

Celebration of Achievement



Honoring the outstanding students, faculty and staff who make CSTEM successful!

May 6, 2025



COLLEGE OF SCIENCE, TECHNOLOGY,
ENGINEERING & MATHEMATICS

2025 Celebration of Achievement

Master of Ceremonies

Dennis Kolosov, Ph. D.

Assistant Professor, Biological Sciences

Introduction

Jackie Trischman, Ph.D., Dean

Presentations

Biological Sciences & Biotechnology

James Jancovich Ph.D., Department Chair

Chemistry and Biochemistry

Robert Iafe, Ph.D., Department Chair

Computer Science and Information Systems

Simon Fan, Ph.D., Department Chair

Mathematics

Marshall Whittlesey, Ph.D., Department Chair

Physics

Ed Price, Ph.D., Department Chair

College of Science, Technology, Engineering, & Mathematics

Jackie Trischman, Ph.D., Dean

Closing

Dennis Kolosov, Ph. D.

Assistant Professor, Biological Sciences

2025 Celebration of Achievement

Welcome from Dean Jackie Trischman

“Life is a Group Activity.” That feels especially true after this year—a year filled with big challenges and even bigger reminders that none of us gets through this alone. Whether we were navigating budget uncertainties, federal grant chaos and dismantling of so many programs that we recognize as important to the fabric and future of our country, threats to our individual and collective freedoms, pandemic learning loss, or the whirlwind rise of LLMs and AI tools, we’ve all had moments that tested our patience, resilience, and creativity.

But here’s the thing: in science, in education, and in life, we rarely solve anything alone. We build knowledge together, lift each other up, and keep moving forward—not in spite of the challenges, but because we face them together. That’s what makes this community so powerful.

This year, I saw that power in action. I saw students stepping up as leaders, advocating for their peers and reimagining what support can look like. I saw faculty diving into new research, asking harder questions, and mentoring with compassion and purpose. I saw staff pouring themselves into the work that so often happens behind the scenes—ensuring everything ran as smoothly as possible. Every person played a part.

At a university that is committed to DEI—not just as a statement, but as a daily practice—we know that real progress takes collaboration. It means making room for every voice, every background, and every lived experience. It means recognizing that the work of equity isn’t separate from the work of science or education—it is the work.

So as we close out this academic year, I invite you to reflect not just on what you accomplished, but what we achieved together. Let’s carry that collective energy forward. Because life—and especially the life of the mind—is, and always will be, a group activity.

Biological Sciences

Outstanding Faculty-Student Collaboration

Awarded to **Dr. Elinne Becket and Josue Navarrete**

Josue Navarrete has been working with Dr. Becket since 2023. As a computer science undergraduate and URISE Scholar, Josue has played a pivotal role in developing informatics and statistical analysis pipelines for metagenome datasets in Dr. Becket’s lab. Their work has contributed to six research projects, including collaborations with faculty and a regional nonprofit, and has also been permanently implemented into multiple CURE courses.

Josue has presented their research through five poster and two oral presentations at both internal and international conferences, earning recognition such as the Barry Goldwater Scholar, the COAST Undergraduate Research Support Award, the ABRCMS Outstanding Presentation Award, and the CSTEM Molsoft Award. Their contributions have led to three manuscripts currently in draft, with two featuring Josue as the first author. Josue has also mentored undergraduate and master’s students in computational techniques, ensuring the sustainability of their work in future projects. With a strong passion for data science and its application to biological systems, Josue is currently interviewing for PhD programs across the country with the goal of becoming a faculty member at an HSI PUI. Their experience in Dr. Becket’s lab has provided them with extensive training in computational biology, teamwork, and project leadership. Josue will graduate in May 2025 with a GPA of 3.87.

Through their collaborative research efforts, mentorship, and dedication to advancing data-driven biological research, Dr. Becket and Josue exemplify an outstanding faculty-student partnership. Their work has significantly propelled the Becket Lab’s research program and set Josue on a promising career path in computational biology.



