

## The STEAM City of Women – Week 6

Sofia, *student*

### Monday 8/16

We're in the home stretch! It's week 6 and the countdown for our last day and showcase has begun. I am both excited and sad at the same time. Before we get to that, let's talk about Monday! Today, we had guest speaker Aarati Cohly. Aarati, a native New Yorker, is the Deputy Director of Strategic Planning and Executive Affairs at NYC Census 2020, an initiative launched by the City to ensure every New Yorker, especially those in historically underrepresented and immigrant communities, are fully counted and represented in the 2020 Census. Her passion and vision is to elevate local voices, bring impact to NYC communities, and inspire herself and others to carry out more public work. To clarify, Aarati's job and concern is focusing on voters in general, which means she does not exhibit any party affiliation. She walked us through some of her challenges: her work is not easy or for the faint of heart. Sometimes there's not enough funding or timing for certain projects or programs. In addition, sometimes bureaucracy itself gets in the way of Aarati's work. Regardless, she has a good time with her colleagues who help her tackle challenges and figure things out together. She understands that her job is very fast paced at times but seems to always enjoy it as a good learning experience. Two of her key methods to organization and efficiency are planning ahead and budgeting. She says these two skills are critical because certain things don't work out, so at least you have a strategy set and some organization to continue forward or redirect yourself and your team. What is the future of democracy in NYC? Five years from now, Aarati wants to continue making an impact in public service, specifically helping South Asian women and working with Art in communities for messaging purposes and helping out small businesses. Aarati states she likes meeting impactful individuals who have done a lot in public work because it teaches her and prepares her for things to come in her career. However, she makes it evident that most projects in her field are done in groups in the end. You can prepare for this though, even at a young age, by starting to do your own work, be passionate and active, find out issues you are interested in that are prominent in your community, find your strengths, and do your research. It's never too early to start off your career! Next, we talked about inspirations, which she credits to her parents and family, mainly her dad's immigration story and her grandmother. Aarati informed us of her grandmother, who was a pioneer in her community; she drove which was unheard of in India at the time and was lucky to have been able to work in India as well. She has met a lot of leading women in her career thus far: her last boss gave her a lot of experience to elevate herself and also allowed her space to learn and grow. Lastly, Aarati credits many of her past and present professors, as she appreciates that they have taken the time to always support her. There's no city like NYC, but since Aarati loves to travel, she would want to go to other cities to do projects such as DC or Boston. Besides work, Aarati told us about her hobbies. She got back into music during the pandemic and every week does a class in Indian music. She likes hanging out with friends and loves music and singing as it brings her joy and gives her peace. Lastly, she taught us about RVC ballots and we got to practice with them! I really enjoyed our time with Aarati and practicing the ballots! Thank you for visiting us today! For the second half of today's meeting, we worked on our Where the Winds Blow and the Chickpeas in a Pod projects in our groups. My team, Team Amina, worked weather data collected between 2:47 p.m. -10:45 p.m. on

7/12/21. We converted degrees in Fahrenheit to Celsius for 103 data points! It was fun for me, I liked doing the conversion a lot. Tomorrow, we will work on our posters. See you then!

### Tuesday 8/17

Good Morning everyone and happy Tuesday! Today, we had guest speaker Thalia Smith, who is in accounting for Deloitte. We also had Shamika Edwards join us, from the same company. Our interviewer for these two lovely women today was our EDsnaps Editor-in-chief, Mimi! Thalia told us a little about her upbringing. She came from a low income family, she gives thanks to her profession and hard work which got her her own home, the ability to easily travel, and more. There are lots of misconceptions behind accounting: it's not boring, just about numbers, or full of dull people. Thalia reassures that these are all false! She loves accounting and speaks very passionately about it. She emphasizes the life changing experiences she has had because of her career. For the future of STEM, she hopes to have more diversity, as everyone has their role to play and diversity will expand the field immensely. DEI (diversity, equity, and inclusion) has to be intentional. Colleges also need to bring in diversity. Deloitte actually encourages this by recruiting high schoolers and college students in diverse ways. As the future and the upcoming working class, we need to choose to go down the STEM path ourselves. There is only so much older generations can do to help the younger ones be interested in STEM, so if we have passions in STEM related fields, we need to take our own initiative. I think the best advice she gave us today was to always remember to take a breath and a moment to realize you are not where you are by chance! Everything you have, and so much more, you are 100% worthy of. Thalia expresses she indeed has experienced imposter syndrome as a black woman, but she says everyone probably gets it at some point no matter race, gender, etc. However, a lot of times the places and fields we go into are not very diverse, so you have to fight a little harder to stay true to yourself and excel, especially as POCs and/or women. Shockingly, Thalia told us she used to be quiet and shy and actually feared public speaking. She was not the life of the party, but 30 years later, she has been active in a very dynamic profession. You can always be your very best but always remember you have help all around you; if you feel you can't do something, just ask for help and have someone reliable to lean on. Shamika followed up by advising us to maintain contact when you have a good connection with someone, as networking is not just important, but also helps to eventually build deeper relationships and continuity. Thalia and Shamika both stressed the importance of balancing your time between work and self-care. Thalia loves spending time with family and friends, going out and traveling (she's been to 28 countries)! Always remember to take care of yourself, some examples these ladies gave us are exercising, getting sleep, eating well, and maintaining a good social life. Some closing remarks: If you see an opportunity you think you might be able to do, go for it. Working is not the same as school. You learn along the way as you navigate your career, and peer help and mentors are critical for advice, but you also have to put it into action yourself. Sponsors are also important, these are people who will speak on your behalf for roles and opportunities you may not even be aware of. Similarly, champions are always there for you in your career and will see your success through as their goal is to help you as much as possible. You will have very few champions in your career and probably many more sponsors. Thank you so much Thalia and Shamika, you two are incredible! As I mentioned yesterday, today we worked on our

