

Be Bold- Break the Mold: Women Succeed in Nontraditional Careers

Academic Year 2022-23 Final Report

Purpose and Mission of Be Bold-Break the Mold

Gender-based barriers are still prevalent for women, and societal pressures, along with gender bias and lack of adequate support structures often negatively impact educational goals and career decisions for female-identifying and nonbinary learners. For example, women, especially women of color, are essentially 'absent' from technology innovation. *In 2017, 26% of the computing workforce were women, and less than 10% were women of color (5% were Asian, 3% were Black/African, and 1% were Hispanic).*

Educational pursuits and career decisions are often unconsciously based on societal gender norms. Pursuing a nontraditional career increases a woman's ability to earn and advance in their careers, but limited exposure to career options and varied expectations driven by varied cultural backgrounds influence a student's future trajectory, academic resilience and career aspirations. With intrusive support services that connects students to community and campus resources, faculty, and gender-based mentorship we can better address the needs our students and encourage their retention and completion in nontraditional career programs leading them to careers that are high demand, high growth, and high wage. Be Bold – Break the Mold supports an inclusive learning environment that promotes equity and attempts to eliminate traditional barriers to success. In light of the above, intentional support structures that increase female/nonbinary student success and engagement is critical, and BB-BM directly meets that need.

The results and data gathered below speak to the effectiveness of programming, now in place and starting its 4th year at NHCC and 2nd year at HTC.

Entrance and Exit Online Questionnaires were required as part of the program. This is a detailed report based on the comparison before/after experiences in Be Bold – Break the Mold.

The first section of this report lists the enrollment, demographics, professional development and empowerment speaker series. The middle section of this report is the quantitative details of what was experienced based on the surveys. The final section is the more qualitative details of the experiences, benefits, and learnings, and suggestions that came from our students.

Enrollment, Completion Rates & Demographics

The group in 2022/23 started with 34 (19 applicants from NHCC and 15 applicants from HTC) students who were female-identifying/nonbinary and enrolled in an academic program that is considered nontraditional (25% or fewer females currently working in the field). These majors included: Pre-Engineering, Computer Science, Construction Management, and Criminal Justice at NHCC. At HTC, all but one of the students was enrolled in Networking/Cyber/Software with one a Robotics student.

Of the 34 original applicants, 25 (15 at NHCC & 10 at HTC) of them successfully completed the program and received their \$1000 stipend. The completion rate in the program is as follows: NHCC 78% and HTC 75%.

Caveat: Those students that didn't complete the program realized early on (within 2-3 months) of their inability to fully commit because of extraordinary life circumstance- not because they saw no value in the program. With this detail considered, **the true completion rate of students enrolled in Be Bold-Break the Mold (through to stipend) is 100%.**

Ethnicity identified by students at NHCC:

Black/African 8
White 2
Asian 3
Hispanic 1
Prefer not to answer 1

Ethnicity Identified by students at HTC:

Black/African 2
White 5
Asian 1
Hispanic 1
Indigenous 1

- Only 4 of the 25 students would be considered 'traditional age' college students (3 at NHCC/1 at HTC). The rest were working full-time and had families as well.
- Breakdown by major at NHCC: 3 Pre-Engineering, 2 Construction Management, 5 Computer Science, 5 Criminal Justice
- Breakdown by major at HTC: 9 Networking/Cyber/Software, 1 ARET

Professional Development Series

All students were assigned a mentor from their field of study and were asked to meet monthly. A Mentoring Toolkit was provided to give structure to these meetings. NHCC & HTC is grateful to these organization and their employees for providing mentoring support in 2022/23:

Hennepin County
Medtronic
Best Buy
BI Worldwide
Windsor Engineering
Young Engineering
AE2S
Genesys Cloud
SPS Commerce
BETA Minnesota
Smith & Company
Seagate
Unysis
Ungerma Construction
Real Time Talent
Metro State
City of Minneapolis

Minnesota State
University of Minnesota

**2022-23 Program Schedule and Empowerment
Speakers/Topics:**

*All sessions were held from 6-7:30 via Zoom and on campus at NHCC. (The intention will be to alternate campuses each year so that both HTC and NHCC are able to be hosts.)

September 15	Orientation: <i>The Importance of Telling Your Story</i> with Dr. Eda Watts
Oct 13 th	<i>Flexing Your Networking Muscles</i> with Jade Denson, Target
November 17	<i>Rockin' Your Resume</i> with Karen Philbin, NHCC Career Center Director
January 12	<i>Are You Risking Enough Failure</i> , Shelisa Demuth, BETA MN
January 26	<i>Interviewing Best Practices</i> with Karen Philbin
February 16	<i>'I Am Remarkable'</i> with Maria Vittone
February 23	<i>Acing the Technical Interview</i> with Rose Dillon, Hennepin County
March 23	<i>Personal and Professional Boundaries</i> with Cathy Brennan Construction
March 30	<i>Clifton Strength's Finder</i> with Margie Solomon, Certified SF Coach
April 6	Meditech Career Panel for Women & Nonbinary
April 20	<i>Confident & Authentic Decision-Making</i> with Marin Laukka, Decision Coach
April 27	<i>Acing the Technical Interview</i> Part II with Rose Dillon
May 12	Field Trip to Medtronic Cybersecurity Division
June 16	Field Trip to Takeda Pharmaceuticals
May 25	Final Celebration!