Biotechnology

Outstanding Faculty-Student Collaboration

Awarded to **Dr. Carlos Luna Lopez and Casandra Nguyen**

Casandra Nguyen graduated with a Biotechnology major and was recognized for her creativity and contributions to research. While working in Dr. Carlos Luna Lopez's Lab, she played a key role in developing an innovative face-mask-based drug delivery system, designed to provide a non-invasive and efficient method for administering life-saving treatments. Through this project, she gained expertise in 3D AutoCAD and 3D printing, complementing her biotechnology education and research skills.

Casandra is currently pursuing a Master of Science in Biology at CSUSM, continuing her research under Dr. Luna to explore compounds that inhibit crosstalk between fat cells and breast cancer. With a strong passion for women's health and reproductive biotechnology, she aspires to contribute to advancing treatments for gynecological and reproductive diseases. Her vision includes leading clinical trials and bridging the gap between lab research and real-world applications to drive meaningful impact in the scientific and medical community. Casandra's dedication to research and innovation makes her an outstanding ambassador for CSUSM, embodying creativity, leadership, and a commitment to improving human health.

CSUBiotech Glenn Nagel Finalist 2024

Olivia Blauer—"Mix-Valent Diiron Model Complexes for Active Sites in Redox-Active Metalloenzymes"

CSUBiotech Glenn Nagel Finalist 2025

Brooke Bounyavong — "Developing Chelate Compounds to Extract Heavy Metal Toxins"



Chemistry and Biochemistry

Outstanding Faculty-Student Collaboration

Awarded to **Dr. Ezequiel Vidal and Kyler Magnuson**

Since Spring 2024, Kyler Magnuson has been working with Dr. Ezequiel Vidal on the development and optimization of chemical sensors, incorporating 3D printing, nanotechnology, and environmental monitoring to create innovative, portable detection systems. Their collaboration exemplifies the power of faculty-student mentorship in fostering scientific growth and innovation.

Kyler, an exceptional Chemistry major with a 3.921 GPA, has shown a deep passion for analytical chemistry, excelling in both coursework and laboratory research. His contributions extend beyond research, as he has played a significant role in developing academic tools to support student success, including a well-organized system of notes designed to assist future cohorts. His initiative and leadership in these efforts reflect his commitment to both scientific inquiry and peer mentorship.

Under Dr. Vidal's guidance, Kyler has developed critical research skills and an independent, thoughtful approach to scientific problem-solving. His work aligns with the teacher-scholar model, integrating instruction, mentorship, and student-driven academic contributions. With aspirations for graduate studies, Kyler continues to refine the skills and expertise that will prepare him for a future as a scientist and educator. Through their collaboration, Dr. Vidal and Kyler exemplify the values of the CSTEM Faculty-Student Collaboration Award, demonstrating how faculty mentorship extends beyond traditional coursework to empower student growth, leadership, and research excellence. Their joint efforts have significantly contributed to the advancement of analytical chemistry research at CSUSM and serve as a model of impactful faculty-student engagement.

Molsoft Award

Awarded to **Santana Rodriguez**

The Molsoft Computational Science Award recognizes a student who has meaningfully incorporated computation into their research projects or advanced coursework within the department. By providing free software licensing, Molsoft empowers recipients to pursue projects and research opportunities that will enhance their academic and professional development.

Santana, graduating this spring with a BS in chemistry, has made significant contributions to advancing scientific knowledge through his undergraduate research during summer-fall 2025 academic year. His project focused on a computational exploration of Diels-Alder reactions activated by metals, such as zirconium complexes. Santana learned how to build and optimize computational calculations to predict reaction mechanisms and energetics, using tools such as density functional theory (DFT) and molecular dynamics simulations.

Through his research, Santana became highly proficient in computational techniques, including transition state modeling, electronic structure calculations, and data analysis. His determination to troubleshoot calculation errors was impressive, and as a result of his dedication, Santana and his mentor are expecting to submit a benchmarking manuscript of their findings to a peer-reviewed journal at the end of the summer. Throughout his time in the lab, Santana's work ethic, efficiency, and rapid growth in computational expertise has been impressive.



