

SPRINGFIELD

Engineering conference energizes STCC students

Springfield Technical Community College students recently traveled to the largest conference in the world for women in engineering and technology, where they had a chance to share their hopes and dreams with over 14,000 kindred spirits.

"I loved it," said STCC student Aleah Pannell, of Springfield, who is in the Engineering and Science Transfer program and focusing on civil engineering. "I felt very empowered to see all these women - especially in construction, my own field."

Pannell and three other STCC students attended the Society of Women Engineers annual conference in Minneapolis, held in October.

Men continue to outnumber women working in engineering. According to SWE, only 13 percent of professional engineers are women. The annual conference served as a potent reminder that women may be a minority in the engineering field, but they are strong, focused and determined to make their mark. For the STCC students, the conference was a powerful experience.

"I was able to get all these different perspectives that I wouldn't normally get," said Maeliz Colon, of Springfield, one of the STCC students who attended the conference. "There were professionals. There were students who were in their last years of studying. Everyone at STCC is in their first or second year."

Colon, a second-year student at STCC, is in the engineering and science transfer program, focusing on mechanical engineering. But in meeting fellow conference attendees, she was able to think about other possible options when she transfers to a four-year school.

"One woman started off as a mechanical engineer and she eased her way into material science," Colon said. "That gave me something to think about."

In addition to sharing stories with other students, Colon and



From left, STCC students Keiry Marquez, Victoria Vredenburg, Maeliz Colon and Aleah Pannell attend the Society of Women Engineers annual conference in Minneapolis.



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other attendees had a chance to get valuable advice from professionals.

Beth McGinnis-Cavanaugh, a physics and engineering professor and faculty advisor to the SWE chapter at STCC, accompanied the four students to the conference, which drew more than 14,000 professional and collegiate women.

"These young women had a great experience at sessions, workshops and a Career Fair with 60 of the largest engineering and tech companies in the United States," McGinnis-Cavanaugh said. "There, they spoke to recruiters and learned how to position themselves for success in interviews and on internship applications."

The trip was funded in part by the STCC STEM Starter Academy, a state-funded grant initiative that supports and assists science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) students as they work toward graduation from their STEM programs.

McGinnis-Cavanaugh also helped organize the #MySTEMstory networking event for Pioneer Valley women in STEM, which was held at the UMass Center in Springfield a week after the SWE conference. The four community colleges in Western Massachusetts collaborated on the event.

STCC President John B. Cook said the college fully supports efforts to encourage more women to pursue careers in the fields of science, technology, engineering and mathematics.

"As the only technical community college in the state, we feel a big part of our job is to help narrow the gender gap in STEM fields," Cook said. "The SWE conference was a terrific opportunity to inspire our students to keep pursuing their dreams. I'm thrilled they had a chance to connect with students from other institutions and professional women working in the field."