Research & Policy Brief

WOMEN &
LEADERSHIP
Project

Utah Women in STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering & Mathematics)

Utah leaders have set a goal of having 66% of the state's adults earn postsecondary degrees or vocational certificates by the year 2020. The goal is based on data from Georgetown University projecting that to remain competitive, Utah's economy will need 66% of its population to have some form of postsecondary education by 2018.[1] Leaders have identified STEM (science, technology, engineering, and mathematics) and health professions as areas in which there will continue to be a high demand for workers,[2] and these areas will have high priority initially. To underscore the importance of this need, legislators recently approved $10 million[3] to launch an initiative that includes the creation of a STEM Action Center to support a greater emphasis on STEM education and careers in Utah. According to Mark Bouchard, chair of the Prosperity 2020 Initiative, the milestone legislation will bridge private sector and education to build a strong Utah workforce.[4]

It will take both men and women in STEM degrees and jobs to meet the Utah workforce demand that will contribute to a strong economy. A STEM degree *is* an identified pathway to a STEM job.[5] However, the number of women pursuing foundational STEM degrees lags behind men both nationally[6] and within the State of Utah.[7] According to the U.S. Department of Commerce, women hold nearly 50% of all jobs nationally, yet they hold less than 25% in STEM fields.[8]

This brief is intended to inform Utah leaders and other stakeholders (e.g., educators, parents, counselors) about what STEM is and why more should be done to influence girls and women in Utah to pursue postsecondary STEM degrees and certificates. Hence, information about STEM disciplines is followed by the benefits of women in STEM fields. Data about the Utah K–12 STEM pipeline and postsecondary STEM degrees within public colleges and universities are provided. These include Dixie State University, Salt Lake Community College, Snow College, Southern Utah University, University of Utah, Utah State University, Utah Valley University, and Weber State University.

STEM Disciplines

STEM fields traditionally comprise the broad disciplines of science, technology, engineering, and math. However, there is no national consensus as to which professions fit precisely into this category.[9] Various employers include different jobs in their definitions, including conventional fields such as chemists, software developers, mechanical engineers, and statisticians. Others in business and academics incorporate a wider range of professions, such as managers in technical occupations, manufacturing personnel, and architectural designers.[10]

This report uses the Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS) categories: 1) Biological & Biomedical Sciences; 2) Computer, Information Sciences & Support Services; 3) Engineering; 4) Engineering Technologies & Related Fields; 5) Mathematics and Statistics; 6) Physical Sciences, and 7) Science Technicians. State of Utah academic researchers often include two additional categories as well: Agricultural Sciences and Health Professions.

Although there are diverse perspectives on what should be included in STEM disciplines, there appears to be general agreement among Utah leaders, STEM-related professionals, and national economists that there is the need for more people in STEM occupations.[11] Researchers at the Georgetown Public Policy Institute project that the number of STEM jobs in the U.S. will grow by 17% between 2008 and 2018, creating 2.4 million new jobs.[12] They also predict the number of STEM-related jobs in Utah will reach 101,000 by 2018.

Benefits of Women in STEM

There are numerous benefits for Utah women who pursue STEM degrees and careers. First, there are clear economic advantages to being employed in STEM-related fields. Workers in STEM occupations typically earn 26% more than their non-STEM colleagues, even after accounting for demographic factors such as age, race, and gender.[13] STEM workers are also less likely to become unemployed. According to the U.S. Congress Joint Economic Committee, the highest STEM unemployment rate during the recent recession was almost half of the non-STEM unemployment rate (5.5% vs. 10%, respectively).[14] In addition, because technology is dispersed today throughout all types of businesses and industries, STEM-capable workers are needed in all organizations.[15]

Businesses and educational workplaces benefit from having more women employees. A diverse workforce promotes creativity and fosters innovative business solutions.[16] When business teams add people into their ranks with a variety of backgrounds and experiences (e.g., gender, race, and ethnicity), they more closely represent their customer base, are able to understand complex concerns, and frequently produce a wider range of new products and services.[17] Recent studies have also reported companies with women on their boards and in key positions also perform better financially.[18]

