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STEM
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Spotlight

INDUSTRY TOUCHPOINT

Elevating STEM Equity: JetBlue Prepares for Departure from Industry Status Quo



(Photo by Utah STEM Action Center)

Utah STEM Action Center Director Tami Goetz, PhD, (left) and JetBlue Captain Becky Roman-Amador addressed the JetBlue Women in Flight group about increasing diversity in STEM careers at the airline's Utah offices on May 28, 2019.

Championing diversity in aviation » For decades, the airline industry has been dominated by men, with scant representation from ethnic minorities.

Drawing from census information, 92.3% of aircraft pilots and flight engineers in the U.S. are white, and 93% are male, reports Data USA. There are studies that show female and minority representation has improved in the past two decades, but the industry's rapid growth translates to a high demand for talent to fill these and other airline jobs.

Enter JetBlue, which is actively promoting awareness and engagement among females and ethnic minorities through targeted JetBlue Foundation initiatives in Utah and beyond. One such effort is the paradigm-shifting airline's "Fly Like a Girl" event, which departed its New York City origins for the first time in 2018 to bring the event to Utah. More than 100 Utah girls, ages 8 to 14, joined female JetBlue leaders, pilots, technicians, and inflight and ground crews for an insider's view of the aviation industry in an afternoon of hands-on engagement activities at Atlantic Aviation. The highlight came when the hangar doors were pulled back to reveal a JetBlue Airbus 320, its entryway open with smiling JetBlue pilots, inflight members, and technicians



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— all women — lining the stairs. Girls boarded the plane, toured the flight deck, talked with the pilots about their work, learned from inflight crewmembers what goes into flight preparations such as food service and snacks, and tech ops showed them the engine and explained the mechanics involved in its engineering and maintenance, from construction to everyday upkeep.

“As a young girl, all I wanted to do was become a pilot,” said JetBlue Captain Becky Roman-Amador during a recent Women In Flight discussion at JetBlue’s Utah offices. “My father was an aircraft mechanic so I was always around airplanes.”

Captain Roman-Amador’s path to becoming a pilot wasn’t as clear-cut as she’d hoped it would be. When she told her parents she wanted to pursue aviation upon finishing high school, they balked.

“My parents didn’t think there was any money in flying planes,” Captain Roman-Amador explains. They encouraged her toward engineering, where she excelled to a position in which she was leading a

group of male engineers, many of them white and older than she was. “The pay was great, but I was miserable. I quit my job and began flight school, which shocked my parents. My mom thought I’d gone crazy.”

Captain Roman-Amador’s path led her to final stretch of obtaining a pilot’s license – at which point she was called to serve active duty for the military in the Middle East. Despite the delays she endured in realizing her dream of becoming a commercial airline pilot, she never stopped believing.

“I do everything I can to show women and young girls that pursuing a non-traditional career is possible for them,” Captain Roman-Amador explained.

Utah STEM Action Center Director Tami Goetz, PhD, also addressed the Women in Flight audience, advising parents on engaging and sustaining their daughters’ interests in science, technology, engineering, and math.



(Photo courtesy of Deseret News)

More than 100 Utah girls participated in JetBlue’s Salt Lake City “Fly Like a Girl” event in September 2018. An all-female crew gave the participants an insider’s look at aviation jobs, complete with hands-on experiences.

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— BECKY ROMAN-AMADOR
JETBLUE CAPTAIN

“A great starting point is the stem.utah.gov website, where there are several resources, including listings of afterschool and summertime programs throughout the state,” said Dr. Goetz. “We need to increase the number of women role models

and really examine our micro- and macro-messaging around STEM pursuits. What we’re facing in the disparity is impacting our innovation, creativity potential and competitiveness.”

Ultimately, increasing any child’s likelihood of STEM engagement comes through providing hands-on, real-life opportunities, encouraging words, and above all, role models.

“It’s so important to be the example that inspires young girls to pursue aviation dreams, especially among minority populations,” Captain Roman-Amador emphasized. “If I could live out my dream, so can they. When I wear my uniform, I wear it as proudly as I can – because when young girls see someone who looks like them, they believe.”

Many thanks to the JetBlue team, Women in Flight group, and Captain Becky Roman-Amador.



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