Where the Winds Blow posters in our groups. Everything is coming along nicely, I can't wait to see the other teams' work!

### Wednesday 8/18

It's a Wonderful Wednesday! To kick off this morning, we all finalized our Where the Winds Blow projects and posters in the first hour of our session. I love my team, we all work so well together and efficiently. We have helped each other along the way and made this project more fun than it already is! Tomorrow, we will practice for our showcase that is on Friday! For the second half of today, we got to sit back while Alex interviewed Dr. Florencia Polite, who is the Chief of the Division of General Obstetrics & Gynecology, Department of Obstetrics & Gynecology at the University of Pennsylvania. Some of the things she does is teaching medical students and residents in the Perelman School of Medicine as well as delivering babies! I think this is so cool, I have never met or talked to anyone in this profession. It was very nice to see her perspective and insights into her career that I had never considered before. Dr. Polite knew from an early age she wanted to increase the access of contraceptives for teens and knew she wanted to focus on women's healthcare. Outside of work, she loves to travel, is an extrovert, indulges in self-care as much as she can, goes out with friends, and spends time with her family. As Alex started off the interview with a question about challenges, Florencia touched on systemic problems towards women and POC in her field of work. She wishes to see more and more women in OBGYN, though she does acknowledge and is proud of the fact that in her workplace, there are already plenty! She addressed the flaws in medicine, giving the example that many medical students thought black people were less likely to feel pain because they were actually taught that in school. There are certain things still taught in medicine that are racist and biased that need to be undone completely, though it may take much time ahead. More honest discussions need to be had to establish more inclusion and equity. Dr. Polite recognizes that women's health is still stigmatized. Gynecology is crucial for women's health but because of stigmas and the idea that the field remains male dominated, women are afraid and may feel unwelcome. In addition, it is up to the marketing and promotions of companies and even hospitals to address issues, such as race and gender, to be more inclusive and friendly to all persons rather than one specific group of people. Her advice to us was to always be true and authentic to yourself. We must understand that there are still many homogeneous spaces all around us. There are also times you have to let micro-aggressions go because if you don't, you might not be able to excel and surpass them. Choose your battles wisely and allow yourself the ability to give people the benefit of the doubt. Thank you Alex for all the amazing questions, you are an excellent interviewer. Dr. Polite had a beautiful and informative presentation for us. I do want you to know that some of the things we learned about and discussed can be triggering for some audiences. It is essential that as women, and young individuals, we learn about sexual assault. We learned that shockingly, one out of four female undergraduates will be victim to some form of sexual assault before graduation. Just because someone allows you to kiss them, does not mean that this is a consent for further sexual activity! An overwhelming 20% of college students thought otherwise in a 2015 study. Though it is a very scary topic, it is necessary that we all prepare ourselves and take on some responsibilities. You can set expectations, communicate your expectations, recognize when

things aren't going as expected, and speak up in the moment. If you are feeling very unsafe and scared, don't stay quiet and don't be afraid to say the word rape! There are three types of violence against women: sexual assault, intimate partner violence, and reproductive coercion. Sexual assault is any sexual act performed without consent. Intimate partner violence is violence against teen and adult women within a relationship that is intimate or family. This is one of the major causes of physical injuries, homelessness, and mental illnesses in women as Dr. Polite's presentation states. Types of this violence can include physical, sexual, and psychological abuse. It can happen in same sex relationships as well, not just heterosexual ones. Lastly, reproductive and sexual coercion are behaviors that intend to manipulate and control power in a relationship over the partner's reproductive health. Examples of this include coercion to have unprotected sex, interference with contraceptives, and impregnation attempts against a women will by her partner. When going back to school, whether this is middle, high, or college, be sure to stick with your peers, speak up, make a plan of safety, and know the sexual violence policy at your school. We are all in this together, no matter how we identify to prevent sexual assault and support those who have gone through it. On that note, thank you so much Dr. Polite for your passionate interview and insights!

