
20 Years
WOMEN OF INNOVATION®
CONNECTICUT TECHNOLOGY COUNCIL
Celebrating Connecticut women in STEM for 20 Years
October 28, 2025

Medtronic

Committed to technology and innovation

Congratulations!

Congratulations to the Medtronic women recognized as finalists in the Connecticut Technology Council's Women of Innovation. We're proud of your achievements and the impact you are making in medical technology.

Women at Medtronic play a pivotal role in driving innovation, contributing diverse perspectives that lead to groundbreaking medical technologies and solutions. Their expertise and creativity ensure that our products meet the needs of a wide range of patients, fostering inclusivity and improving healthcare outcomes. By empowering women within our organization, Medtronic not only promotes gender equality but also inspires future generations of female innovators, enhancing our leadership in the medical technology industry.

Our progress is driven by constant innovation that creates new markets and growth opportunities.

20 Years
WOMEN OF INNOVATION®
CONNECTICUT TECHNOLOGY COUNCIL

WELCOME!

On behalf of the Connecticut Technology Council, welcome to the 2025 Women of Innovation® Awards. We are thrilled to celebrate this milestone 20th anniversary and honored to continue the legacy of this powerful event.

For two decades, the Women of Innovation® program has been at the heart of CTC's mission — to connect, unite and elevate Connecticut's technology ecosystem while championing the essential role of diversity in driving innovation and growth. Each year, we honor women across science, technology, engineering, and math—trailblazers, leaders, role models, and change-makers, including extraordinary high school and college students who are shaping the future. These remarkable women are not only advancing their fields—they're breaking new ground and shattering ceilings. And today, their recognition feels more vital than ever.

Our Women of Innovation® network is now nearly 1,000 strong—and growing. Each year, it expands as new honorees join a powerful legacy of leadership, mentorship, and innovation. The impact they have is worthy of recognition and admiration. Tonight, as we welcome the Class of 2025 in this anniversary year, we also reflect on and remember the women honorees who came before them — many of whom are joining us for this celebration.

The class of 2025 is a worthy addition to the WOI family. This year's 46 finalists exemplify excellence in STEM. Chosen from an impressive group of nominees, they represent a diverse spectrum of scientists, engineers, educators, researchers, entrepreneurs, manufacturers, and student leaders. Our esteemed panel of judges—leaders and experts from across the STEM landscape—faced a tough task in selecting these finalists based on their commitment to innovation, research achievements, academic excellence, and service to their communities.

At CTC, we understand the critical role STEM fields play in shaping our world. The bios in this program speak volumes - they reflect tireless dedication, hard work, bold ideas, and a passion for progress. Tonight, we are proud to announce our 2025 award recipients in nine categories of Innovation & Leadership: Academic Secondary, Academic Post Secondary, Community, Corporate-Large, Corporate-Small/Medium, Entrepreneurial, Research, Collegian, and Youth.

We invite you to celebrate with us. Connect with this year's finalists during the networking reception. Join us in congratulating them! Seek out the young women launching their careers and our young inventors - you'll be inspired by their ambition. Visit our Women of Innovation® website at www.ct.org/womenofinnovation to get involved in future programs. Attend, promote, donate, nominate - your engagement strengthens this important movement.

This celebration would not be possible without the generous support of our sponsors, the dedication of our planning committee, staff, judges, and volunteers. Thank you! To the CTC Board of Directors, Executive Committee, and members - your commitment to our mission makes this event possible. And to our nominators, partners, and attendees —thank you for helping keep the momentum alive.

As we look ahead, the Connecticut Technology Council remains dedicated to honoring the Women of Innovation legacy and to celebrating bold leadership and achievement in STEM. Here's to tonight—and to the next 20 years of innovation, inspiration, and impact.
Enjoy the celebration!

MS Erwin

Milena Stankova Erwin
Executive Director, CTC

Giovanni Tomasi
Board Chair, CTC

20 Years

ABOUT THE CONNECTICUT TECHNOLOGY COUNCIL

A statewide 30-year-old member-based trade association, The Connecticut Technology Council (CTC) unites the state of Connecticut's technology ecosystem, serving as a dynamic platform for idea exchange and resource sharing. The CTC connects across sectors, firm sizes and business models, to drive innovation and growth in Connecticut's tech sector.

The CTC offers exceptional networking, learning, and promotional opportunities, connecting a diverse network of technology leaders, educational institutions, government agencies, non-profits, and service providers. Members gain access to a dynamic community of influential tech leaders, founders, business owners, and partners. Through exclusive, invitation-only forums and signature events, the CTC addresses key technology issues and trends, providing valuable insights and opportunities for knowledge sharing among industry experts and peers.

Programs include:

- CEO roundtable
- Professional roundtables
- Seminars on topics of interest (Cybersecurity, AI, HR, Leadership)
- Panel discussions
- Tech Resource Spotlights
- Networking events

Contact us and join our community!
Check out our special WOI2025 offer. For more information, visit www.ct.org.

