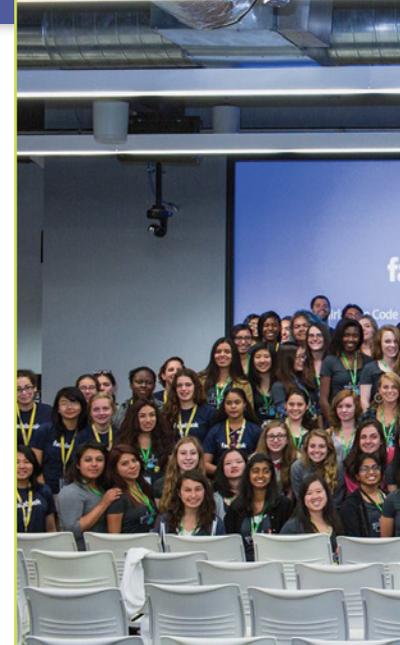


# girls who CODE

## Paving the Way to Careers in Tech

by Imani Taylor



I had no computer science background when a family friend told me about the Girls Who Code (GWC) Summer Immersion Program, a free, intensive seven-week program for high school girls. But I've always had an affinity for math and thought I'd pursue a STEM career, so I decided to give it a try. In February 2014 I sent in my application, essays, and letters of recommendation from my math and science teachers.

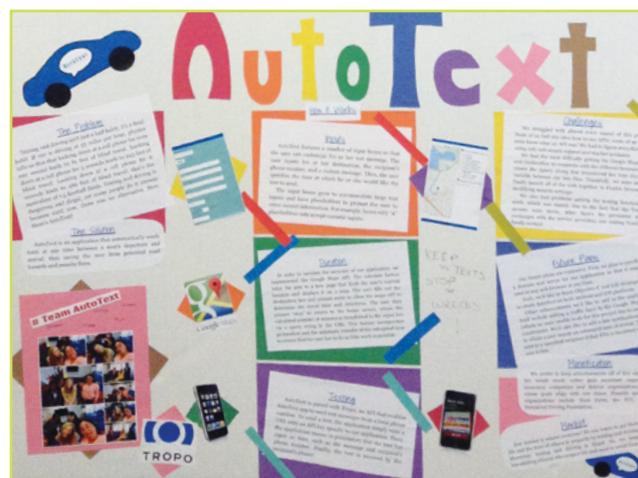
I knew that the program was very competitive, so I was surprised and excited to receive an acceptance email in April. As one of 375 girls accepted that year, I would learn coding at one of several leading tech companies: Facebook, Twitter, Square, Intel, and Intuit were among my choices. I selected Facebook because it was the company that I knew the most about as a user, and, because it is close to where I live, I would be able to take the Facebook shuttle to and from the campus every day.

### Focus, Fun, Repeat

Beginning in mid-June, I spent every weekday from 9:00 to 4:00 on the Facebook campus with 19 other girls, learning about robotics, computer programming, web design algorithms, and mobile development. We were each assigned a mentor, an engineer at Facebook who met with us periodically over the summer, but we spent more time with our teacher and TAs, who taught us programming techniques. We started out with Scratch, a program that allowed us to learn coding concepts without actually writing any code. Later we moved on to languages including Python, JavaScript, and HTML and CSS.

The work was intense and challenging, but we took breaks throughout the day to go outside and play games to refuel before going back to our computers. Another girl and I were even allowed to bring our skateboards to campus and skate around the courtyard during lunch.

That pattern of focused learning punctuated by fun and physical breaks was effective, and after six weeks, we were ready to apply what we'd learned. In small groups, we spent the last week of the program working on our final projects. After brainstorming ideas,



Imani's group worked on an app called AutoText, which addresses the problem of texting while driving.

my group of five decided to create a web app to address the problem of texting and driving. Many people text and drive just to inform someone that they are on their way or almost there. Our web app, AutoText, prevents this by sending updates about the user's location and distance from the destination. Before starting the trip, the user enters his or her current location and destination, along with the recipient's phone number. AutoText then sends preset texts while the user is driving.

Creating the web app was definitely a challenge. Because we had only a week to get it done, we divided up the work—but this meant that we were never all working on the same thing at the same time. There were many different components to creating this app, ranging from the design of the logo to integrating the Tropo and Google Maps APIs; I myself spent a lot of time working on the contacts section. We shared our work in a presentation at graduation, where each group presented their project. Other groups' projects included a verbal door-unlocking mechanism, an app that helps students study, and a keyboard with keys made of paint. It was incredible to see what we'd all accomplished in such a short time.



All the Bay Area Girls Who Code, including those from Twitter, Intuit, and Intel, visited the campuses of Google and Facebook.

### Following in Their Footsteps

Highlights of my amazing summer at Facebook included writing code that made robots dance, hanging posters all over the campus to promote GWC's spirit week, and, my favorite, Gray Day (AKA Mark Day), when we all wore jeans and a gray T-shirt like Mark Zuckerberg. That same day, all Girls Who Code from the Bay Area—including those from Twitter, Intel, and Intuit—went on a field trip to Google, where we got to meet Girls Who Code from other locations. We all took a tour of the Google campus and then had lunch together in one of the cafeterias.

In addition to interacting with our peers, we got to meet inspirational women such as Hillary Clinton, who visited the Facebook campus one afternoon; Sheryl Sandberg, Facebook's chief operating officer; and Resha Saujani, the founder of Girls Who Code. Guest speakers throughout the program included several women engineers who work at Facebook as well as accomplished women from other tech companies such as Pixar. It was amazing to be in the same space as these female leaders—and to think that one day we might share the stage with them. GWC gave all of us the confidence that it was possible.

During my time at Girls Who Code, I built lasting relationships and made great memories with the caring, likeable girls around me. For seven weeks we all supported each other, working together to tackle problems and learning from each other. Although the program has ended, we all still keep in touch, primarily in groups on Facebook, where we communicate with each other about tech questions we have, classes we're taking, upcoming events we could attend together (such as a talk by Malala Yousafzai), or anything else we want to share with each other.

### Sharing the Gift

The great thing about Girls Who Code is that you can keep building on the experience long after the classroom portion ends. In my case, that meant attending the MIT MITES program last summer, where I learned about computer hardware in an electronics course. It also meant working as a junior programmer at a startup company in San Francisco called Adoptful, where I helped create an interactive user survey for prospective adoptive parents.

Girls Who Code encourages summer program alumnae to share the benefits they've realized by starting Girls Who Code clubs in their communities. Wanting to share the great experience I had, I decided to start a club at my high school. After enlisting a faculty advisor, I did a presentation at a school assembly about Girls Who Code and the club I was starting. We needed at least 10 students to form a club; to make this happen, my school and another local school combined our members. Girls Who Code then sent a volunteer to teach the same curriculum I learned in the Summer Immersion Program to girls during the school year.

It's hard to believe that less than two years ago I knew nothing about coding. Now I can't imagine my life without it. Whether I go into computer science or engineering in college, I'll have Girls Who Code to thank for opening the door to my future. ■



**Imani Taylor**, 17, is a high school senior in San Francisco, CA. Outside of academics, she is involved in music and theater, and she teaches piano to young beginners. Imani was a national runner-up for the 2015 National Center for Women & Information Technology (NCWIT) Award for Aspirations in Computing.

Learn more about Girls Who Code at <http://girlswhocode.com>.