



STEMS TO BRANCHES

*Achieving Sustainable Wellness for Young
Women, Femmes, & Non-Binary Youth
of Color*



Stems to Branches:
A Summit Achieving Sustainable Wellness for
Young Women, Femmes, and Non-Binary
Youth of Color
Marleny Nuñez

SCHEDULE

9:30am - 10:30am

BREAKFAST & SETTING INTENTIONS

10:30am - 11:00am

INTRODUCTION & ICEBREAKER

11:00am - 12:30pm

OVERCOMING THE IMPOSTER SYNDROME

12:30pm - 1:30pm

LUNCH & DYADS

1:30pm - 3:00pm

PANEL: BRANDEIS POC in S.T.E.M.

10 MIN BREAK

3:10pm - 4:10pm

VISION BOARDS & MANIFESTATION

4:10pm - 4:40pm

**KEYNOTE SPEAKER : IVY WATTS
ON ACHIEVING SUSTAINABLE WELLNESS**

4:40pm - 5:00pm

CLOSING



Brandeis

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Brief Summary

The primary objective of this all-day event on Saturday, May 11th, 2019 is to honor and celebrate the intersecting identities of young women, femmes, and non-binary youth of color interested in pursuing S.T.E.M. (Science, Technology, Engineering, Math). The event is not limited to students of color in S.T.E.M. but it encouraged. This event will engage local high school juniors and seniors of color in Waltham in conversations surrounding holistic wellness, mental health, and transitioning into college and/or post-high school opportunities. Throughout this summit, we will be holding space for these students to inquire about obstacles, challenges, and successes they may encounter throughout considering post-secondary opportunities, especially when entering Predominantly-White Institutions.

Stems to Branches is:

- Fostering a space to prevent feelings of isolation, depression, & anxiety amongst students of color pursuing higher education within predominantly white spaces**
- Bringing awareness on the challenges of transitioning into post-secondary opportunities as people of color and first- generation students.**
- Increasingvisibility of women, femmes, and non-binary people of color pursuing S.T.E.M. related careers**
- Engaging in self-care/ healing as a community.**
- Allowing participants to feel more capable of resilience in the face of challenges.**

Why STEMs to Branches?

Going out of state to a private university was not a common path, not for my family at least, and not for the community in which I live either. As I was packing up to go home after my first year at Brandeis University, my sister called me to check-in, and discuss my experience through my first year attending college. Before I was able to offer an honest reflection, she expressed how proud of me she was, for following my dreams and, from her perspective, excelling. She said that for me to get to where I am, with little concrete academic or financial support from my family, was admirable. Hearing these words from my sister, while true in her eyes, were almost unbelievable to me. To my sister, my going to Brandeis University as a Posse scholar, with a full-tuition scholarship, was a great accomplishment in itself. For me, however, I found myself always comparing myself to students, often privileged, who took the same classes as I did, did the bare minimum, and excelled beyond compare. Meanwhile, I had struggled both academically and socially, to the point of developing increased levels of anxiety and depression. This, subsequently, discouraged me from believing that I could actually make it as a doctor, or even as a student at Brandeis.

As a queer woman of color who intends to pursue a career within STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, Mathematics) in a Predominantly White Institution, my journey at Brandeis, thus far, has not been an easy one. In my first year, I realized what an isolating experience going away for college would be, especially when your culture and upbringing is very different from those around you. Being a minority in multiple aspects of my identity, was enough to increase my anxiety. Pursuing a pre-medical track and seeing very few women of color in my field, was disheartening, to say the least. Most, if not all, STEM classes are large lectures or laboratory classes, therefore, making them difficult for students to really interact or build a community amongst each other. It is often difficult for the professors to develop a one-on-one relationships -given class sizes- in ways that I have experienced in several of my humanities classes. This promotes a competitive nature amongst students with STEM majors. I learned not to expect students, let alone professors, to go out of their way to offer their support or check- in with each other. It felt like I seeing natural selection happen right before my eyes: every individual for themselves, survival guaranteed for only the fittest.