**Qualitative Questions:
Percentage change comparing pre/post surveys**

1. Prior to Joining Be Bold, *did you have a mentor* or another professional available to you (within our career field or major) for advice and support:
85% of participants gained a mentor for the first time
2. Prior to starting Be Bold, *how connected did you feel to other students* in your major?
60% of participants felt more connected to students in their program/major through Be Bold- Break the Mold
3. How well *do you know the support systems* available to you at your school?
100% of participants increased their knowledge of college support systems
4. How *supported* do you feel at HTC or NHCC as a woman pursuing a non-traditional major?
There was a 92% increase in participants feeling supported as woman pursuing their nontraditional major
5. Prior to starting Be Bold, how *confident* did you feel about completing your non-traditional major at HTC or NHCC?
80% of participants increased their confident levels in completing their degrees to confident or very confident completing (from not confident, somewhat confident or neutral)
6. How welcome and engaged do you currently feel as a student at HTC or NHCC?
Participants felt 80% more welcome and engaged as a student at NHCC/HTC through Be Bold-Break the Mold
7. How *comfortable* do you currently feel about networking?
Participants increased their comfort level in networking by 50%
8. To what degree do you *feel prepared to find a job in your career field*?
84% of participants felt more prepared to find a job in their career field
9. Do you feel like you are *aware of your strengths* and how they would play out in a professional setting?
68% of participants gained awareness of their strengths and how they would play out in a work setting

- 10.) Do you feel like you have the *skills to be an ally* to other women and people of color, i.e. if you see something, say something?
75% percent of students agree that they have the skills to be an ally
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Qualitative Questions: Participant Reviews/Suggestions

If you would like a copy of a report that includes all responses from individual students, please email me at mvirttone@nhcc.edu or mvirttone@hennepintech.edu Note the information below is a **summary** of general responses and themes.

List any positive outcomes that might have occurred because of your involvement with Be Bold:

Overall, students felt like they built a larger professional network and were able to put themselves in a position to be 'seen'. They become more comfortable with networking and were able to feel prepared for interviews. This led to many internships and jobs opportunities that they didn't expect to happen until after graduation. Some students not working in their field received promotions at their current jobs because of the skills and advice they gained from the speaker series. Going on industry field trips helped students see what their actual career might look like and gave them the confidence and excitement to continue to pursue their education.

What were your biggest learnings this year?

In general, students felt they learned a lot about empowerment and how to support and collaborate to help each other. They began to understand and develop their personal brand which ultimately helped increase confidence across the board. They particularly loved learning about networking, communications skills, setting boundaries, how to define themselves in a diverse community, and how to utilize self-promotion. Being able to rely on others and ask for help was also an important take-away.

What skills or career knowledge did you gain?

Public speaking though not addressed directly in any of our sessions (albeit modeled brilliantly by our empowerment speakers) was a piece of career knowledge that they were able to glean and emulate. Hearing other women's stories made them understand that their own is important and not dissimilar. This in turn, increased their understanding of failure as a natural part of the learning process, thus they continued to take risks and put themselves in situations where they wouldn't have before this experience. Again, networking, confidence building, boundaries, understanding how to speak about their strengths, and practice with resume/interviewing came up as top knowledge gains.

Suggestions and Feedback

All students were grateful for the opportunity and would recommend it to other women/nonbinary students: *'Keep the program going! Absolutely recommend! Thank you so much! I would love to see Be Bold be available to more students. Keep the program as it will help students.'* Suggestions included having weekend activities, having more Criminal Justice Speakers, and using a workshop style for resume and interviewing sessions. These suggestions have already been incorporated into the 2023/24 sessions.

Conclusion

The Bold students clearly found a lot of 'community' in this program and increased all of their career-ready skills. For the first time, many of them found/connected with other women in their majors. They are more committed than ever to complete their degrees, clearly feel more welcome, and now know more about accessing our colleges' support services in general. Most of them believed that they increased their skills in DEI and were comfortable practicing allyship. They understand the value of networking, established their first mentoring relationships, and developed the confidence to take risks, fail, and try again. A high percentage of students were able to obtain an internship and/or are now working directly in their field even before graduating. In addition, there will be two graduates that will move from 'mentee' to 'mentor' this coming year!

Be Bold-Break the Mold in a few words:

Community Building
Mentorship
College Retention
Career Opportunities
Confidence
Taking Risks
Networking
Seeking Support
Career Readiness

***Being an Ally
Establishing Boundaries
Paying it Forward***