We are proud to sponsor the Connecticut Technology Council's 20th Annual Women of Innovation Awards.

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CT TECHNOLOGY COUNCIL

Where Connecticut's Tech Leaders Connect & Innovate

In honor of our 20th WOI year, we are offering a **20% discount** on *new* CTC memberships for 2026.

Offer is valid for 2025 WOI awards event attendees only until Jan.31, 2026.
Contact us at hello@ct.org to claim the offer!

CT TECHNOLOGY COUNCIL Nonprofit Trade Association, 501(c)(6) ct.org hello@ct.org **Milena Stankova Erwin, Exective Director**

CONGRATULATIONS

to the Connecticut Technology Council
Women of Innovation Award Finalists including

Clara Fang

University of Hartford
Chair, Civil, Environmental & Biomedical Engineering Department
Program Director, Civil Engineering
Member, Connecticut Academy of Science and Engineering

1976

Connecticut Academy of Science and Engineering
Celebrate, Promote, Inform in Service to Connecticut

ctcase.org

Celebrating

DR. AMY THOMPSON

Honoring our Chief Technology Officer for her leadership in advancing the manufacturing ecosystem, including spearheading CCAT's Talent & Training Accelerator and pioneering MBD and additive training initiatives.

We are so proud of you!

CONNECTICUT CENTER
FOR ADVANCED TECHNOLOGY

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Connecticut Technology Council

EVENT VOLUNTEERS

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Sonata Scientific

Sondra Schneider
Chief Executive Officer and Founder, Security University

Olivia Strobl
Connecticut Innovations

Martha Yaney
President & Founder
Vista Group International, Inc.

Transform Your Future

We're thrilled to celebrate
Southern Connecticut State University's
Dr. Colleen Bielitz, Associate VP for Strategic Initiatives & Outreach,
Tanya Hennegan, Director of IT Administration, and
Mariaceleste Florian, student,
on their well-deserved nominations as a
2025 Woman of Innovation

Thank you for your leadership in STEM workforce training, and to all the inspiring finalists for driving progress, mentoring the next generation, and making STEM a space where everyone can thrive.

SouthernCT.edu/OWLL

Southern Connecticut State University
SCSU OFFICE OF WORKFORCE & LIFELONG LEARNING OWL

20TH ANNUAL WOMEN OF INNOVATION AWARDS EMCEE

LAURA HUTCHINSON | NEWS 8

Laura Hutchinson is the weekday morning news anchor of Good Morning Connecticut on News 8 and also visits schools weekly for her What's Right With Schools stories where she highlights positive programming, students and staff around the state. She's also had a daily money-saving segment for the last 10 years called "Stretch Your Dollar" where she looks for simple ways to save families money.

Before Connecticut, she worked at WWLP-TV in Springfield, MA for six years, and at WENY-TV in Elmira, NY for two years before that. Before she was on-air, Laura worked in the control room of a morning newscast in Philadelphia. She earned her degrees in broadcasting and political science at Temple University. That's also where she met her husband. Together they have two young kids at home and a very busy schedule! She loves to give back in the community wherever there are opportunities.

AWARDS AGENDA

4:30 - 5:30 pm
Networking Reception; Finalist Photos

5:30 - 7:00 pm
Awards Ceremony

- Opening remarks and CTC Welcome
- Keynote: Esther Takeuchi
- Medtronic (Platinum Sponsor) Welcome
- Finalist Recognition & Winner Announcements
- Closing Remarks

20TH ANNUAL WOMEN OF INNOVATION AWARDS KEYNOTE SPEAKER

DR. ESTHER S. TAKEUCHI

Dr. Esther S. Takeuchi is a SUNY Distinguished Professor and the William and Jane Knapp Chair in Energy and the Environment at Stony Brook University. She holds a joint appointment at Brookhaven National Laboratory as Chief Scientist and Chair of the Interdisciplinary Science Department.

Previously, she was employed at Greatbatch, Inc., and was instrumental in the development of the lithium/silver vanadium oxide battery power sourcing life-saving implantable cardiac defibrillators.

Dr. Takeuchi has more than 150 patents, and is a member of the National Academy of Engineering, National Inventors Hall of Fame, American Academy of Arts and Sciences, and a Charter Member of the National Academy of Innovation. She received the National Medal of Technology and Innovation, the E. V Murphree and Astellas Awards from the ACS, and ECS Edward G. Acheson Award.

She is a Fellow of the ECS, the AIMBE, and the AAAS. She has received the European Inventor Award, the Sigma Xi Walston Chubb Innovation Award, an honorary Doctorate from Notre Dame University, and the National Academy of Sciences Chemical Sciences Award.

BENTO ENGINE

Congratulations to all the 2025 Women of Innovation Finalists!