It wasn't until I left Brandeis over the summer and returned home that I was able to use my culture, friends, and community as a form of healing. This is when I acknowledged the importance of sharing experiences, building, and strengthening the community amongst women of color, especially in spaces where there are so few of us. I identified a need and decided I had to do something about it.

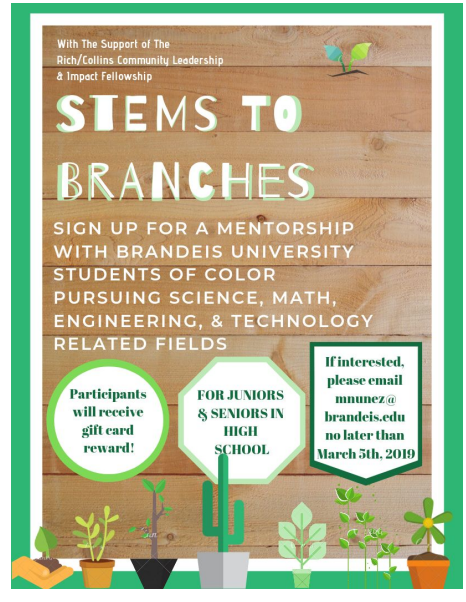
In the summer of 2017, I applied for and was awarded with, Sadie Nash Leadership Project's ELLA Fellowship to create a project addressing a need in my community, alongside a cohort of young women & femmes. I created Stems to Branches as an initiative aiming to strengthen the community of women of color within the S.T.E.M. field (Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics) at Brandeis University. Stems to Branches would explore the history of resilience of people of color within S.T.E.M., cultivate a healing space to share decolonized methods of achieving wellness, and work towards destigmatizing mental health within communities of color. One of the main goals for this collective was to bring visibility to women of color on Brandeis' campus so that future generations can avoid this feeling of isolation in a Predominantly White Institution.

After holding a series of six workshops involving mental health, history, and community- building, I learned that women of color at this university are in desperate need of the proper resources and support system to build community, achieve holistic wellness, and succeed academically. One of the most impactful moments of this entire experience was creating an exhibition to celebrate women of color in S.T.E.M. and displaying it in Upper Usdan. Reading and seeing the women's stories first- hand, was heart- warming. I realized, however, that I needed a bigger platform to reach my community, offering a larger impact to an audience of multiple generations.

Initially, this project was going to manifest as a week of events intended on bringing visibility to women, femmes, and non-binary students of color in S.T.E.M and connecting them with highschool students. Because of the budget cut, I decided to compress the project into a one-day event which centered the highschool students instead. Additionally, while I initially wanted to establish a mentorship initiative with brandeis students of color and highschool

students, unanticipated events leading to me having to leave Brandeis for several days pushed back my timeline and I had to adjust my project accordingly.

The Evolution of STEMs to Branches As The Semester Unfolded



Community Outreach

STEMS TO BRANCHES

Achieving Sustainable Wellness for Young Women, Femmes, & Non-Binary Youth of Color

For High School Juniors & Seniors
Saturday, May 4th, 2019
9:30 am - 5:00 pm
Breakfast & Lunch Provided
The Heller School, Brandeis University



MAY 11

STEMS to Branches

Public · Hosted by Stems to Branches and Waltham Partnership for Youth

✓ Interested ▾



🕒 Saturday, May 11, 2019 at 9:30 AM – 3 days ago

Youth

VOLUNTEERS NEEDED!

