

EXTENSION SNAPSHOT

Fulton-Mason-Peoria-Tazewell

I ILLINOIS Extension

COLLEGE OF AGRICULTURAL, CONSUMER
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STEM Bootcamp is a collaboration between University of Illinois Extension, the Society of Women Engineers-Central Illinois and Bradley University offering high school girls an opportunity to engage in hands-on learning and mentoring opportunities with women currently working in local careers in the STEM field.

STEM Bootcamp Connects High School Girls with Professional Women in Local STEM Careers

For the third year in a row, University of Illinois Extension Fulton-Mason-Peoria-Tazewell Unit, the Society of Women Engineers-Central Illinois, and Bradley University partnered together to offer STEM Bootcamp to high school age girls. STEM Bootcamp is designed to create a learning opportunity focused on teamwork, solving a problem, and mentorship by female engineers and scientists.

The American Association of University Women (AAUW) stated in their 2014 report, "Solving the Equation: The Variables for Women's Success in Engineering and Computing", that girls today are studying and succeeding in math and science more than ever before. However, their success in these subjects is not reflected in an increased number of women employed in engineering and computing careers. Obstacles exist from childhood to middle adulthood. Providing informal science, technology, engineering and math (STEM) learning environments is one of the recommended practices to help encourage participation in STEM careers (Dasgupta and Stout, 2014).

As part of the 2019 STEM bootcamp, 22 high school girls learned about problem-solving and decision making by solving a crime through analyzing simulated blood, fiber, and hair. Girls also spent time in small groups with a member of the Society of Women engineers doing mock interviews and discussing interview skills. "The time the girls spent interacting with female role models and mentors is one of my favorite parts of the day because it helps girls visualize who they could be in the future." says Judy Schmidt, 4-H youth development educator.

Ninety-four percent of the girls who attended reported learning skills or information that will help them achieve their goals for the future. Eighty-eight percent learned about jobs and careers that they had not thought much about before and also felt more confident about career exploration and steps to prepare for a STEM career.

Sarai, a freshman at Manual Academy shared these thoughts about her experience. "I will come to every opportunity that University of Illinois Extension or the Society of Women Engineers (SWE) offers. My goal right now is to be a female, Spanish speaking, leader of a construction company. When I attend U of I Extension and SWE events, I feel that I learn so much from the women engineers. I love attending these classes on a college campus like Bradley. I work hard to carry good grades and I try to keep focused on their importance. STEM Bootcamp helps me stay focused."



Photo by Judy Schmidt | Illinois Extension

Since the first STEM Bootcamp in 2017, Illinois Extension has reached 80 young ladies through the day-long camp, with hands-on activities and career exploration. It is just one example of ways Illinois 4-H programs help youth learn more about future career options.