Computer Science and Information Systems

Outstanding Faculty-Student Collaboration

Awarded to **Dr. Nahid Majd and Andres Hinojosa**

As a faculty/student pair, Andres and Dr. Majd have made significant contributions to Computer Science, particularly in the areas of Network Security, Blockchain, and Software Engineering Analytics. Andres has demonstrated exceptional research abilities, publishing three papers in top-ranked IEEE conferences while still an undergraduate student. Now a master's student with a 4.0 GPA, he continues his research in Dr. Majd's Network Security Lab, contributing to multiple ongoing projects that are expected to lead to further publications.

Andres' research spans across critical areas of computer science, including innovative approaches in security and software analytics. His expertise has earned him an internship in Innovative Technologies at New York Life Insurance Company for Summer 2025. Beyond research, Andres has been an inspiring leader and consultant for other students in Dr. Majd's lab, fostering collaboration and mentorship. Additionally, he has served as a teaching assistant for three semesters, assisting in course assessments and supporting student learning.

Through their collaboration, Andres and Dr. Majd exemplify the values of faculty-student mentorship and research excellence. Their joint efforts have made a meaningful impact on the CSIS department, and Andres' contributions highlight his potential as a future leader in the field of computer science.



Mathematics

Outstanding Faculty-Student Collaboration

Awarded to **Dr. Hanson Smith and Dylan Scofield**

Dylan Scofield and Dr. Hanson Smith have built an active and engaging research collaboration that exemplifies the spirit of faculty-student mentorship. Dylan's interest in research began in the final weeks of Dr. Smith's Abstract Algebra course in Spring 2023, where he became fascinated by how rings were used in Lamé's and Kummer's approaches to Fermat's Last Theorem. Over the summer, Dr. Smith guided Scofield in further exploring cyclotomic number rings, leading to Scofield delivering a well-received talk at the SMIMIC math department colloquium in Fall 2023.

This early exposure to mathematical research motivated Scofield to pursue his master's in mathematics at CSUSM. After excelling in Graduate Number Theory in Spring 2024, he took on a mentorship role as a graduate mentor for Dr. Smith's summer scholars program. In addition to mentoring, Scofield continued his own research in algebraic number theory.

Now, Scofield and Dr. Smith have transitioned their collaboration into Scofield's master's thesis research. Their work focuses on prime factorization and the splitting of the integral prime 2 in radical extensions—continuing Dr. Smith's prior studies on odd integral primes in these extensions. Given the originality of their work, they aim to publish their results in a peer-reviewed journal. With a 3.675 GPA, Scofield is on track to graduate in fall 2025 or spring 2026. His long-term goal is to pursue a Ph.D. in mathematics and a career in academia.



The Wolfram Award

Awarded to **Noah Lowery**

The Wolfram Award is granted to Noah Lowery, a graduating senior who has demonstrated exceptional skill in software-based computation and visualization. As a 2024 summer scholar with Dr. Hanson Smith, Lowery used SageMath to generate theoretical examples and later employed Mathematica to create clear, impactful visuals that enhanced the team's research poster. His contributions helped explain a complex topic in an accessible and engaging way. In Dr. Amber Puha's Math 443 course, Lowery further impressed with efficient, well-annotated Mathematica code and polished simulation outputs. His work consistently combined technical precision with clear presentation. Lowery is excited to pursue roles in data science or financial mathematics that emphasize problem-solving and computational tools.

K. Brooks and Marion Reid Student Achievement Awards

Thanks to a generous donation by the Founding Librarian Dean and Librarian Emerita Marion Reid, and Founding Faculty Member and Professor Emeritus K. Brooks Reid, the Department of Mathematics annually recognizes three students that have shown outstanding academic performance in Mathematics.

Awarded to:

Renton McGregor – Reid Discrete Mathematics Award

Mackenzie Cox – Reid Algebra/Analysis Award

Ian Tullis – Reid Graduate Student Award



Physics/Electrical Engineering

Outstanding Faculty-Student Collaboration

Awarded to **Dr. Reza Kamali and Jesus Hernandez**

Jesus has distinguished himself as a stellar student and researcher in the Electrical Engineering program. He has made significant contributions to hands-on research and learning through his work on advanced laboratory systems and experimental design. Jesus was instrumental in designing and setting up a complex antenna measurement system, initially configured in the department's stockroom and now being installed in the campus anechoic chamber. This system plays a vital role in understanding how antennas transmit signals and has greatly expanded the department's research and teaching capabilities.

