mellon University

Each early application plan has the same three potential outcomes: acceptance, deferral and denial. Deferral in this instance means that the college is not ready to make an admission decision yet and wants to reconsider the applicant in the context of the other regular decision applicants. (If this happens to you, be sure to notify the college of any pertinent changes in your academic situation, such as new test scores, grades, etc., as you await the final decision.)

Does applying early give students an edge in gaining admission?

This is the million-dollar question. There are too many variables and too many unique individual circumstances to predict conclusively the outcome of applying early. A good general rule is that it makes sense for students to do so if they have completed all the requirements and are within the top 50 percent of the college's academic profile and this is a college they really want to attend.

While applying early to college is not necessary, it is always valuable to be informed about options and analyze what makes the most sense for you.

Attend a workshop

What: Jennifer Borenstein, independent college adviser and owner of The Right College for You in Davis, will present a free workshop on How to Apply to College. She will cover the following topics:

- Overview of the college admissions process
- Timeline — what to do and when to do it
- Different types of colleges
- What colleges look for
- Applying
- Financial aid and scholarships

When: Sunday 2 to 4 p.m.

Where: Stephens Branch Library, Blanchard Room, 315 E. 14th St.

Regardless of which application deadline you select, be sure to give yourself enough time to put your best effort into it. And, as always, remember there is a college out there for everyone!

Pros and cons

Pros of early action: Early answer, unrestricted choice, enables better planning.

Pros of early decision: Signals the college about how committed the student is about that school and schools want students who will be excited to attend; may reduce time and money spent on applications — if accepted by December to the first-choice school, then no more applications.

Cons of both early routes: Influences the ability to compare financial aid packages; compressed time frame may cause students to cut corners; if rejected, may undermine confidence going forward; may be a more competitive applicant pool.

— Jennifer Borenstein is an independent college adviser in Davis and owner of The Right College For You. Her column is published on the last Tuesday of the month. She lives in Davis with her family. Reach her at jenniferborenstein@therightcollegeforyou.org, or visit www.therightcollegeforyou.org.