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Dear Gifted Student,

You are receiving this because you are a female student in the gifted program. We hope that you will spend some time reading this letter and considering participating in our project.

Before I begin, let me ask you some questions: Do you like to write? Do you like to find out how things work? Do you like to get to know other female students, say, from other schools in Nebraska? Do you like to participate in a writing contest, learn something about computer science (CS) and information technology (IT) along the way, make new friends, work with a big sister at UNL, and perhaps take a very exciting first step towards doing something fun and exciting in CS or IT? If you answer yes to these questions, then we have something for you.

On behalf of the Computer Science and Engineering Department at the University of Nebraska, Lincoln, NE, we are pleased to announce the **Fourth Annual GEM Team Writing Contest**, sponsored by a seed grant from the National Center for Women and Information Technology (NCWIT) as well as continued funding by the Union Pacific. We hereby officially invite you to participate in the contest and become one of our GEM girls. GEM, which stands for **Girl Empowerment and Mentoring for Computing**, is a project that aims to inspire girls like you towards computing in post-secondary education. (See our GEM logo to the right.)

For the contest, you will (1) work with a "Big Sister" at UNL who will mentor you, help you choose a topic and understand the underlying CS or IT paradigms, (2) work in a team you're your peers—female students from other schools, and (3) investigating the use of IT and computing in real-world applications. This contest will allow you to learn from your mentor about life as a student at UNL and as a CS student, learn how to work as a team with teammates from other parts of the state of Nebraska, and learn how to investigate a technical topic and write cohesively and engagingly about their findings. Essays will be judged on a variety of criteria and winning teams will be awarded with prizes and scholarships.

Further, as our world is rapidly becoming digital and computing is increasingly pervasive and ubiquitous, it is essential for all students, regardless of your interests and majors, to have an appreciation for computational thinking—just as we require all students to have mathematical thinking—and an ability for logical problem solving in wide-ranging topics.

Therefore, participating in a contest like the GEM Team Writing Contest can open up new opportunities and expose you to exciting ideas in the IT and computing world, and how those ideas are used in all sorts of applications ranging from automated music selection for your iPods® to customized search engine with Google, from intelligent support for assisted living to technology-enhanced dance performances, and take a first and key step towards a successful post-secondary education and professional career down the road.

In addition to the GEM Team Writing Contest, we started two new GEM programs last year and will continue for this year. We will have "Visit Your School" days where we visit your school to present something fun about computational thinking, with games, puzzles, and a magic show. We will also have "Shadow A Mentor" days where we arrange for GEM participants to visit campus and follow their mentor to class and to other activities for a day.

For this year, due to sponsorship constraints, we will only accept 50 participants. And thus, we will give priority to students who have not participated in GEM before. Since we will have other activities such as Visit Your School and Shadow-A-Mentor Days, for students who we cannot accommodate in our Team Writing Contest, we will try to arrange for them to participate in those activities. Thus, all are welcome to apply.

In conclusion, we would like to strongly and enthusiastically urge you to participate in the contest, and talk to your classmates, parents, and teachers about the contest as well.

Please visit our project website at http://cse.unl.edu/gem for more information on how to register, as well as details on time commitment and expectations of participants and parent(s)/guardian(s). Registration ends on Friday, November 11th, 2011. Feel free to contact us if you have any questions.

Say Yes and join us!

Sincerely,

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