

# Student Vignette

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In several of my STEM classes, I experienced imposter syndrome—this feeling of not being good enough or fully represented as an Indian woman in my biology major. I lacked a connection between my personal identity and the STEM classes I had taken due to this absence of belonging. It was in a writing-intensive course about the history and philosophy of math and science that I finally felt a sense of belonging. This class was singular in my STEM education because I focused on an issue that resonated with me personally. Outside of this class, I would not have had the opportunity to explore the topic on which I eventually wrote a 15-page paper: “Scientific Developments in Colonial-Era India.”

This class acknowledged and emphasized that several civilizations and cultures contributed to the scientific community and went underappreciated and unrecognized due to the Eurocentric nature of science. This intrigued me; I wondered if this had happened to my own culture. Through the assigned readings in this course, I realized how little other cultures’ contributions to science were taught in school, and I wanted to add to the discourse by including my own culture. Consequently, my final paper focused on the scientific developments in India during British rule. The reflections written after the readings were vital to my paper—they allowed me to see scientific concepts from a historical and philosophical angle, which was often not evident in my core STEM classes. The class not only helped me to appreciate my cultural history but also to admire that my people contributed to the very field I am studying.

This paper bridged the gap between my place within the STEM fields and my experiences as a woman and a person of color. It is well established that these fields, especially their research aspect, is male-dominated. In my experience, my male classmates have typically been more assertive and confident, in contrast to some of my female classmates, who tend to be more reserved and second-guess themselves. In one of the reflections for this class, I recalled instances with my male classmates and professors in group discussions like lab meetings where I thought to myself, “What if I say something—or should I even say anything at all? What if they judge me?” While they had not meant to ignore me, I always felt like an outsider and like I needed to work much harder to make my ideas heard. This class gave me the space and confidence to communicate those very ideas.

Through this writing assignment, exploring my Indian ethnicity and culture allowed me to engineer my own inclusion in the STEM fields in spite of imposter

syndrome. Due to this course and its assigned writings, I was further inspired to write an article in my college's journal about women who were overlooked in the STEM fields. It was beneficial for me to see my heritage and community represented in the field I am currently studying. I hope that my presence in the STEM fields will inspire others with my ethnic background to pursue similar careers and interests, while simultaneously paying homage to the scientific successes of our ancestors.