

Supporting Students Interested in Nontraditional Fields

Secondary Super Strategies | INTRODUCTION

What is a Nontraditional Field?

The term ‘nontraditional fields’ means occupations or fields of work, such as careers in computer science, technology, and other current and emerging high skill occupations, for which individuals from one gender comprise less than 25 percent of the individuals employed in each such occupation or field of work.

When informing students about programs for Nontraditional Fields, it is crucial to dispel stereotypes held by teachers, counselors, parents, and/or students themselves regarding nontraditional occupations by raising awareness of nontraditional careers early in the educational process. A goal of teachers and counselors should be to promote a message that suggests to a student of an underrepresented gender that they can succeed in a nontraditional career. The message should also promote this idea among more traditional student populations, parents, and school staff.

Gender equity issues pose a significant barrier to student interest in such programs. Difficulties recruiting students into nontraditional careers are compounded by the fact that most learners do not picture themselves working in nontraditional fields; they need consistent exposure to materials and career exploration activities to stimulate their interests. In light of these barriers, traditional awareness-raising methods are insufficient to impact career decision making.



Nontraditional Fields Super Strategies | RECOMMENDATIONS

- Provide workshops, hands-on career fairs, career panels, and other events that highlight nontraditional fields. Invite students and parents.
- Discuss local employment opportunities for those with training in nontraditional fields.
- Emphasize the potential earnings of nontraditional careers to students and parents.
- Invite students and parents to a program site to eliminate misconceptions about Career and Technical Education (CTE) programs and nontraditional careers.
- Include presentations from positive, attainable role models to credibly answer questions posed by parents and students.
- Create relationships with employers to provide accurate information and facilitate contact with potential speakers and resources.
- Create a section of your program's website that has specific information for students interested in nontraditional fields, include testimonials and success stories.
- Contrast pay between traditional careers and nontraditional careers.
- Include information about support services that are specifically relevant to those individuals seeking careers that are nontraditional for their gender.
- Review all current materials and processes to make sure they do not contain an inadvertently discriminatory message.
- Make adjustments to social media campaigns to reflect recommended practices.
 - √ Social media is an effective way to facilitate word of mouth advertising with a source that is easily remembered and referenced in conversation.
- Educate counselors and teachers on bias, both personal and institutional, and ensure they understand the potential barriers for students seeking nontraditional careers.
- Present programs to students of all genders.
- Design activities that include family members and encourage students to achieve educationally; this action is especially important for economically disadvantaged or underrepresented communities.



Nontraditional Fields Super Strategies | RECOMMENDATIONS

- Include pictures of women and men in all recruitment material.
- For radio and TV advertising make sure to include nontraditional student voiceovers.
- Use gender inclusive language, you are actively seeking students of all genders.
- Present real world settings in promotional videos and cover relevant topics.
 - √ What it's like to be a man or woman and work in a gender dominated field.
 - √ Establishing work/life balance.
 - √ Building a support network of family and peers.
- Use press releases to let the community know when you are offering information sessions geared towards nontraditional students.
- Use commonly understood terminology when discussing programs. Do not assume your audience knows what is meant by nontraditional fields.
- Train teachers and counselors to consider issues related to nontraditional programs.
 - √ Train counselors to understand the relationship between the personal, professional, and cultural situations facing students in nontraditional programs.
 - √ Drive cultural change by spreading awareness of issues within nontraditional fields.
- Facilitate support groups.
 - √ Include clubs that increase student engagement or interaction with professional organizations, peer counseling, and groups that involve like-minded peers in programs.
 - √ Support is a high priority consideration for females as they consider career options.
- Stress the influence of job security and job availability of some nontraditional careers, especially for males from lower



DID YOU KNOW?

Traditional methods that foster students' interest in a STEM career, like print advertising, site visits, demonstrations, etc., are not sufficient to prompt women to explore STEM fields. For women, self-confidence and efficacy in the field precede interest.

Allison and Cossette conducted a thorough review of academic literature on recruiting women into stem careers and found that "A number of recruitment strategies focus on engaging young women's interest in STEM careers through interpersonal and/or hands-on experiences (for example, increasing women's self-confidence in STEM fields through cooperative and/or hands-on workshops)" are effective because, "for women, self-confidence precedes interests and career goals. Women must feel confident in their abilities before their interest is aroused."¹

Nontraditional Fields Super Strategies | RECOMMENDATIONS

- Inform students of actual on-the-job activities.
- Include information about expectations of work/life balance.
- If lower pay is a concern for male students considering nontraditional careers do not attempt to minimize its significance. Instead, balance discussion of pay with discussion of positive elements that may align with their values.
- Each student's values are different; don't make assumptions based on gender stereotypes.
- Attempt to initiate hands-on experiences as early as possible through facility tours.
- Provide mentors and accessible positive role-models.
 - √ Establish mentoring programs for students in nontraditional programs that connect them with those working in corresponding fields.
 - √ Ensure that mentoring programs fit the educational setting and student need.
 - √ Consider alternate mentoring strategies; web-based contacts and connection to professional organizations may be viable options when face-to-face contact cannot be established.
 - √ Include speakers and presenters in classes who can serve as role-models.



SOURCES:

- ¹Allison, C.J., & Cossette, I. (2007). Theory and Practice in Recruiting Women for STEM Careers, Proceedings of the WEPAN 2007 Conference, Women in Engineering Programs and Advocates Network.
- ²Dodson, T., & Borders, L.D. (2006). Men in Traditional and Nontraditional Careers: Gender Role Attitudes, Gender Role Conflict, and Job Satisfaction. *The Career Development Quarterly*, 54.
- ³Hard Hatted Women. A Toolkit for Recruiting and Retaining Women in Nontraditional Positions. (2009). PDF. Accessible via: <http://www.cewd.org/toolkits/CEWDHHwtoolkit.pdf>.
- ⁴Miller, L., & Hayward, R. (2006). New Jobs, Old Occupational Stereotypes: Gender and Jobs in the New Economy. *Journal of Education and Work*, 19(1), 67-93.
- ⁵National Alliance for Partnerships in Equity. Nontraditional Career Preparation Root Causes & Strategies. Cochranville: National Alliance for Partnerships in Equity, 2009. Napequity.org. NAPE. Web.
- ⁶Strengthening Career and Technical Education for the 21st Century Act H.R.2353, 115th Cong., (2018) (enacted). <https://www.congress.gov/bill/115th-congress/house-bill/2353/text?r=2>.