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## College receives grant for interactive journalism camp

By Myles Ma  
News Editor

The National Science Foundation awarded a \$600,000 grant to support a proposed program intended to increase interest in the computer sciences.

The program will involve rising eighth graders from Fisher Middle School in Ewing, who will be introduced to computer science through interactive journalism.

"Some of the characteristics that you need to be a good computer scientist are the same characteristics that you need to be good journalists, artists, people who are creative," Monisha Pulimood, assistant professor of computer science, said.

Pulimood, Ursula Wolz, associate professor of computer science, and Kim Pearson, associate professor of English, are in charge of the grant.

For the first two years, the program will be comprised of two week-long summer camp experiences at the College as

well as an after-school program at Fisher Middle School. The 18 children attending these events will be publishing an online journal using a programming language called Scratch.

"They're not going to just create text," Wolz said. "They're going to create little interactive videos using Scratch."

Scratch was designed by Mitchel Resnick, head of the media arts and sciences program at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology. Resnick, a classmate of Pearson's at Princeton University, designed the program with middle-school students in mind.

Fisher faculty will be trained on how to use the language before the program takes place.

Pearson said while collaborations between the College and

the Ewing public school system have happened before, "Using journalism to teach computer science is new."

Among the problems the principal investigators hope to address with the program is the lack of people going into the field of computer science.

"The primary goal is to attract young people to computing careers who may not have thought of them as an option," Pearson said.

"We want to work with kids who may not necessarily be top scorers in math and science," Pulimood said.

Pearson said she hopes the children "gain an appreciation" for the journalism field through the program. She added that possible content for the proposed journal included local reporting as well as simple eco-

nomic reporting. Among her ideas is a database comparing prices of popular children's items at different stores.

The method for selecting the children has yet to be determined. Pulimood said determining an appropriate method could pose a challenge.

"I can see people getting worried about why their kids aren't in the program," Pulimood said.

Mary Switzer, gender equity diversity specialist in the department of technology studies and program manager of the grant, said, "We want to have equal access for all the students involved in the grant with particular focus on underrepresented groups," meaning women and minorities.

"Women and minorities tend to move away from computer science for various reasons," Pulimood said.

After two years, the program will be evaluated on whether its goals were realized.