UNTAPPED POTENTIAL

Cheering on Women of Innovation!

UP

Returning STEM Talent...

to *your* industry.

www.upotential.org

2025 Woman *of* Innovation Finalist

Fairfield University's School of Engineering and Computing Congratulates Director of the Biomedical Engineering Graduate program, Susan Freudzon, PhD.

Her research interests include medical device design focused on affordable healthcare solutions, inclusivity of women in biomedical engineering, and STEM outreach in the community.

Fairfield UNIVERSITY

School of Engineering & Computing

20 Years

WOMEN OF INNOVATION®

CONNECTICUT TECHNOLOGY COUNCIL

2005

2009

2012

2013

2016

2017

Celebrating Connecticut women in STEM for 20 Years

2010

2011

2014

2015

2021

2023

THE FINALISTS

CATEGORY: Corporate Innovation & Leadership - Large Business

LISA BROWN *Market Segment Director, Launch Vehicles, Ensign-Bickford Aerospace and Defense Company*

Lisa is Director of the Launch Vehicles segment at EBAD, bringing 20 years of leadership in aerospace, defense, and alternative energy. Her background spans engineering, business development, government relations, and program management, with prior roles at Kaman, Sikorsky, and United Technologies. Lisa holds a B.S. and MS in Chemical Engineering from the University of Connecticut and an MBA from Penn State University. She joined EBAD in October 2022 and currently lives in North Granby with her husband and two daughters.

JULIE DIGIACOMO *Mechanical Systems and Externals Integrated Team Leader, Pratt & Whitney, An RTX Business*

Julie is an Integrated Product Team Leader at Pratt & Whitney, specializing in advanced military engines. With degrees in engineering and business, she began her career in structures and broadened into cross-functional leadership. She now leads teams developing integrated engine systems in a connected, digital environment. Outside of work, Julie enjoys running and spending time with her husband and three young children, balancing her career with full family life.

DAWN MASKELL *IT Business Relationship Manager, Eversource*

Dawn has built a career of over 20 years in the energy industry, progressing through various roles, from Project Administrator, QA tester, Business Analyst, and most recently serving as the Technical Architecture Lead for Eversource's new Customer Information System implementation for Massachusetts customers. Dawn led Eversource's first agile teams and oversaw the IT development teams supporting Eversource.com and call center technologies. Currently, she manages a team of business analysts and is driving standards at Eversource.

KATHLEEN (NIKKI) MOORE *Senior Manager, Global Innovation Portfolio, Engineering, Otis Elevator Company*

Nikki drives global Innovation Portfolio for Engineering at Otis Elevator Company. As a local SWE Hartford leader and co-founder of Otis's global Women in Technology ERG, they advocate for diverse talent worldwide. Nikki holds a B.S. in Materials Science from Cornell University and an MBA from Carnegie Mellon's Tepper School of Business. Based in Connecticut, they're a proud cat-parent, wife, sister, mentor, traveler, and more.

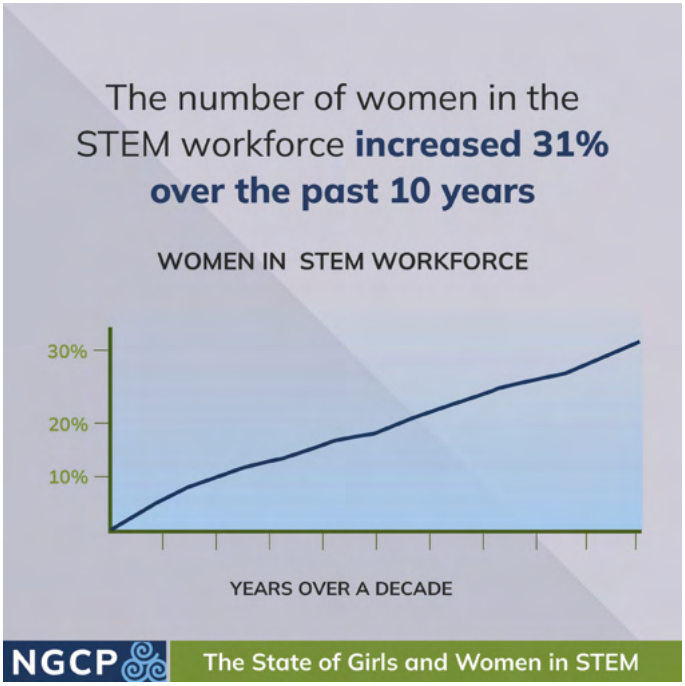
CATEGORY: Corporate Innovation & Leadership - Large Business

KRISTINA PACHECO *Machinist V, Kamantics Corporation, a division of Kaman*

Kristina explored several career paths before discovering her true passion for manufacturing, where she thrives on problem-solving and innovation. Now a Machinist at Kamatics Corporation, she applies her skills in machining and process development to drive efficiency and precision. Known for her strong attention to detail and commitment to continuous improvement, Kristina is working toward her goal of being a manufacturing engineer and inspiring future generations to explore manufacturing.

