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# Women of Color in Humanities a hidden tech talent pool

## SUMMARY

Tech leaders often report that hundreds of thousands of high quality jobs go unfulfilled in the U.S. due to talent shortages, especially among women of color (WOC). Although women of color and their talents are consistently overlooked in science and technology industries, underrepresentation may make it challenging to recruit significant numbers of minority women from traditional STEM majors. Casting a wider recruiting net may be the key to unlocking an untapped talent pool. Incorporating the perspectives of WOC humanities majors can assist the tech industry with designing systems and tools for racially, linguistically, and culturally diverse users while also addressing disparities and broadening opportunities for underrepresented communities to enter the field.

As a result of this pilot, an undergraduate major in **User-Experience** was developed and approved in the English Department at **The University of Texas at El Paso**.

## INTRODUCTION

A recent pilot study demonstrated how WOC in humanities can use their perspectives, experiences, and backgrounds to support the development of more localized, user-centered technologies. Provided with collaborative networking and mentorship opportunities, the fellows gained skills and insight into the principles of User-Centered Design (UCD) and the field of User Experience (UX). Having no formal training in technology prior to joining the study, in just one year the participants were able to design and present research projects in User Experience (UX) to industry professionals. Participating in weekly mentor meetings and workshops throughout the pilot enhanced the women's self-efficacy, as they all reported feeling capable of working alongside tech professionals. However, the participants also noted real and perceived barriers to gaining entry into tech careers.

**With new skills and confidence, study fellows have begun mentoring other students from marginalized backgrounds interested in UCD/UX.**

**All four women in the pilot study successfully completed research projects and sought employment in tech-related jobs.**

## Fellows' Concerns

- Linguistic and racial backgrounds
- Visa status
- Lack of formal training in technology
- Template language on tech job applications too narrow

A second phase of this study is being designed to extend the impact of the pilot and address some of the concerns expressed by phase one participants. In the interim, study authors **invite tech leaders to:**

- **Consider the way job postings** may discourage non-traditional, yet qualified candidates from applying for positions and work with HR to incorporate more inclusive language centered around skills and experience, rather than disciplinary background or training.
- **Make visa requirements** and sponsorship opportunities explicit on job postings
- **Consider recruiting women of color** from humanities programs and other relevant, non-STEM majors for positions in UX and UCD.
- **Partner with innovative colleges or departments** to bolster support for programs that extend tech opportunities to women of color and other underrepresented students while also leveraging their unique perspectives and experiences.