In addition to his work on antenna systems, Jesus has also played a key role in the VLSI design lab. His technical skills ensured experiments ran smoothly and reliably, often taking on responsibilities that exceeded the capabilities of current lab staff. Jesus has supported instruction in several core engineering courses, including EE 100, EE 210, EE 420, and EE 430, significantly enhancing the learning environment for his peers. His initiative, problem-solving abilities, and collaborative spirit have enhanced the quality of the Electrical Engineering program at CSUSM.



Engineering

Outstanding Faculty-Student Collaboration

Awarded to **Dr. Kenneth Ballou and Philip Avdey**

Philip Avdey and Dr. Kenneth Ballou have established a strong research collaboration in the field of computational scientific workflows. Philip, a junior Computer Science major with a cumulative GPA of 3.851, has been actively working with Dr. Ballou on an innovative research project called **Cowl**.

Cowl is designed to automate the transformation of computational scientific workflows. This project streamlines the creation and management of AWS compute infrastructure, aiding researchers in executing computationally expensive scientific workflows efficiently. Once the workflows are completed, Cowl facilitates the automated teardown of resources, ensuring cost efficiency while maintaining high computational performance.

By bridging the gap between running resource-intensive tasks on local machines and migrating them to supercomputers, this research has the potential to make high-performance computing more accessible and scalable for the scientific community. Through his work, Philip has demonstrated technical expertise, problem-solving skills, and a deep understanding of cloud-based scientific computing.

San Diego County Engineering Council

Awarded to **Dr. Simon Fan**

Dr. Simon Fan, Professor of Software Engineering in the CSTEM Engineering Program, has been awarded the prestigious 2025 San Diego County Engineering Council's (SDCEC) Outstanding Engineering Educator Award.

CSTEM Dean's Outstanding Graduate Award

Awarded to **Maya Qaddourah**

Maya Qaddourah is the 2025 CSTEM Dean's Outstanding Graduate, a recognition of her exceptional academic achievements, research contributions, and leadership

A dedicated advocate for student success, Maya played a pivotal role in establishing two new student professional development groups at CSUSM—the STEM Outreach Club and Sigma Xi, a research honor society in STEM. Through these initiatives, she has enriched the student experience by organizing professional development workshops, faculty-student engagement events, and mentorship programs, significantly breaking down barriers for underrepresented students in STEM.

Beyond campus, Maya dedicated over 400 hours as a Pathmaker Medical Intern at Palomar Medical Center, earning the Exemplary Service Award for her outstanding commitment to patient care. Maya took a leadership role in SuperSTEM Saturday, designing an interactive Wickedly Wild Slime activity with a pop culture twist. Her initiative brought national attention to the event through a TV feature, that helped draw over 20,000 attendees to campus. Maya took full advantage of CSUSM's research opportunities by joining Dr. Jane Kim's lab and went on to present her work at professional conferences in multiple fields, representing CSUSM at the CSU Student Research Program for two consecutive years. Her research culminated in her first first-author journal publication in Dr. Sajith Jayasinghe's lab, highlighting her interdisciplinary approach and intellectual curiosity.

As the **2025 CSTEM Dean's Award recipient**, Maya will serve as the **Student Grand Marshal** at the CSTEM Commencement and carry the student Mace.

CSTEM Dean's Outstanding Undergraduate Research Award

Awarded to **Valeria Castellanos Rodriguez**

Valeria Castellanos Rodriguez is awarded the CSTEM Outstanding Graduate Award for her exceptional academic achievements, dedication to research, and leadership in STEM outreach.

Valeria, a first-generation Latina student, has been a key member of Dr. Carlos Luna Lopez's lab and a URISE scholar for the past two years. She is deeply driven by her background and passion for cancer research, contributing significantly to her family while excelling academically with a 3.96 GPA. In her early research, she worked on two complex projects—studying morphological changes in breast cancer cells and building an LED-controlled algae bioreactor using a Raspberry Pi. She has since presented at the American Society for Cell Biology and the West Coast Biological Sciences Conference. Valeria was accepted to competitive REU programs at Stanford and the Fred Hutch Cancer Center, where she investigated autophagy signaling and breast cancer proliferation mechanisms.