K-12 STEM Pipeline

Educators in Utah have recognized the importance of emphasizing STEM education. In fact, the Utah State Office of Education (USOE) recently published a STEM Statement that outlines their commitment to integrating technology through-

out the curriculum and promoting STEM fields to students. They intend to collaborate with higher education and industry personnel to provide foundational skills.[19] Yet, Utah has a history of fewer girls and young women enrolling in advanced STEM-related coursework and earning degrees at the secondary and postsecondary levels. In fact, 2008 IPEDS data show the percentage of Utah females graduating from high school who enroll in STEM postsecondary programs is 19.2%, compared to 31.2% nationally.[20]

To understand why Utah women are lagging behind men in STEM degrees, it is important to understand how elementary-age girls perform in math and science. There is evidence to demonstrate that if children lack proficiency early on, their future STEM options may indeed be restricted.[21] One measurement of student achievement in the U.S. is through the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP). Current STEM areas that are assessed include mathematics and science, and in 2014 technology and engineering literacy will be added.[22] Table 1 includes Utah data for 4th and 8th grades and identifies proficiency gaps.

Table 1: National Assessment of Educational Progress for Proficiency in Utah

MATHEMATICS		
	At or Above Proficient	Proficiency Gap for Females
4th Grade Males 2011	46%	
4th Grade Females 2011	40%	(-6%)
8th Grade Males 2011	37%	
8th Grade Females 2011	33%	(-4%)
SCIENCE		
4th Grade Males 2009*	39%	
4th Grade Females 2009*	36%	(-3%)
8th Grade Males 2011	47%	
8th Grade Females 2011	38%	(-9%)

Source: U.S. Department of Education. *2011 State Snapshot Report.* Retrieved from National Center for Education Statistics: http://nces.ed.gov/nationsreportcard/states/; * 2011 science assessment was administered at grade 8 only.

NAEP data show that Utah males outperformed females in every proficiency level in 4th grade and 8th grade for math and science. The largest gender gap is in 8th grade science, where males led females by 9 percentage points. The most recent ACT Profile Report for Utah, Graduating Class 2012, shows parallels. The percentage of Utah females meeting college readiness benchmark scores was 37% for math (versus 43% for males) and 25% for science (versus 33% for males).[23] Both males and females rank only 2 percentage points behind their national peers in science. However, there are larger gaps in mathematics readiness. Utah males rank 43% vs. 50% nationally; Utah women rank 37% vs. 42% nationally.

Cultural and social factors lead to negative stereotypes that affect academic choices and performance levels for girls as early as elementary school. Incorrect assumptions include beliefs that boys are better in math and more suited to scien-

tific work.[24] In addition, girls frequently receive less encouragement, have fewer role models, and believe they will appear "geeky" if they like math and science. The biggest misconception may be that young women often believe they do not have the innate ability to succeed.[25] When young women do decide to enter STEM programs, they often lack confidence and feel intimidated in male-dominated courses.[26] To counter such damaging beliefs, researchers suggest that girls and young women have more female role models and mentors, develop spatial skills, and understand that math and science abilities grow over time. In fact, parents, counselors, and teachers should encourage *all* high school students to enroll in higher math and technical classes.[27]

Postsecondary STEM Degrees

In order to design effective initiatives to increase the number and proportion of females enrolling in STEM degree and certificate programs within the state, it is important to know the percentages of females graduating in these fields. The Appendix includes a detailed snapshot of all 2012 STEM degrees earned by award level and USHE institution. Women are significantly behind men in graduation rates in all but two of nine STEM categories. In this section we will first review the areas with the highest graduation rates for women. We will conclude with a review of all other STEM fields.