HOPE UTTERBECK *EVP & CIO, Retired, Liberty Bank*

Hope is a seasoned professional with extensive experience in the technology sector. She held various leadership roles, demonstrating a strong commitment to innovation and excellence. Hope's expertise spans executive technical leadership, strategic IT planning, and team development. Additionally, Hope has volunteered her time and serves her community, further showcasing her commitment to making a positive impact.



THE FINALISTS

CATEGORY: Corporate Innovation & Leadership - Small/Medium Business

KATIE DIGIANANTONIO, PH.D. *Senior Research Investigator, Arvinas, Inc.*

Katie is a Senior Research Investigator at Arvinas in the Platform Technology group, where she manages all aspects of protein production and structural biology for the company. Prior to Arvinas, Katie studied protein design with Prof. Michael Hecht at Princeton University, followed by post-doctoral studies of HIV-host interactions with Prof. Yong Xiong at Yale University.

BRITTANY ISHERWOOD *President and CEO, Burke Aerospace*

Brittany is President & CEO of Burke Aerospace, a leading provider of machining services for the Aerospace, IGT, and Defense industries. With prior leadership roles at GE Aviation, she joined Burke in 2016 and became President in 2020. She holds a Mechanical Engineering degree from Wentworth and an MBA from Northeastern. Brittany serves on several industry boards and is passionate about driving operational excellence and strategic growth in advanced manufacturing.

RAJESWARI (RAJI) KOMPALLI *Vice President, Research and Development, Laticrete International Inc.*

Rajeswari (Raji) is a seasoned research and development leader with deep expertise in construction chemicals and building materials. As Vice President of R&D at LATICRETE, she drives innovation, product development, and cross-functional collaboration across global teams. Passionate about advancing sustainability and efficiency, she has spearheaded initiatives in research, raw-material strategy, and digitalization, while fostering a culture of curiosity, teamwork, and continuous improvement in the innovation ecosystem.

AMY THOMPSON, PH.D. *Chief Talent & Training Officer/Chief Technology Officer, Connecticut Center for Advanced Technology (CCAT)*

Amy is a national leader in digital, systems, and manufacturing engineering and technical education. She is passionate about helping manufacturers transform their technical workforce and increase their technical and business capabilities by acquiring new technologies, talent, and skills that support technology adoption and business resiliency.

THE FINALISTS

CATEGORY: Entrepreneurial Innovation & Leadership

AMBER CHILDS, PH.D. *Associate Professor, Psychiatry and Founder, Yale School of Medicine and M-Select*

Amber is a nationally recognized expert in child and adolescent mental health and the founder/CEO of Dr. Amber, a venture dedicated to improving mental health outcomes for youth. Currently an Associate Professor of Psychiatry at Yale School of Medicine, Amber is a serial founder (GROW, YMBCC, M-Select), award-winning innovator, and frequent media contributor (New York Times, Washington Post, CNBC, Hartford Courant). Amber earned her Ph.D. from the University of Tennessee. She lives in Connecticut with her husband and two children.

BARBARA DELOUREIRO *Founder and CEO, Vizionara, LLC*

Barbara is the CEO and Founder of Vizionara, a women-owned tech consulting firm that drives digital transformation and accelerates the ambitious technology agendas of its clients. With over two decades of high-tech leadership, she combines strategic insight with real-world execution. A fierce champion for building STEM talent and leveraging technology for social good, Barbara recently launched the Vizionara Gives Back program, helping nonprofits harness technology to amplify impact.

ROBERTA NOLE *Founder and CEO, Nolaro24 LLC; Stride Physical Therapy and Pedorthic Center*

Roberta is a Physical Therapist, Certified Pedorthist, and founder of Stride Orthotics and Nolaro24. She invented the patented QuadraSTEP® and littleSTEPS® orthotic systems and developed a patented 24-foot-type classification system. Roberta lectures nationally, promotes healthy foot development in children, and mentors workplace injury prevention initiatives. A pilot study she guided at Michelin Plant 1 using the QuadraSTEP Workforce System reported over 80% reduction in MSK injuries across 500+ employees.

VANESSA SENA *Founder and CEO, My Local Chefs (MLC) Nutrition*

Vanessa is the Founder and CEO of MLC Nutrition, a Medicaid-approved food-as-medicine company delivering medically tailored meals across Connecticut. With a background in food systems and culinary operations, she has led the integration of nutrition services into clinical care models. Vanessa partners with health systems, care managers, and policy leaders to bring scalable, community-based food-as-medicine initiatives into healthcare settings that prioritize equity, outcomes, and innovation.