Valeria is also a dedicated mentor and community advocate. She has served as a STEM tutor, an Accelerated Excellence in Education ambassador for four years, and has presented to K–12 students about STEM careers. She is a past Goldwater Scholar and North County WIN scholarship recipient. She recently accepted an offer to pursue a PhD in cancer research at the University of California, Irvine. Her strong academic record, research experience, and leadership make her a standout student and future scientist.



CSTEM Community Engaged Scholar

Awarded to **Haley Lorenz**

Haley Lorenz is a passionate and community-minded student who exemplifies the spirit of the Community Engaged Scholar Award.

Since transferring to CSUSM in Fall 2022, Haley has been an active leader in the Math Department—organizing events, supporting peers, and embracing the new Algorithmic Option of the Math major. She completed internships at Thermo Fisher and through UCLA's Break Through Tech AI program, where she helped develop an AI tool to match travel nurses with hospitals. Her leadership on this project helped sharpen both her technical and collaborative skills.

Haley brought her real-world experience back to campus as the first student to enroll in the Math 495 internship course and gave a standout talk at the November 2024 SMIMIC seminar, encouraging fellow students to pursue internships and careers in STEM. With a 3.255 GPA, Haley continues to grow as a scholar and leader. Her commitment to connecting academic learning with community impact makes her a strong candidate for this award.

2024-25 CSTEM Commencement Speaker

Awarded to **Haley Lorenz**

Haley Lorenz, a graduating B.S. in Mathematics student, has been selected as the 2025 CSTEM commencement speaker. Chosen for her strong application, Haley will share her CSUSM journey with her fellow graduates.

Haley was also honored with the Cougar Wall of Fame award at the Tukwut Leadership Awards, recognizing her exceptional achievements in academics, leadership, and campus involvement.

CSTEM Outstanding Student Leaders

Awarded to **James Rosas** and **Kurt Williams**

James Rosas is a remarkable recipient of the 2024 CSTEM Outstanding Student Leader Award. Since joining CSUSM as a CIRM COMPASS scholar, James has demonstrated exceptional initiative, dedication, and leadership both in and out of the lab. He is a key figure in the Jameson Lab, where he leads a research team studying the role of epidermal gamma delta T cells in psoriasis using single-cell RNA sequencing. James brings infectious enthusiasm to his work and is respected for his independence, insight, and mentorship. As one of the most reliable and motivated students in the lab, he continually pushes his peers to dive deeper into scientific inquiry. His leadership has extended into competitive research opportunities, including his role as a core author on a forthcoming manuscript and as first author on a poster presentation for the Federation of Clinical Immunology Societies (FOCIS) 2024 conference. James exemplifies what it means to lead through passion, rigor, and a commitment to scientific excellence.

Kurt Williams is the 2024 CSTEM Outstanding Student Leader Award recipient, honored for his exceptional leadership and dedication to CSUSM's engineering community. As a lead officer of the Amateur Radio Club, Kurt helped raise \$1,500—earning the club a top-three fundraising spot on campus—while creating a welcoming and vibrant space for students. Kurt's leadership extends across several organizations, including TOM and IEEE, where his collaborative spirit has brought unity and energy to the engineering student body. Beyond student orgs, he plays a vital role in supporting lab operations, consistently going above and beyond expectations to ensure smooth course delivery. Known for his inclusive and motivating leadership style, Kurt mentors his peers with a rare combination of positivity, humility, and effectiveness.






CSTEM Inclusive Excellence & Diversity Award

Awarded to **Yetunde Adebayo**

Yetunde Adebayo is the recipient of the 2025 CSTEM Inclusive Excellence and Diversity Leadership Award. Her academic excellence, impactful research, and inspiring leadership have left a meaningful and lasting mark on the CSTEM community. Yetunde has shown an unwavering commitment to advancing inclusion, creating spaces that support and empower students from historically underrepresented backgrounds in STEM.

She played a pivotal role in organizing events like *Black Voices in STEM*, helping to amplify Black and African American voices within the College. Her nominators speak highly of her exceptional work ethic, thoughtful collaboration, and her unique ability to bring people together for a common cause. In addition, her research in public health reflects a deep passion for using science to promote equity and social change.