In Utah, women have relatively high completion rates in agricultural sciences and health professions (see Table 2). Of the 3,471 health professions graduates in 2012, 652 received awards of "less than 1 academic year," and 181 received awards of "at least 1 but less than 2 academic years," comprising 24% of all degree types for this category. This is a good start and will help Utah meet its big goal of having 66% of adult residents with a certificate or higher degree by 2020. In addition, the need for healthcare professionals is projected to grow quickly in the nation through 2018. Utah will see an increased need for personal care aides, home health aides, and registered nurses at least through 2020.[28]

Table 2: Percentage of Utah Women with Agricultural Sciences and Health Professions Certificates and Degrees in USHE Colleges and Universities

	2008		2012	
	Total Number	% of Total	Total Number	% of Total
Agricultural Sciences	63	41%	81	44%
Health Professions	2,781	72%	3,471	73%
Total	**2,844**	**57%**	**3,552**	**59%**

Source: IPEDS Completions Survey Data for Certificates and Degrees Awarded in STEM and Health Related Areas of Study, Utah Colleges and Universities.

It is important to note, however, that educational requirements are expected to increase for healthcare workers. By the end of this decade, approximately 192,000 healthcare workers nationally will need "some college but no degree," whereas at least 681,000 will need a minimum of an associate's degree.[29]

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Recent employment data for Utah's metropolitan region show that 23.5% of Registered Nurse openings required a bachelor's degree.[30] Based on these trends found in the workforce literature, high-paying healthcare jobs may likely require a higher level of education.

When agricultural sciences and health professions are not included, a different picture emerges. Women trail men significantly in every category. Table 3 reveals that the largest differences are among high-paying computer and engineering fields, where women make up less than 12% of graduates. This reflects Utah employment data that show males comprise 83% of the labor force in science, engineering, and computer fields.[31]

There were increases in the percentages of women in all STEM programs between 2008 and 2012, with the largest increases of 4% over the five-year period in the fields of Math and Statistics as well as Science Technicians. Agricultural Sciences and Health Professions showed an overall growth rate of 2%, and STEM showed an overall growth rate of 1%, as shown in Table 2. Although these are encouraging trends, it is clear that Utah will need the help of multiple stakeholders (e.g., educators, parents, counselors, business leaders, community members) to strengthen both the K–12 and postsecondary pipelines so more women enroll in and graduate from STEM programs.

Table 3: Percentages of Utah Women with STEM Certificates and Degrees for 2008 and 2012 in USHE Colleges and Universities

	2008		2012	
	Total Number	% of Total	Total Number	% of Total
Biological/Biomedical	200	35%	234	38%
Computer/Info. Sciences	68	12%	96	13%
Engineering	112	11%	129	12%
Engineering Tech.	27	10%	34	11%
Math & Statistics	43	32%	57	36%
Physical Sciences	105	30%	114	33%
Science Technicians	12	35%	13	39%
Total	**567**	**19%**	**677**	**20%**

Source: IPEDS Completions Survey Data for Certificates and Degrees Awarded in STEM and Health Related Areas of Study, Utah Colleges and Universities.

Conclusion

The number of STEM-related jobs in Utah will continue to grow throughout the decade. To meet the growing demand for STEM talent, women will need to have greater representation in the workforce. While women have progressed in a number of STEM fields, they lag behind in many of the top-paying, in-demand positions, such as engineers and computer scientists. There is a great need for girls and young women to receive encouragement and mentoring in their academic pursuits that encompasses both personal and professional communities. A proven pathway to entering a STEM degree is to

develop spatial skills early and complete higher math and science courses.

Utah women have made some progress in obtaining STEM-related degrees, and state leaders have recognized the importance of this issue through support of state-level STEM initiatives. Even so, there is a need to aggressively focus efforts on increasing the enrollment and completion rates for both women and men in these fields. Young girls and women need to understand that entering STEM-degree programs is both feasible and worthwhile. It can contribute to professional and personal success. Ultimately, it will help produce the college-educated workforce that is critical to Utah's competitiveness and reputation as a great place to live.

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[10] Ibid.

[11] Ibid.

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[14] Ibid.

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[25] Ibid.

