

Embracing Technology

At this all-women's college, a little tech savvy goes a long way toward future success.

More than ever, technology dominates the job market. Work in STEM disciplines is abundant and pays well compared to other professions. Yet, for a variety of reasons, women are still underrepresented in the field. According to the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, in 2017, women occupied less than 20% of high-tech jobs in the U.S. and were paid approximately 80% of their male counterparts' salaries.



Mount Mary University President Christine Pharr, Ph.D., began her academic career as a chemistry professor and takes joy in her role as a pioneer and advocate for women in science and technology.

For Christine Pharr, Ph.D., president of the all-women's college Mount Mary University, it's an issue that needs addressing—to connect the strengths of a woman's interests with the promising potential of technology. “I don't know whether it's nature or nurture, but for some reason, women are still more likely to choose service-oriented careers like health care and social work,” Dr. Pharr observes. “But what students don't realize is that technology is prevalent in many of those professions, too, and that by acquiring certain technical skills, they'll gain a powerful advantage in the workforce.”

Dr. Pharr cites several examples of technology appearing in unexpected jobs. “In social work, avatars are often used in addressing mental health issues. The fashion industry uses predictive analytics to forecast consumer trends, and health care uses technology in a wide array of treatments.

“The question is: How do we help students see that STEM skills can help them accomplish their existing goals?”

Developing New Programs

It's a question Dr. Pharr and her staff are actively seeking to answer. One approach is developing targeted programs at the university, such as the Compass program. In Compass, first-year Mount Mary students who are undecided about their major can postpone choosing one, and, instead, spend their freshman year exploring a variety of options. “They get hands-on experience with chemistry, biology, food science, math—areas they'd probably never be exposed to if they declared a major right away,” Dr. Pharr notes.

Another program is a summer camp series for high school girls, planned for launch in 2021. In these weeklong, on-campus sessions, girls will have an opportunity to apply technology to their specific interests and passions.

As powerful as these programs are, Dr. Pharr's philosophy on the topic runs even deeper. “I believe we need to rethink STEM as a concept,” she says. “We still haven't succeeded in making the field appealing to women. Connecting their interests to the ever-growing potential of technology is how to unlock the future for women.”



“We need to re-envision how girls initially connect with science and technology.”

*Christine Pharr, Ph.D.,
President, Mount Mary
University*

Committed to Education for All Women

In the 2020 U.S. News & World Best Colleges report, Mount Mary University has the highest ethnic diversity index in the Midwest. In the category of social mobility, a new ranking that measures the graduation rate for Pell-eligible students, Mount Mary is the top-rated private institution in Wisconsin.

Nearly 44% of Mount Mary students are majoring in STEM-related fields; this significant representation will go a long way toward achieving equity in male-dominated fields.

Mount Mary
UNIVERSITY 

Sponsored by the School Sisters of Notre Dame

2900 North Menomonee River Parkway
Milwaukee, WI 53222-4597
414-930-3000 | mtmary.edu

Mount Mary University is developing tech-friendly programs with particular appeal to women, such as food science (pictured here), fashion design, and various health careers.