Yetunde's leadership has mobilized her peers and faculty alike, creating real momentum around issues of diversity, equity, and belonging. CSTEM is proud to celebrate her achievements and the legacy of compassionate and transformative leadership that she leaves behind.



CSTEM Minerva Award for Outstanding Graduate Teaching

Awarded to **Manuel Montano**

It is with great pleasure that we award Manuel Montano the 2025 CSTEM Minerva Award for Graduate Student Teaching. Manuel has shown an unwavering commitment to both teaching and mentorship throughout his graduate studies in the Department of Biological Sciences at California State University San Marcos. His roles as an Instructor of Record, Teaching Assistant, and Course-Embedded Learning Support (CELS) Facilitator have allowed him to demonstrate his deep commitment to fostering student success.

Manuel's passion for teaching is rooted in his desire to give back to the community that supported him as a first-generation college student. He is dedicated to mentoring students, especially those from underrepresented backgrounds in STEM, and creating inclusive, equitable learning environments. His use of active learning strategies and evidence-based teaching practices ensures that students not only grasp difficult scientific concepts but also see the relevance of these concepts in their everyday lives.

Faculty mentors consistently praise Manuel for his reflective teaching style, his dedication to student success, and his ability to engage and support a diverse range of students. His commitment to equity in education, mentorship, and active learning makes him an exceptional educator. Manuel's contributions to the academic community and his passion for mentoring the next generation of scientists make him a highly deserving recipient of this award.



College of Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics

Outstanding Staff

Amy Armstrong	Calvin Le
Lori Asaro	Rebecca Luu
Rebekah Baza	Leticia Marin
Ford Becker	Diane Mitchell
Sara Belontz	Tonya Molnar
Caroline Caplan	Jeffrey Morales
Lisa Carmosino	Courtney Nance Sotelo
Breanna Caso	Elizabeth Nercessian
Clarivel Cedillo Lopez	Jonathan Pont
Jeani Cressy	Angelica Ramos
Andre Dominguez	Everardo Robles-Martinez
Courtney Dow	Dulce Robles-Martinez
Dana Edstrom	Elizabeth Sanchez Bustos
Faraideh Fareidar	Laurie Schmelzer
Jessica Faulkner	Janine Smock
Anissa Garcia Vasquez	Mikaela Speets-Drake
Elizabeth Gonzalez	Patricia Tulloch
Albert Halili	
Dakota Heisel	
Jennifer Johnson	
George Lane	



CSTEM Outstanding Staff Award

Awarded to **Laurie Schmelzer**

Laurie's impact on the CSTEM community is extraordinary. As Director of Student Services & Programming, she is a one-woman powerhouse—managing everything from student concerns and policy interpretation to event coordination and strategic communications. Laurie serves as the first point of contact for countless students, often resolving complex issues related to enrollment, reinstatement, and academic standing. She collaborates regularly with the Dean of Students Office, Disability Support Services, Cougar Care Network, and the Registrar's Office, ensuring students get the support they need.

Beyond individual support, Laurie co-leads the Student Success & Engagement Team (SSET), where she develops orientation programming, career-readiness initiatives, and student outreach events. Her behind-the-scenes efforts have been instrumental in shaping policies and building systems that benefit the entire college. Laurie also creates custom reports to help departments intervene early with at-risk students, tracking prerequisites and course progress to keep students on path toward graduation.

Laurie's most visible contribution is her leadership of Super STEM Saturday, the college's signature outreach event. She coordinates over 120 booths, manages logistics and partnerships with both campus and community organizations, and leads all marketing efforts—ensuring more than 21,000 attendees have welcoming experience. Laurie champions inclusion, fosters connection, and brings warmth and care to every interaction. Whether it's hanging chalkboards for students to leave inspirational notes or launching networking events like Chow on the Deck at the Veterans Center, Laurie has a gift for making CSTEM feel like home. Her dedication, creativity, and collaborative spirit are vital to CSTEM, and she exemplifies the mission of student success.