[26] Coger, Robin N. (2012, October 29). Why STEM fields still don't draw more women. *The Chronicle of Higher Education.* Retrieved from https://chronicle.com/article/Massive-Excitement-About/135302/

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APPENDIX
2012 STEM Degree Award Levels for USHE Institutions

Note: The following information was obtained from the Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS) by Joe Curtin, Director of Institutional Research and Analysis for the Utah Office of the Commissioner of Higher Education.

Dixie State College of Utah	# Men	% Men	# Women	% Women	Award Level
Computer & Info Sciences & Support Svcs	10	56%	8	44%	Less than 1 academic year
Health Professions and Related Programs	121	32%	257	68%	Less than 1 academic year
Health Professions and Related Programs	12	55%	10	45%	At least 1 but less than 2 years
Engineering	2	100%	0	0%	Associate's degree
Health Professions and Related Programs	47	32%	101	68%	Associate's degree
Biological and Biomedical Sciences	12	86%	2	14%	Bachelor's degree
Computer & Info Sciences & Support Svcs	24	67%	12	33%	Bachelor's degree
Health Professions and Related Programs	4	7%	54	93%	Bachelor's degree
Mathematics and Statistics	3	60%	2	40%	Bachelor's degree
Total	**235**	**35%**	**446**	**65%**	
Salt Lake Community College	**# Men**	**% Men**	**# Women**	**% Women**	**Award Level**
Computer & Info Sciences & Support Svcs	21	84%	4	16%	Less than 1 academic year
Health Professions and Related Programs	39	17%	190	83%	Less than 1 academic year
Biological and Biomedical Sciences	0	0%	3	100%	At least 1 but less than 2 years
Computer & Info Sciences & Support Svcs	13	81%	3	19%	At least 1 but less than 2 years
Engineering Tech & Eng-related Fields	12	100%	0	0%	At least 1 but less than 2 years
Health Professions and Related Programs	15	13%	98	87%	At least 1 but less than 2 years
Biological and Biomedical Sciences	9	60%	6	40%	Associate's degree
Computer & Info Sciences & Support Svcs	42	84%	8	16%	Associate's degree
Engineering	42	98%	1	2%	Associate's degree
Engineering Tech & Eng-related Fields	76	86%	12	14%	Associate's degree
Health Professions and Related Programs	70	18%	321	82%	Associate's degree
Mathematics and Statistics	5	71%	2	29%	Associate's degree
Physical Sciences	10	63%	6	38%	Associate's degree
Science Technologies/Technicians	13	65%	7	35%	Associate's degree
Total	**367**	**36%**	**661**	**64%**	
Snow College	**# Men**	**% Men**	**# Women**	**% Women**	**Award Level**
Health Professions and Related Programs	37	17%	185	83%	Less than 1 academic year
Health Professions and Related Programs	7	19%	29	81%	At least 1 but less than 2 years
Agriculture- Agriculture Operations	1	20%	4	80%	Associate's degree
Biological and Biomedical Sciences	3	33%	6	67%	Associate's degree
Computer & Info Sciences & Support Svcs	12	92%	1	8%	Associate's degree
Engineering	20	83%	4	17%	Associate's degree
Engineering Tech & Eng-related Fields	4	80%	1	20%	Associate's degree
Health Professions and Related Programs	30	29%	72	71%	Associate's degree
Mathematics and Statistics	0	0%	2	100%	Associate's degree
Physical Sciences	1	25%	3	75%	Associate's degree
Total	**115**	**27%**	**307**	**73%**	
Southern Utah University	**# Men**	**% Men**	**# Women**	**% Women**	**Award Level**
Engineering Tech & Eng-related Fields	2	50%	2	50%	Less than 1 academic year
Agriculture- Agriculture Operations	0	0%	2	100%	At least 1 but less than 2 years