#### Thursday 8/19

Practice day on this beautiful Thursday morning! We are in full preparation mode. We broke up into our groups for final touches, details, and to assign roles for our Flower Power project and Where the Winds Blow. Then we all went back into our main room to start off the trial run. I know I was so nervous to present! Public speaking, even through Zoom, is definitely not my thing. I'm more of the behind the scenes type of person (clearly)! We went one group at a time and then Dr. C gave us advice on how to improve our speeches and manage our time to present better. She constantly reminded us to not be scared! I will never forget the phrase she gave us, "This is a dolphin tank, not a shark tank". This little reminder always makes me laugh, but it is also so comforting because it reminds me that no matter what, we are an EDsnaps family. Even though our program is coming to an end, we are still a family, and our support for each other is everlasting. I will take this little phrase forward as I know the need for public speaking in all of our lives will always continue. Back to today, it was very interesting to see all the projects. Our methods of approach to the same task were all so different. It is persistently evident that we are an incredibly talented and creative group. Some teams had graphs, others had visual effects, and some had pictures! No single project looked anything remotely similar to the next. I enjoyed hearing some new voices and seeing new faces! There are many participants of our program that are shy, like me, and don't speak up or show their face as much. Today, everyone was out of their comfort zone and got enough courage to turn on their cameras and talk. Everything went smoothly, we only went a couple minutes overtime. Each group kept their projects, summaries, and thoughts short and sweet. We also shared three words that we feel describe this year's EDsnaps Summer Program. Tomorrow, the judges and guests will see us say our words in a video! It was heartwarming to see everyone put in so much effort and love into this practice, I can't even imagine how tomorrow is going to turn out.

Friday 8/20

It's finally the moment we've all been waiting for! Can you believe it? Today is our EDsnaps 2021 showcase for the Summer Program! This is also a bittersweet day, as it is our last meeting for the summer and in this program. I am a little emotional to see this beautiful program end, but this is just the beginning! Our journey is still long and we are not parting ways forever, this is just temporary! I know I will definitely continue to be in the EDsnaps family, I have grown to really love this family. Anyways, my point is, this is not a sad day. Instead, it is a celebration of all our hard work and bonding throughout the past 6 weeks. We got to finally meet the esteemed judges and guests that Dr. C has been telling us about this whole time. We got a diverse group in our audience, the age range in the Zoom call was between 14 and 83! Wow. When I heard that I was completely blown away. Dr. C's parents were in our audience as well; we had the privilege of hearing them speak in Dutch, which was such a treat. We had guests from all over the place: different states, The Netherlands, and Ghana! After the introduction, we jumped right into the awards! Our fantastic judges announced the winners from our individual projects, images, and more! It was nice to see our participants get spotlighted, as no one was made aware of the winners beforehand, besides the judges and Dr. C of course! I even got an honorable mention from the previous blogger, Ami Konate. This was the first time I ever met her, yet we had so much in common. Not only do we both love to write, we also love soccer. Thank you Ami for presenting me with this blogger baton, it was a pleasure to finally meet you! Thank you to all our judges, your choice in winners was exquisite. Next, it was video time. Remember the three words from yesterday? Well today, the final video of all of us was presented in the Zoom! Also, our final dance from our time with Renata and Olney from the New Victory Dance Theater was shown. I was ready to get up and do the dance as well. After the videos, it was finally time to present our projects with our groups. I was super duper nervous! I know I wasn't the only one though. Thankfully everything went incredibly smoothly. Even our participants from Ghana, who sometimes don't have strong connections, were able to do their parts fabulously. We are all so proud of each other, as we have come a long way. This is a dolphin tank, not a shark tank! All nerves aside, we pulled through and did our very best and had fun, which are the most important things in the end. We finished right on time, as I'm sure Dr. C loved to see. This was such an amazing experience, and I'm not just talking about the showcase. Thank you Dr. C and the board of EDsnaps for giving us this excellent opportunity. I will miss you all, for now. This summer blog was so special to me, as I hope it was for you. Have a stellar rest of your summer, and we hope to see you soon!