THE FINALISTS

CATEGORY: Research Innovation & Leadership

VERONICA MARIA PIMENTEL, M.D. *OBGYN Residency Research Director, Associate Professor OBGYN, and Assistant Professor, Trinity Health of New England. QU Netter School of Medicine, UConn School of Medicine*

Veronica Maria is a Maternal-Fetal Medicine Specialist, Residency Research Director at Trinity Health of NE, and an associate professor at the Netter M.D. School of Medicine, and an assistant professor at the UConn School of Medicine. She is nationally recognized for improving maternal health. She innovatively combines research, education, mentorship, and advocacy to improve the clinical care of pregnant and postpartum people via the lens of equity.

RUZICA PISKAC, PH.D. *Donna L. Dubinsky Associate Professor of Computer Science, Yale School of Engineering and Applied Science*

Ruzica is a Professor of Computer Science at Yale and co-founder of Leibniz AI, a startup leveraging AI and formal reasoning to automate legal reasoning and make legal knowledge universally accessible. At Yale, she leads the ROSE group, with research spanning software verification, applied cryptography, and automated reasoning. Her work bridges rigorous formal methods with real-world applications in technology and law.

ANNA TARAKANOVA, PH.D. *Associate Professor, Mechanical Engineering and Biomedical Engineering, University of Connecticut*

Anna is a computational biophysicist whose research advances multiscale, molecular, and data-driven modeling of nanoscale biological materials. A key focus is on extracellular matrix proteins and their roles in aging and disease. Her work integrates physics-based approaches and machine learning to uncover mechanisms of tissue behavior and structure–function relationships in molecular materials, with the long-term goal of enabling predictive biomaterials design and new frameworks for understanding aging-related pathologies.

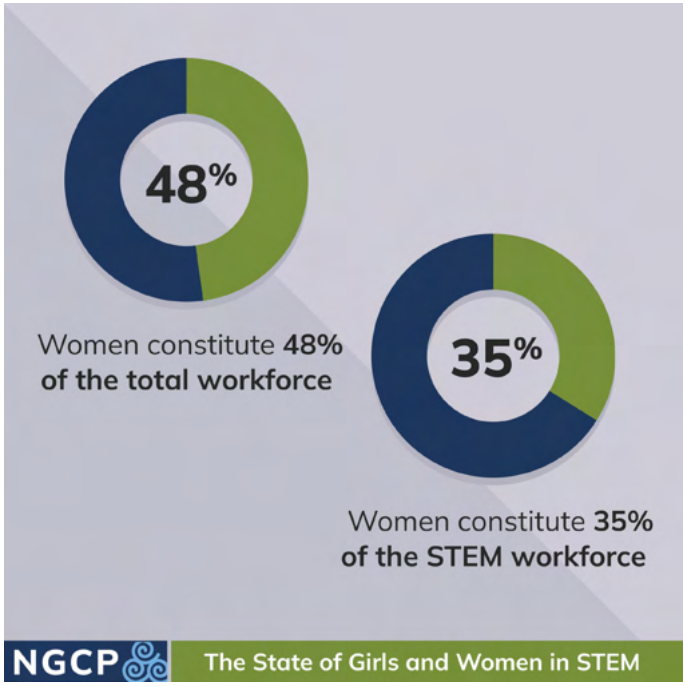
TAMILLA TRIANTORO, PH.D. *Associate Professor, Business Analytics and Information Systems, Quinnipiac University School of Business*

Tamilla is an Associate Professor at Quinnipiac University and a global expert in human-AI collaboration. Her research explores the intersection of artificial intelligence, the future of work, and well-being. She is a co-author of Converging Minds and an active speaker at academic and industry events worldwide. With a Ph.D. from the City University of New York, where she researched online user behavior, Tamilla brings a deep understanding of the human element to her work.

CATEGORY: Research Innovation & Leadership *(continued)*

LEA WINTER, PH.D. *Assistant Professor of Chemical and Environmental Engineering, Yale University*

Lea is an Assistant Professor of Chemical and Environmental Engineering at Yale. She received her B.S. from Yale in 2015 and Ph.D. in Chemical Engineering from Columbia in 2020. Her research focuses on electrified processes at the food, energy, water, and climate nexus, including greenhouse gas conversion to chemicals and fuels, green nitrogen fixation, and water treatment. Lea is a 2024 Beckman Young Investigator and 2024 DOE Early Career Awardee.



THE FINALISTS

CATEGORY: Community Innovation & Leadership

NAGASREE GARAPATI, PH.D. *Assistant Professor, Chemical Engineering Program, University of New Haven*

Nagasree is an Assistant Professor in the Chemical Engineering program at the University of New Haven. She has received funding from DOE-GTO, NETL. She also received an outreach grant from Stony Brook Alan Alda Center for Communicating Science, through which she visited 9 schools in and around New Haven. She also collaborated with researchers from Cummins College of Engineering for Women in India on a community project to develop a pilot scale pyrolyzer.

