

ACCESS

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3 thoughts on career paths from women STEM leaders

On March 4, Ingenuity Project gathered students and local leaders to discuss how they turned STEM interests into jobs, and found support along the way.



By [Stephen Babcock](#) / STAFF



Leaders speak to Ingenuity Project students at Brown Advisory.

(Photo by Stephen Babcock)



This **editorial article** is a part of **Technical.ly's Gender Equity in Tech Month** of our **editorial calendar**.

An interest in fields like science, technology, engineering and math can open up opportunities. To figure out where to land, there's plenty of help available along the way.

On March 4 at **Brown Advisory** in Fells Point, **Ingenuity Project** gathered young women who are interested in these fields to meet professionals who had their own stories and serve as mentors.

Ingenuity Project oversees an advanced curriculum in math, science and research for more than 700 local students, and the event offered a chance for girls enrolled in the program at **Baltimore Polytechnic Institute** to network and learn from leaders in these fields.

The event included a panel discussion, which revealed three key lessons on career paths:

Find your passion. A career will follow.

Dr. Claire Hur, an assistant professor in the **Department of Mechanical Engineering** at **Johns Hopkins University**, is guided by a mission to help people through engineering. That's taken different forms, from building aircraft to a current biomedical work.

But along the way, she was guided by a central goal that served as a guide.

"I still use my engineering skills to try to help people, so my goal is still the same, but how I get there is slightly different," she said.

For **Dr. Megan Olsen**, a professor of computer science at **Loyola University Maryland** and director of the North Baltimore institution's **CPaMS Scholars Program**, defining her interest in computer science came later. She taught herself to build webpages with HTML. It was only when she took a course in high school that she learned there was a field behind this work — one that she ended up majoring in college.

“That helped me realize I was passionate about computer science,” she said. “I liked programming. I liked the algorithmic thinking — thinking through problems and designing solutions.”

Try things out.

Often, the beginning of a journey doesn't lead to where one thinks they'll end up. When it comes to careers, that's OK. Many of the panelists told stories about how they explored different paths before ending up at their current profession.

“You don't have to know what you want to do from the beginning,” said **Ebony Larry**, who now works as a project engineer at **George, Miles and Buhr, LLC**. She said experience in the Ingenuity Project helped her get exposed to new ideas. It was an industry mentor who stayed in touch that helped awaken her passion.

“Finding out what you dislike might be really helpful to finding what you really enjoy,” she said.

Even when choosing an area, there can be things one doesn't like. Dr. Winstead offered the example of required courses in college that might not be one's favorite, but are necessary learning to enter a field. Being prepared to push through struggles can help.

It's a mindset: “I've just got to push through to get where I want to go.,” Dr. Winstead said.

In each challenge, there's opportunity to learn.

“Stay the course. You have everything you need to be successful,” said **Dr. Dawnielle Farrar-Gaines**, a senior electrical and materials engineer at Johns Hopkins' **Applied Physics Lab**.

Educating and mentoring others is a path in itself.

Dr. Jacky M. Jennings, an associate professor in the **Department of Pediatrics** in the **Johns Hopkins School of Medicine**, said finding people with a similar passion in social justice helped her along the way.

For **Dr. Angela Winstead**, the chair of the chemistry department at **Morgan State University** and a professor, found mentors at different points in her career.

“The person doesn’t have to be there just for that period,” she said. “You can have different people to support you in different ways.”

In fact Winstead, found that working with students was a calling in itself. Growing a love of organic chemistry, she said it was being a mentor for a student that changed her life.

Now she has a mission to help people find opportunity, no matter their background, and a message: “Find what you love and don’t let anyone stop you.”