

Schools

## Girls Take Over 'Boys' Club' at Lane Tech

Jobs in math and science aren't exclusively for boys. That's the lesson coordinators of Lane Tech's newest club want students to know. They're teaching ladies about bridging the gender gap in the real world.

By Andy Ambrosius, Patch Staff

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A group of high school girls smiling while playing with fish intestines is just one example of what makes the Lane Tech College Prep's GEMS Club unique.

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Girls in Engineering, Math and Science—or GEMS—is one of the school's newest clubs, and it's exploding in popularity. Focused on cultivating high school girls' interest in fields traditionally dominated by men, the group showcases what the ladies are made off, coordinators said.

Christine Gonzales, a teacher in the school's science, technology, engineering and math (STEM) program, says the club started last academic year and since, has already doubled in size. It's all about showing girls that a career in math and science isn't just for the boys, she said.

"You see in the media what kind of professions a girl should go into, and these girls see that constantly, so you can't help start gearing toward that type of field," Gonzales said. "So we're trying to expose them to this kind of thing to nurture their interest ... I mean, last year we had 70 girls, and we literally doubled in one year."

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chemistry club."**

Besides trips and experiments at Chicago's Shedd Aquarium, Gonzales says the club is about teaching the girls how science and math relate to jobs in the "real world." For example, everyone knows what a nurse, teacher and lawyer does, but what exactly does a scientist do?

Gonzales says research shows girls are interested in science and math up until about high school. But that's when things change. While ladies fare well in those subjects, they don't move into those fields professionally. That's why GEMS was created. It's all about bridging the gender gap in science, math and engineering fields by showing girls what real professionals do during the work day.

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“We get women speakers in here so the girls can identify with them,” Gonzales said. “Then they can say, ‘Okay, here’s a woman in a field that I’m interested in. I guess I can do it, too.’ The woman will come in and talk about what she went to school for, what her day-to-day work is like, so they just get that reassurance that they can be that rock star scientist.”

The next step for the GEMS club is to branch outside the walls of Lane Tech and get even more involved with the real world. Gonzales and her co-supervisor Cristen Lain say they not only want to make internships part of college, but a regular component of the GEMS program by setting up relationships with local universities and companies. Gonzales and her co-supervisor Cristen Lain work towards setting up relationships with local universities and companies in order to expose the girls to as many outside opportunities as possible.

“Many girls aren't aware of all of the options available to them," Lain said. "There are colleges and businesses who would love to have intelligent young women learn more about what they do, and Lane has the largest pool of talented students in the city. Christine and I are trying to help make connections that lead to meaningful opportunities for our girls.”

And it’s apparent the Lane Tech students love the program. GEMS President Jacqueline Hardin is helping Lain and Gonzales create an outreach program for local elementary schools.

On top of that, Hardin says the all-girls club has the Lane Tech boys jealous.

“GEMS is a really great club and a terrific way to expose girls to something new,” said Hardin at the Lane Tech Science Fair. “That’s why I joined it ... The boys are definitely jealous, especially my AP chemistry teacher because GEMS is way better than his chemistry club.”