JODIE GILLON *President and CEO, BioCT*

Jodie is the CEO of BioCT. She started her career in hospitals, advocacy, and government. She then spent 27 years in industry at Novartis, Pfizer, and AstraZeneca, wherein she served as the Head of their Chief Medical Office, as well as four startup companies in drug development and AI. Achillion Pharmaceuticals brought her to New Haven, where she has been serving CT residents, patients, students, workforce, and growing the life sciences industry.

TANYA HENNEGHAN *Director, IT Administration, Southern Connecticut State University*

Tanya is an experienced IT leader with over 25 years of experience in IT operations, data, governance, and strategy across higher education, healthcare, government, and industry. She has held senior leadership roles in both public and private sectors. Deeply committed to community service, Tanya is active in several professional organizations and is dedicated to mentoring and creating pathways into STEM for underrepresented youth.

EMILY JACOBS, PH.D. *Senior Principal Biomedical Engineer, Technical Fellow, Medtronic*

As a technical lead within Medtronic's Surgical Research & Technology group, Emily explores new opportunities to address unmet clinical needs through the development of novel and disruptive technologies. She has 10 years of experience in the medical device industry with expertise in biomaterials, surgical devices, and cancer treatment modalities. Emily holds her Ph.D. in Biomedical Engineering from the University of Connecticut.

CATEGORY: Community Innovation & Leadership *(continued)*

JENNIFER PASCAL *Associate Professor in Residence and Associate Department Head, Dept. of Chemical and Biomolecular Engineering, University of Connecticut*

Jennifer earned a B.S. and a Ph.D. in Chemical Engineering from Tennessee Technological University. She was a National Institutes of Health Academic Science Education Research Training Postdoctoral Fellow at the University of New Mexico where she focused on cancer research and taught at a tribal college. She has been a faculty member at the University of Connecticut since 2016, where she teaches in the Chemical and Biomolecular Engineering department.

THE FINALISTS

CATEGORY: Academic Innovation & Leadership - Post-Secondary

COLLEEN BIELITZ, PH.D. *Associate VP for Strategic Initiatives & Outreach, Southern Connecticut State University*

Colleen is an accomplished academic, administrator, entrepreneur, and futurist who delivers pragmatic ideas and insights into the trends, technologies, and paradigms transforming education and society. She oversees Strategic Initiatives and Outreach for Southern Connecticut State University, where she works to create purposeful, focused change in her institution's economic and social potential. Colleen lives her passion daily, illuminating what is possible at the nexus between tech and human ingenuity.

MALGORZATA (MARGARET) CARTIERA, PH.D. *Innovation Director, Yale University*

Malgorzata (Margaret) specializes in translating bold ideas into impactful solutions. At Yale, she mentors emerging innovators at Tsai CITY and leads interdisciplinary initiatives at the YNHHS Center for Healthcare Innovation. She previously managed Connecticut's Bioscience and Regenerative Medicine Funds and held executive roles at biotech, medtech, and digital health companies. Her expertise spans product development, operations, strategy, and investment. Margaret holds degrees from Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute, the University of Pennsylvania, and Yale University.

CLARA FANG, PH.D. *Professor & Chair, Department of Civil, Environmental, & Biomedical Engineering, College of Engineering,Technology, & Architecture, University of Hartford*

Clara, a Professor and Chair of Civil Engineering at the University of Hartford, is an internationally recognized leader in transportation engineering. She leverages AI, simulation modeling, and computational methods to enhance infrastructure safety and efficiency. Author of over 60 publications and recipient of nearly $1 million in research funding, her AI-driven bridge performance work has been featured by the Hartford Courant, Fox 61, NBC, and the Connecticut Academy of Science & Engineering.

SUSAN FREUDZON, PH.D. *Director of Biomedical Engineering Graduate Program, Fairfield University*

Susan is the Program Director of Biomedical Engineering at Fairfield University. She oversees curriculum development, accreditation, and student advising, and builds industry partnerships to support senior design and student-led research. Susan teaches Biomechanics, Medical Device Design, Biomedical Instrumentation, and Imaging. Her research includes medical device innovation, low-cost healthcare training tools, and STEM outreach. She also serves as the faculty advisor to the Tau Beta Pi honor society.

CATEGORY: Academic Innovation & Leadership - Post-Secondary

(continued)

KRISTINE HORVAT, PH.D. *Associate Professor of Chemical Engineering, University of New Haven*

Kristine is an Associate Professor and Program Coordinator of undergraduate Chemical Engineering at the University of New Haven, where she teaches laboratory, materials science, thermal-fluid, and sustainable energy courses. Her research focuses on finding ways to make and use energy so that excess carbon dioxide is not released into our atmosphere. Specifically, she studies processes to make biofuels from algae and gas hydrates for carbon dioxide sequestration.

