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Students Lead Inaugural Year of MakerGirl Program Through The Petrick Idea Center

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BLOOMINGTON, Ill. — Sophomore students Victoria Ballesteros-Gonzalez and Mansi Shah are at the forefront of a new STEM initiative on Illinois Wesleyan University's campus called the IWU [MakerGirl Academy](#).

After seeking methods to encourage more young people to explore the fields of science, Ballesteros-Gonzalez '25 learned about the not-for-profit group MakerGirl through John Quarton, director of IWU's [The Petrick Idea Center](#). Ballesteros-Gonzalez began seeking other students who shared her interest. Shah '25 was the first student to volunteer and the two went to work to make the IWU MakerGirl Academy a reality.

MakerGirl partners with universities to offer “Academies” that inspire young girls to pursue STEM fields (science, technology, engineering and math) and become creators through 3D printing sessions.

“MakerGirl is redefining what it means to be a 'maker',” said Mary Hadley, CEO at

MakerGirl. “We are not only a touchpoint for girls to get introduced to STEM but to support them along their entire journey from elementary to high school to college and then into the workforce. As a next step in our journey, we are establishing additional Academies, expanding volunteer opportunities to more high school and university students nationwide.

“We are so excited for the next Academy to be Illinois Wesleyan University. The Petrick Idea Center will be the perfect next location to host our programming and create the next generation of future female leaders in the Bloomington-Normal community.”

The IWU MakerGirl Academy will be the first of its kind at a liberal arts university. Academies have been established in the past at the University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign, Northwestern University and The University of Texas at Austin

Ballesteros-Gonzalez and Shah are the first members of the IWU community to join MakerGirl's team of high school and college students called ChangeMakers, who volunteer to help run programs across the country – but they won't be the last.

This fall, more IWU students will have the opportunity to become ChangeMakers by joining the IWU MakerGirl Academy. Interested students are invited to attend one of two information sessions led by Gonzalez and Shah which will be held on Oct. 6 from 6-7 p.m. and Oct. 8 from 1-2 p.m. at the IDEA Center in the Memorial Center.

[Students can apply here by Oct 9.](#)

Students who join the IWU MakerGirl Academy will receive 3D printing and Computer Aided Design (CAD) training, professional development support through workshops, and access to a network of community and corporate partners.

“Any IWU student who is an enthusiastic, creative and big-scale thinker excited to educate the next generation of makers can join the IWU MakerGirl Academy as a ChangeMaker. No previous experience with 3D printing is required,” said Quarton.

The IWU MakerGirl team plans to host a free, pilot 3D printing workshop in November for the children of IWU faculty and staff. More information about signing up for this workshop will be shared with faculty and staff. This workshop will be the first step in reaching a larger goal of educating 1,000 girls and boys through similar workshops over the next three years.

Workshops are intended for girls aged 7-10, although boys can register for sessions as well. During each session, participants will learn about 3D printing/design and its applications, as well as STEM careers and women in the field. Each participant will design and print a 3D object.

With most youth participants likely to join from local elementary schools and eventually junior high schools, Quarton expects the IWU MakerGirl Academy to serve as a network between Titans and younger students.

“One of our goals is for our IWU ChangeMakers and MakerGirl participants to find that sense of connection and student-to-mentor bond. We want both parties to feel connected with each other and want our participants to feel as comfortable as they can with the IWU campus community,” Quarton said.



Participants from a previous MakerGirl Academy show off 3D printed objects they created through the program. Photo courtesy of MakerGirl.