STEMS TO BRANCHES

Achieving Sustainable Wellness for Young Women, Femmes, & Non-Binary Youth of Color

For High School Juniors & Seniors
May 11th, 2019



MAY 11

Volunteers Needed! Stems to Branches Summit

Public · Hosted by Stems to Branches

✓ Going ▾



🕒 Saturday, May 11, 2019 at 9:30 AM – 5 PM
3 days ago

Budget:

Youth

VOLUNTEERS

Item	quantity	link	cost				
Lanyards & nametags		1 https://www.amazon.com/gp/produ	\$19.97				
push pins		1 https://www.amazon.com/gp/produ	\$6.99				
markers	X3	https://www.amazon.com/gp/produ	\$30				
craft paper		1 https://www.amazon.com/gp/produ	\$14.99				
design paper pad		1 https://www.amazon.com/gp/produ	\$5				
framed cork boards	X11	https://www.amazon.com/gp/produ	\$186.89				
stencils		1 https://www.amazon.com/gp/produ	\$7.18				
acrylic paint		1 https://www.amazon.com/gp/produ	\$44.43				
Panera Catering Services							
Breakfast Bundle	(serving 35)						
Sandwiches & Salads Bundle	(serving 35)		\$930				
Custodial & Linen Charges			\$490				

Your Order Details Your catering order placed on 05/06/2019 03:58 PM, totaling \$ 930.00, will be delivered between 08:45 AM - 09:00 AM tomorrow.

Order number: 10620740

Event Date: 05/11/2019

No. of People: 35

Expected Delivery Time: 08:45 AM - 09:00 AM

Delivery Location
 415 South Street, Shapiro Science Center
 Waltham, MA 02453
 9292480955

Need help with your order? Please Call 781-899-2116.

For your convenience reminders are sent 1 day prior to scheduled fulfillment. Same day orders and orders placed after 8AM the day before order fulfillment will not have email reminders sent.

Sandwiches & Salads Bundle	(serving 35)		\$930				
Custodial & Linen Charges			\$490				
Gift Cards for students	X3	\$ 25 each	\$75				
Gift Card for Keynote speaker	X1		\$50				

Evaluation

Unfortunately, as a result of lack of attendance on the day of the event, I had to cancel the summit. I think that the lack of attendance may have been due to the fact that May is a pretty busy week for highschoolers who are studying for SATs and in the midst of taking AP exams. Ultimately, In the future, I would have liked to collaborate with the Waltham highschool a bit more in order to understand when the students are the most busy. While I appreciated the relationship with and support of the Waltham Partnership for Youth, I think strengthening the relationship with the highschool and with other established youth organizations would have been key to getting more notoriety to the event and attention of the students.

Personal Reflection

Throughout this entire experience, I learned that trial and error is inevitable in any project or experience. I've learned to not look at this as a personal failure, rather as a moment of growth in understanding how to better reach out to my intended audience. I think there were several unforeseen circumstances this semester that resulted in several unwarranted shifts in the nature and outcome of my project. Regardless of such factors that were beyond my control, I am still proud of my ability to persist and continuously acknowledge how important this project was for me. I think, moving forward, I need to focus on building relationship with the students I am to offer support either via the waltham partnership for youth or the Waltham boys and girls club. Additionally, I believe that establishing a relationship with the Waltham Partnership for Youth earlier on would have been helpful in forming these connections and getting more students interested in the event.

Throughout the entire process of creating this summit, I progressively learned that there is a lot of work that still needs to be done. I learned that women, femmes, and non-binary students of color are in need of the proper resources and support system to build community, achieve holistic and sustainable wellness, and succeed academically. This, however, can't happen without students', and administration alike, acknowledging that this is a need. Highschool students of color have a lot of responsibilities as they are fulltime students, and often many of them are apart of several extracurriculars, work, and have to study for APs and SATs/ACTs and often feel the pressure to succeed and go above and beyond, if they want to go to college. I learned, additionally, that we must continue to honor and celebrate women of color, especially when they are found in spaces that may not be the most welcoming and supportive.

Qualitative Survey

1. What is something you enjoyed from the space?
2. What is a conversation that you would like to have seen happen, that didn't?
3. Is there something you learned that you didn't know before? If so, what was it?
4. Is there any feedback you have for me as a facilitator? Things I did well, Things I can improve on?
5. How will your self-care practices evolve after today?