

Using Role Models to Encourage Nontraditional Participation

One of the main barriers to attracting more female students into nontraditional programs is the shortage of positive role models in these occupations. Many students are receptive to the notion that they can be anything they want, but in terms of real influence on academic and career decisions, role models speak louder than words. Sharing experiences with students to expand their academic and career options can help them realize the benefits of keeping those options open.

Who Can Serve As Positive Role Models

- Teachers
- Parents
- Community Members
- Older Students
- Recent Graduates

Tips for Using Effective Role Models

1. Present the role models in such a way that the student can identify with them. The most effective role model will connect with her/his audience as a “real person” working in a real job.
2. The role model should discuss not only what she does on the job, but the impact the job has on her private and family life, her interests and life goals.
3. Ongoing publicity is essential to provide recognition of women working in nontraditional careers and to encourage younger women to enter these male-intensive fields.
4. Sometimes the most effective role models are older students who are enrolled in nontraditional programs. If you have female students in the program, ask them to help with recruiting, speaking and mentoring.

Make Sure Students Ask Role Models the Following:

- Describe a typical day on the job.
- What is the salary range for work such as yours?
- How do you use math, science and computer skills in your job?
- What is it like to be a woman (or man) in this job?
- How did you decide on this particular career?

Sources: Vocational Options in Creating Equality. Albany-Schoharie-Schenectady BOCES. Volume XIV, No. 1. March 1993. Michigan Center for Career and Technical Education, Michigan State University