JASNA JANKOVIC, PH.D. *Associate Professor, Department of Materials Science and Engineering, University of Connecticut*

Jasna is an Associate Professor in the Materials Science and Engineering Department at the University of Connecticut. Her research focuses on clean energy, and her teaching on materials engineering and STEM education. She has more than 25 years of experience in clean energy, more than 50 publications, two patents, and two provisional patents. Jasna is a recipient of a number of awards in Canada and the U.S. for research and teaching.

KIKU JONES, PH.D. *Professor of Business Analytics and Information, Quinnipiac University School of Business*

Kiku is a Professor of Business Analytics and Information Systems at Quinnipiac University, dedicated to advancing inclusive STEM education and leadership. Her work integrates academic excellence, nonprofit service—including leadership roles at Feed The Children and ACE Women's Network-CT—and global engagement. Recognized with multiple teaching and service awards, Kiku is committed to empowering women and fostering equity through education, innovation, and community impact.

20 Years

THE FINALISTS

CATEGORY: Academic Innovation & Leadership - Secondary

ALISSA DEJONGE *President, Mercy High School*

Alissa is President of Mercy High School in Middletown, and is a visionary leader in STEM education. She recently launched a Business and Financial Literacy Program and sustains long-standing STEM clubs, including the TechTigers, New England's only all-girls FIRST Robotics team. A mentor and advocate for diversity, Alissa fosters student growth through community outreach, professional networking, and university partnerships, preparing young women to lead with integrity in STEM fields and beyond.

LINDSAY MCCARTHY *Science Teacher, Amity Regional High School*

Lindsay is in her seventh year of teaching biological science and second year of teaching an independent research course. She teaches students how to work with professionals and conduct research under their mentorship. Lindsay has always loved both education and the sciences. She feels lucky to be able to have both as a part of her career and support young learners in finding and pursuing their interest in science.

JULIE MCTAGUE *STEM Department Chairperson, Joel Barlow High School*

Julie is a 30-year educator with 19 years in school leadership, currently serving as Joel Barlow High School's STEM Department Chair. By leveraging passions and talents, she empowers teachers to build forward-thinking programs where students discover their inherent capabilities and envision themselves as future leaders and innovators. Currently, Julie and her team are expanding student opportunities for interdisciplinary learning and career exploration, aligning with the modernized National Career Cluster Framework.

SARAH REEVES *Science Teacher, Amity Regional High School*

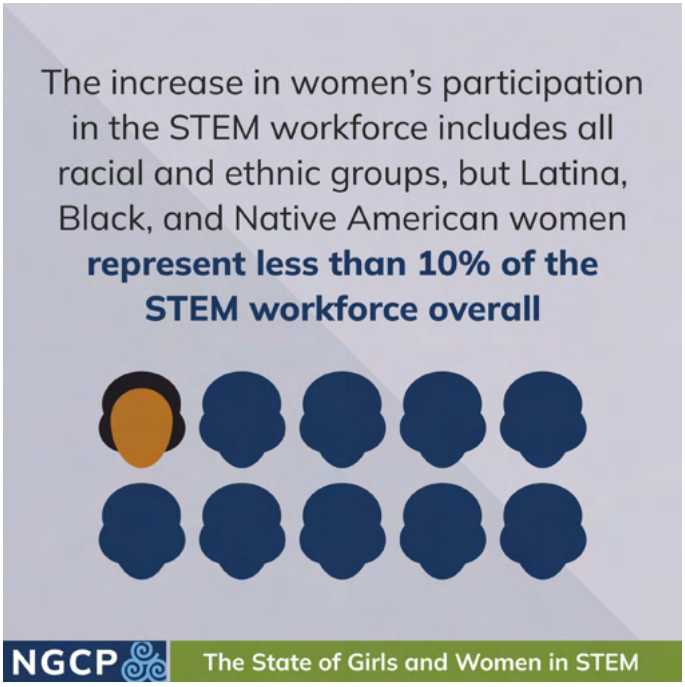
Sarah is the current director of Amity High School's science research program. In this role, she guides motivated students through the process of selecting a science research topic, connecting with mentor(s) involved in a related industry or university program, pursuing their selected research in depth, and preparing their results for presentation at a number of local and/or national science fairs and competitions.

CATEGORY: Academic Innovation & Leadership - Secondary

(continued)

CHINMA UCHE, PH.D. *Computer Science and Mathematics Teacher, CREC Academy of Aerospace and Engineering*

Chinma is a Math and Computer Science teacher at CREC Academy of Aerospace and Engineering, who advocates for access to Computer Science education for all students. She often says, "All our students should have the opportunity to be creators of technology." Chinma supports students and teachers in and outside the classroom. She co-founded the College Board-endorsed Mobile-CSP course and serves on the Connecticut Commission for Educational Technology.



