

Supporting Students Preparing for Nontraditional Fields

Recruitment and Retention Super Strategies INTRODUCTION

What is a Nontraditional Field?

Nontraditional fields refers to occupations or fields of work for which individuals from one gender comprise less than 25% of the individuals employed in each such occupation or field of work.²

When recruiting students into nontraditional fields, it is important to use multiple forms of media to market to parents and students since the decision to enroll in a career or educational pathway is often a family decision. It is crucial to dispel stereotypes held by instructors, parents, and/or the students themselves regarding nontraditional occupations by raising awareness of nontraditional careers early in the recruitment process. Additionally, special consideration must be given to the messages sent by recruitment materials and activities. A goal of a recruitment strategy should be to promote messages that suggest to students of an underrepresented gender that they can succeed in a nontraditional career. The message should be comprehensive and promote this perspective among more traditional student populations, faculty, and college staff.

Gender equity issues pose significant barriers to recruiting students into programs for nontraditional fields. Most students cannot picture themselves working in nontraditional fields, making typical recruitment strategies less effective. Recruitment efforts must focus on exposing students to career exploration materials and activities in order to impact career decision-making.

Did You Know?

A study of more than 350 female undergraduates revealed that the influence of role models accounted for a significant variance in career choices, slightly more than for self-efficacy. The study cites work that ties the influence of role models to career aspirations, career choice, and attitude toward nontraditional careers.⁷

Recruitment Super Strategies | RECOMMENDATIONS

Create recruitment materials and practices that adhere to equitable standards to counter gender equity barriers.

- Provide workshops, career fairs, career panels, and other events that highlight nontraditional occupations.
- 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 CTE programs and nontraditional careers.
- Ask instructors and directors of nontraditional programs to share their expertise and insight on recruiting and retaining students.
- Include presentations from positive role models to answer questions posed by parents and students.
- Create relationships with employers to provide accurate information and facilitate contact with potential speakers and resources.
- Design activities that include family members and encourage students to achieve academically; this is especially important for economically disadvantaged or underrepresented communities.
- Review all current materials and processes and remove any inadvertently discriminatory messages.
- Ensure that recruitment materials reflect a diverse representation of students, including gender, age, race, and disabilities.
- Use promotional materials that feature photos and testimonials of current students and graduates of CTE programs who are working in nontraditional fields.
- 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.
- 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 faculty on bias, both personal and institutional, and ensure they understand the barriers for students seeking nontraditional careers.
- Present nontraditional programs to students of all genders.
- Provide services and recruitment campaigns that draw students to nontraditional programs but do not take actions that single them out; remember the goal is to establish gender equity as a norm without increasing a student's sense of isolation.

Did You Know?

Traditional methods that foster student's interest in a science, technology, engineering, or mathematics (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 they will develop interest in a career."²

Recruitment Super Strategies | RECOMMENDATIONS

Create marketing materials that promote interest in Nontraditional Field programs but are effective for your target population.

- When using pictures of nontraditional students, show them working - not just watching.
 - ✓ Include pictures with colleagues of another gender working as peers.
 - ✓ Include pictures with individuals in context to reduce stereotypes by displaying elements of their personality or identity that are not work-related (this process can help counter biases like those that claim women in nontraditional jobs lose their femininity or that men working in nontraditional careers are not masculine.)
- For radio and TV advertising, make sure to include nontraditional student voiceover.
- Use gender inclusive language; you are actively seeking students of all genders.
- Include real world settings in promotional videos. Cover topics such as:
 - ✓ What it is like to be a man or woman and work in a gender-dominated field,
 - ✓ Work/life balance,
 - ✓ Support networks, and especially the role of family and peers in providing support. Support is a high priority consideration for women as they consider career options.
- Use press releases to inform the community when you start a recruitment campaign geared toward nontraditional students or offer information sessions.
- Forward press releases to community partners to keep them informed of your effort.
 - ✓ Include material about information sessions and registration dates.
- Do not assume your audience knows what nontraditional fields are; use common language instead of professional terms in promotional materials.
 - ✓ If potential students do not recognize the meaning of the terminology, do not use it in recruitment efforts.
- Create a section of your program's website that has specific information for students interested in nontraditional fields, include testimonials and success stories.
 - ✓ Use this section to share information that enhances understanding of the day-to-day experience of those working in nontraditional fields.
- Include role models in marketing.
- Create a second marketing campaign that highlights the benefits of nontraditional fields relevant to students.
 - ✓ Campaigns should vary depending on the specific target gender.
 - ✓ For women, major considerations are often the opportunity for higher pay and career advancement.
 - ✓ For men, major considerations are often work/life balance and job satisfaction.



Retention Super Strategies | RECOMMENDATIONS

- Stress job security and job availability of nontraditional careers, especially for males from lower socioeconomic backgrounds.
- Include information about expectations of work-life balance.
- Inform students of actual on-the-job activities.
- Inform prospective students about pay rates and potential career progress.
- Prepare female students for the negative aspects of high-status, traditionally male careers including stress, scheduling, and physical demands.
- If lower pay is a concern for male students, balance the discussion of pay with discussion of positive elements that may align with their values.
- Discuss values and social responsibilities related to career goals with male students to better understand the emphasis they place on different elements of career and potentially discover if nontraditional careers may be a better fit for their goals.
- Each student's values are different; don't make assumptions based on gender stereotypes.
- Include members of the target population in the faculty.
- Establish mentoring programs for students in nontraditional field programs that connect them with those working in the field.
- Ensure that mentoring programs fit the educational setting and student need.
- Consider alternate mentoring strategies. Internet-based contacts and connections 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.
- Provide a list of resources or support services including childcare, transportation, or partner organizations that are relevant to nontraditional students.
- Initiate hands-on experiences as early as possible through facility tours.
- Include clubs that increase student engagement or interaction with professional organizations, peer counseling, and groups that involve like-minded peers in programs.
- Train instructors and administrators to plan ahead for issues related to changing rooms or equipment sizes so the issues do not arise during coursework.
- Train academic advisors to understand the relationship between the personal, professional, and cultural situations facing students in nontraditional programs.
- Drive cultural change by spreading awareness of issues related to nontraditional fields.

Sources:

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- ³ Hard Hatted Women. A Toolkit for Recruiting and Retaining Women in Nontraditional Positions. N.p.: Hard Hatted Women, July 2009. PDF. Accessible via <http://www.cewd.org/toolkits/CEWDHhwtoolkit.pdf>.
- ⁴ National Alliance for Partnerships in Equity. Nontraditional Career Preparation Root Causes & Strategies. Cochranville: National Alliance for Partnerships in Equity, 2009. Napequity.org. NAPE. Web.
- ⁵ Quimby, J.L., & DeSantis, A.M. (2006). The Influence of Role Models on Women's Career Choices. Career Development Quarterly, 54(4),297-306.
- ⁶ Strengthening 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>.
- ⁷ West, Monieca. Opening Doors for Nontraditional Students. N.p.: Arkansas Department of Higher Education - Department of Career Education, 3 Apr. 2014. PDF. Accessible via: <http://www.adheperkins.com/resources/Nontrad.pdf>.