

The Journey to Gender Diversity

Being a female in society has never been easy, yet my dream of working in a STEM



2018 BVHS Robotics Club Photo

career has made it even more difficult. I joined robotics in middle school, seventh grade to be exact. Going to a small school it was normal to only have five members in a club, but being the only girl in the club surprised me. I always wondered why no other

girls were interested in robotics, but then it hit me. It was the stigma of women in STEM that kept them from joining the club. For four years I was the only female in the middle and high school robotics club. Within the club, I was not viewed as an equal even though I was the most experienced. People would go to inexperienced members over me for help. My expertise was not recognized, rather my gender, which society declared was incapable of STEM activities. I tried my hardest not to let these factors get to me, but in one comment I was broken.

My sophomore year we participated in the last VEX state qualifying competition. The day started in a panic as our robot was on the verge of failing inspection due to programming issues. As team captain, it was my responsibility to get our robot working. I began to think of solutions, then I remembered that one of my middle school mentors was the club advisor for Hilltop's robotics team. Using my connections I managed to get help from my mentor, the robot fixed and through inspection. The competition proceeded normally and it came time for the state qualifying rounds. We had



2019 BVHS Team 751A Photo

to make alliance selections, which were crucial for making state. As our team went to sit in the audience the district robotics coordinator required one representative from each team to sit in the

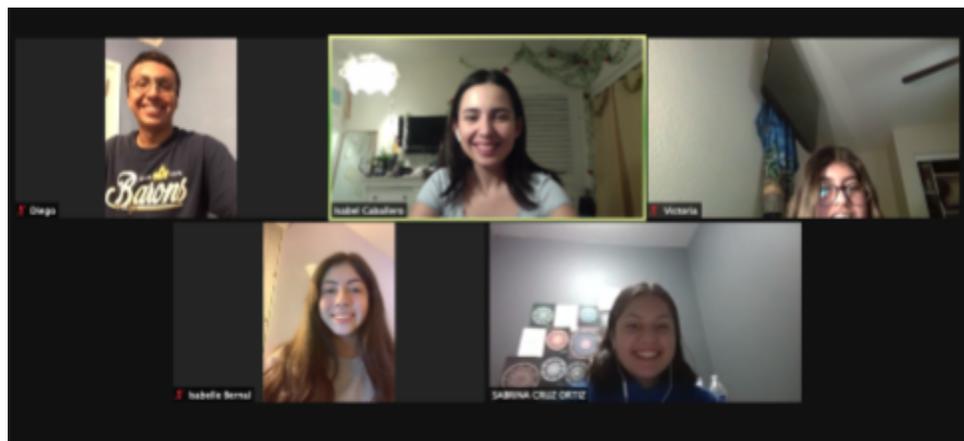


2020 BVHS Team 751B Photo

front row. I sent a fellow representative and went to sit with the rest of our team. Shortly after I sat down the district coordinator was talking to the audience, then looked at me and asked if I was representing my team. I responded saying there was already someone down there. He proceeded to tell me that “sex sells you know”. I was left embarrassed and broken from that comment. Such a sexist and harassful comment to tell a girl, the girl from the only school at the competition with a single

female in the whole club. He overlooked my position as team captain to insult my self worth through my gender. My team went on to make it to quarterfinals, but that comment drove me to where I am now. I pushed myself not to be defined by my gender and became team captain and club president. In obtaining these leadership roles not only have I redefined what it means to be a woman in STEM but have reshaped the club to become more inclusive and reliant on the diversity of genders and perspectives.

In the past couple of years our club has come to be more diverse in terms of gender. At first, as mentioned before, our club was composed of a single female however, we have



2020 BVHS Team 751A Photo

had an increase of over 500% in the number of female participants in the club. With a more diverse club our team work improved and so did our club dynamics and a balance in gender allowed for the club to become more united. In the past with men dominating the club there were high levels of competitiveness that built up over the years. Such tension between the teams caused rivalries to form and ultimately led to a divided club filled with resentment. However,



2019 BVHS Team 751B Photo

with the rise of myself as President and the formation of a female dominated team, the rivalries ceased significantly and tension diminished. Although the pandemic has proposed the club with its most challenging conditions, with the new female team and female leadership of myself, as a club we

have witnessed not only greater success than previous years, but especially improved cooperation between all three teams, reunited under my leadership. The inclusion of women in our club has proven to be a major improvement as women have been able to diminish resentment and rivalry between the club, as well as bring together tension filled teams to unite together and problem solve through the toughest times the Bonita Vista High School Robotics Club has ever seen. It is clear that women simply uplift society and in this case the female inclusion in our club uplifted and improved the club.

Credits:

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