THE FINALISTS

CATEGORY: Collegian Innovation & Leadership

AMNA AL-AZDEE *Chemical Engineering Undergraduate Student, University of New Haven*

Amna is a dedicated student and NASA Pathways intern at Johnson Space Center. She exemplifies academic leadership by mentoring peers, guiding collaborative projects, and leading research focused on sustainable energy solutions. Recognized for her curiosity, resilience, and commitment to excellence, Amna strives to foster inclusive, innovative learning environments. She aspires to continue advancing discovery and inspiring others through her dedication to scholarship, leadership, and service.

MARIACELESTE FLORIAN *Undergraduate Student, Southern Connecticut State University*

Mariaceleste is a senior at Southern Connecticut State University majoring in Physics with minors in Mathematics and Computer Science. She has conducted research in optics and patient-centered studies in radiation oncology, fueling her passion for medical physics. Mariaceleste founded the SCSU Women in STEM club, tutors STEM courses, and leads outreach programs for children in Connecticut and beyond. She plans to pursue graduate studies in medical physics.

RACHEL GODEK *PhD Graduate Student, Biomedical Sciences, UConn Health*

Rachel is a Ph.D. candidate in biomedical sciences at the University of Connecticut Health Center in the lab of Dr. Rebecca Page. Her work uses a multidisciplinary approach to understand the type 2A phosphoprotein phosphatases which are dysregulated in multiple cancers and neurodegeneration. Additionally, she enjoys mentoring and training younger scientists in the program.

SOPHIA HATZIS *Undergraduate Student, Student Lab Manager, University of Connecticut, Innovate Labs, School of Business, College of Engineering*

Sophia aspires to pursue a career as a Human Factors Engineer, aiming to combine her technical expertise with an understanding of human behavior to design solutions that prioritize both functionality and social impact, ultimately focusing on people-centered problem-solving.

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CATEGORY: Collegian Innovation & Leadership *(continued)*

ANJAL JAIN *Undergraduate Student and Founder, Yale University and AdheRx*

Anjal is a Yale undergraduate double-majoring in Biomedical Engineering and Music. She founded AdheRx, an AI-powered medication adherence platform, and Eye Matter International, a nonprofit advancing arts accessibility for the low-vision community. She has co-authored multiple publications, secured pharmacy pilot partnerships, and is passionate about student mentorship. Recognized as a Hillhouse Fellow for entrepreneurship and a Hahn Scholar for STEM research, Anjal continues to inspire interdisciplinary innovation at the intersection of STEM and social impact.

THE FINALISTS

CATEGORY: Youth Innovation & Leadership

RHEA DOSHI *High School Student, Kingswood Oxford*

Rhea is a Kingswood Oxford student researcher (formerly at Choate Rosemary Hall) and founder of CereNova, developing NeuroStride™, an affordable smart mat platform using gait analysis to flag early markers of neurodegenerative disease. She is running a Phase I, IRB-approved study enrolling up to 500 participants and has initiated the FDA 510(k) clearance process. A multi-award-winning student and NSF i-Corps participant, she blends biotechnology and entrepreneurship to build practical, real world health innovations.

CAELI EDMED *High School Student, Lyme-Old Lyme High School*

Caeli found her love of engineering through her high school's FIRST Robotics team 236. As drive team coach in her junior and senior years, she helped lead robot design, manufacturing, and strategy during build season and directed the team's collaboration and robot movements in competitions. Now a first-year mechanical engineering major at Yale University, Caeli plans to apply her robotics experience to her studies and future projects.

NAMYANZI EDWARDS *High School Student, CREC Academy of Aerospace and Engineering*

Namyanzi is a tenacious high school graduate of the Academy of Aerospace and Engineering, and now a freshman at Columbia studying Financial Engineering. She advocates for equitable education and works to support marginalized communities through biomedical, computer science, and legislative research, including participation in programs like the Jackson Laboratory Summer Student Program. She enjoys singing, watercolor painting, and logging flight hours in her pursuit of a private pilot license.

VALERIA PEGKOU CHRISTOFI *High School Student, Farmington High School*

Valeria is an upcoming senior at Farmington High School with a passion for data science and mathematics. Her STEM journey began with robotics in elementary school and has grown through advanced coursework, including AP classes, Girls Who Code summer camps, and a mentorship in actuarial science with Aetna. Valeria is a Connecticut NCWIT Aspirations in Computing winner who hopes to use data science to create meaningful social impact.

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CATEGORY: Youth Innovation & Leadership *(continued)*

ARIANNA PEREIRA *High School Student, Joel Barlow High School*

Arianna explores the intersection of AI, medicine, and public health through independent research and community advocacy. She developed multiple machine learning models to predict clinical trial enrollment and leads STEM initiatives like Spark Nonprofit Inc. and the Grey Matter Project. Inspired by her own experiences with epilepsy, Arianna aims to become a physician-researcher advancing inclusive science and evidence-based policy to improve lives on both local and global scales.

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