	# Men	% Men	# Women	% Women	Award Level
Agriculture- Agriculture Operations	1	25%	3	75%	Associate's degree
Computer & Info Sciences & Support Svcs	2	67%	1	33%	Associate's degree
Engineering	1	100%	0	0%	Associate's degree
Engineering Tech & Eng-related Fields	3	60%	2	40%	Associate's degree
Agriculture- Agriculture Operations	1	100%	0	0%	Bachelor's degree
Agriculture- Agriculture Operations	15	79%	4	21%	Bachelor's degree
Biological and Biomedical Sciences	1	100%	0	0%	Bachelor's degree
Biological and Biomedical Sciences	38	64%	21	36%	Bachelor's degree
Computer & Info Sciences & Support Svcs	14	93%	1	7%	Bachelor's degree
Engineering	2	67%	1	33%	Bachelor's degree
Engineering Tech & Eng-related Fields	17	77%	5	23%	Bachelor's degree
Health Professions and Related Programs	26	33%	52	67%	Bachelor's degree
Mathematics and Statistics	4	80%	1	20%	Bachelor's degree
Physical Sciences	0	0%	1	100%	Bachelor's degree
Physical Sciences	9	60%	6	40%	Bachelor's degree
Total	**136**	**57%**	**102**	**43%**	
University of Utah	**# Men**	**% Men**	**# Women**	**% Women**	**Award Level**
Biological and Biomedical Sciences	101	58%	74	42%	Bachelor's degree
Computer & Info Sciences & Support Svcs	76	97%	2	3%	Bachelor's degree
Engineering	342	90%	38	10%	Bachelor's degree
Health Professions and Related Programs	94	25%	281	75%	Bachelor's degree
Mathematics and Statistics	43	72%	17	28%	Bachelor's degree
Physical Sciences	78	63%	46	37%	Bachelor's degree
Health Professions and Related Programs	1	17%	5	83%	Postbaccalaureate certificate
Biological and Biomedical Sciences	9	56%	7	44%	Master's degree
Computer & Info Sciences & Support Svcs	42	88%	6	13%	Master's degree
Engineering	140	86%	22	14%	Master's degree
Health Professions and Related Programs	87	38%	139	62%	Master's degree
Mathematics and Statistics	11	69%	5	31%	Master's degree
Physical Sciences	34	60%	23	40%	Master's degree
Engineering	1	50%	1	50%	Post-master's certificate
Health Professions and Related Programs	5	26%	14	74%	Post-master's certificate
Health Professions and Related Programs	129	52%	120	48%	Doctor's degree
Biological and Biomedical Sciences	24	55%	20	45%	Doctor's degree
Computer & Info Sciences & Support Svcs	14	93%	1	7%	Doctor's degree
Engineering	55	82%	12	18%	Doctor's degree
Health Professions and Related Programs	20	50%	20	50%	Doctor's degree
Mathematics and Statistics	6	60%	4	40%	Doctor's degree
Physical Sciences	29	74%	10	26%	Doctor's degree
Total	**1,341**	**61%**	**867**	**39%**	
Utah State University	**# Men**	**% Men**	**# Women**	**% Women**	**Award Level**
Agriculture- Agriculture Operations	8	50%	8	50%	At least 1 but less than 2 years
Engineering Tech & Eng-related Fields	2	100%	0	0%	At least 1 but less than 2 years
Health Professions and Related Programs	9	18%	42	82%	At least 1 but less than 2 years
Agriculture- Agriculture Operations	13	65%	7	35%	Associate's degree
Biological and Biomedical Sciences	1	100%	0	0%	Associate's degree
Engineering	15	100%	0	0%	Associate's degree
Health Professions and Related Programs	17	31%	37	69%	Associate's degree

	# Men	% Men	# Women	% Women	Award Level
Physical Sciences	0	0%	1	100%	Associate's degree
Agriculture- Agriculture Operations	53	59%	37	41%	Bachelor's degree
Biological and Biomedical Sciences	73	68%	34	32%	Bachelor's degree
Computer & Info Sciences & Support Svcs	72	95%	4	5%	Bachelor's degree
Engineering	179	85%	31	15%	Bachelor's degree
Health Professions and Related Programs	45	14%	273	86%	Bachelor's degree
Mathematics and Statistics	11	61%	7	39%	Bachelor's degree
Physical Sciences	23	82%	5	18%	Bachelor's degree
Agriculture- Agriculture Operations	9	43%	12	57%	Master's degree
Biological and Biomedical Sciences	10	50%	10	50%	Master's degree
Computer & Info Sciences & Support Svcs	47	80%	12	20%	Master's degree
Engineering	89	88%	12	12%	Master's degree
Health Professions and Related Programs	20	30%	46	70%	Master's degree
Mathematics and Statistics	4	40%	6	60%	Master's degree
Physical Sciences	6	67%	3	33%	Master's degree
Health Professions and Related Programs	3	60%	2	40%	Doctor's degree
Agriculture- Agriculture Operations	2	33%	4	67%	Doctor's degree
Biological and Biomedical Sciences	6	60%	4	40%	Doctor's degree
Computer & Info Sciences & Support Svcs	3	75%	1	25%	Doctor's degree
Engineering	14	82%	3	18%	Doctor's degree
Mathematics and Statistics	1	100%	0	0%	Doctor's degree
Physical Sciences	1	25%	3	75%	Doctor's degree
Total	**736**	**55%**	**604**	**45%**	
Utah Valley University	**# Men**	**% Men**	**# Women**	**% Women**	**Award Level**
Computer & Info Sciences & Support Svcs	1	100%	0	0%	At least 1 but less than 2 years
Health Professions and Related Programs	20	91%	2	9%	At least 1 but less than 2 years
Biological and Biomedical Sciences	4	67%	2	33%	Associate's degree
Computer & Info Sciences & Support Svcs	19	90%	2	10%	Associate's degree
Engineering	21	91%	2	9%	Associate's degree
Engineering Tech & Eng-related Fields	56	95%	3	5%	Associate's degree
Health Professions and Related Programs	24	20%	98	80%	Associate's degree
Mathematics and Statistics	5	50%	5	50%	Associate's degree
Biological and Biomedical Sciences	56	68%	26	32%	Bachelor's degree
Computer & Info Sciences & Support Svcs	114	85%	20	15%	Bachelor's degree
Engineering	8	100%	0	0%	Bachelor's degree
Health Professions and Related Programs	34	20%	136	80%	Bachelor's degree
Mathematics and Statistics	7	70%	3	30%	Bachelor's degree
Physical Sciences	22	85%	4	15%	Bachelor's degree
Health Professions and Related Programs	1	33%	2	67%	Master's degree
Total	**392**	**56%**	**305**	**44%**	
Weber State University	**# Men**	**% Men**	**# Women**	**% Women**	**Award Level**
Computer & Info Sciences & Support Svcs	2	100%	0	0%	Less than 1 academic year
Health Professions and Related Programs	21	51%	20	49%	Less than 1 academic year
Computer & Info Sciences & Support Svcs	58	89%	7	11%	Associate's degree
Engineering	17	94%	1	6%	Associate's degree
Engineering Tech & Eng-related Fields	32	94%	2	6%	Associate's degree
Health Professions and Related Programs	162	25%	482	75%	Associate's degree
Science Technologies/Technicians	7	54%	6	46%	Associate's degree
Biological and Biomedical Sciences	31	62%	19	38%	Bachelor's degree

Computer & Info Sciences & Support Svcs	89	97%	3	3%	Bachelor's degree
Engineering	7	88%	1	13%	Bachelor's degree
Engineering Tech & Eng-related Fields	84	92%	7	8%	Bachelor's degree
Health Professions and Related Programs	154	31%	339	69%	Bachelor's degree
Mathematics and Statistics	3	50%	3	50%	Bachelor's degree
Physical Sciences	15	83%	3	17%	Bachelor's degree
Health Professions and Related Programs	42	49%	44	51%	Master's degree
Total	**724**	**44%**	**937**	**56%**	