CSTEM Outstanding Lecturer Award

Awarded to **Sandie Hansen**

Sandie Hansen has been an integral part of the Mathematics Department since 2017, first as a graduate student and now as a lecturer since 2022. Her path has been marked by resilience—overcoming cancer during graduate school and rebuilding her academic foundation with persistence and grace. She now channels those experiences into her teaching, connecting with students through empathy, encouragement, and a belief in their potential.

Sandie's approach to teaching is innovative and impactful. Her "Growth Mindset" lesson—centered on brain science, perseverance, and her own personal journey—has transformed how students see themselves as learners. In one precalculus course, this intervention helped raise the class pass rate 10% above the average. Students regularly describe her as both effective and caring, and data show increased interest in math among her students by the end of each term.

Her contributions extend beyond the classroom. She co-led the redesign of Math 105 during a major enrollment shift and developed a professional development course for precalculus instructors, fostering community and improving pedagogy department-wide. Sandie is a dedicated, reflective educator who uplifts her students and colleagues alike. Her passion, creativity, and leadership make her a truly outstanding lecturer.



CSTEM Faculty Outreach Award

Awarded to **Hanson Smith**

Dr. Smith's passion for making mathematics exciting and engaging for learners of all ages is evident in the wide-reaching impact of his outreach over the past three years. Whether speaking to prospective students at Discover CSUSM, connecting with math teachers and counselors at county education events, or sharing fun math games at Super STEM Saturday, high school camps, and the Blue & Silver Dinner, his dedication exemplifies the very best of faculty outreach.

Among Dr. Smith's many contributions, he has created engaging tools like colorful math major maps to support student understanding of degree pathways and developed interactive projects such as the Sidewalk Chalk Geometry activity for local high school girls. He has actively encouraged and prepared students to lead outreach activities at major events like Super STEM Saturday and Cougar Blue Day. His outreach also includes presenting at counselor-focused events, such as the Early Assessment Program High School Counselor Breakfast, where he emphasized the importance of sustained math education. Dr. Smith has served as a liaison and speaker for the HWY 78 Math Field Day, contributed to the AB 1705 working group, and played a key role on planning committees for the Reid Lecture and the K-16 Collaborative Math Summit. Additionally, he has supported CRESE outreach efforts and co-organized the San Marcos Informal Mathematics Colloquium, promoting broader engagement with mathematics across the community.

Dr. Smith's ongoing dedication to outreach and recruitment has significantly strengthened the department's connection to students and the broader community.



CSTEM Community Partner

Each year, the College of Science, Technology, Engineering, & Mathematics honors a community partner who has demonstrated a commitment toward helping CSUSM, and CSTEM in particular, to fulfill its mission of student success.

Presented to: **K-16 Collaborative, Heather Cavazos & Christine Jensen**

We are honored to recognize the Border Region Talent Pipeline K-16 Collaborative for the Community Partner Award in recognition of their outstanding leadership and commitment to equitable, career-connected education in our region.

Our partnership has yielded lasting benefits for students, faculty, and the broader educational community. Highlights include a paid summer internship program developed in collaboration with the San Diego Regional EDC and industry partners, through which over 30 CSTEM students have gained hands-on experience since 2023, with more placements expected in 2025.

In 2023, they co-hosted the K-16 Math for Careers Summit, fostering vital cross-sector dialogue on math preparedness and college transitions. K-16 funding has also expanded our Professional Mentoring Program, benefiting over 150 STEM students, and supported the launch of the Career Fellows initiative, which equips faculty to embed career readiness into STEM curricula.

The Collaborative's visionary approach has strengthened cross-institutional efforts and enhanced career pathways for students across the region.



CSTEM Campus Heroes

Presented to: **CTREE—Denise Garcia, Richard Armenta, Rita Cooper**

We are proud to honor the Center for Training, Research, and Educational Excellence (CTREE) with the CSTEM Campus Hero Award. Under the direction of Drs. Denise Garcia and Richard Armenta, CTREE has transformed the educational and professional trajectories of hundreds of students and faculty at CSUSM.

With a mission of equity, identity-affirming mentorship, and research-driven learning, CTREE has built a nationally recognized model for inclusive STEM success. Among their many accomplishments:

- Nearly \$3M in annual funding supporting 90 scholars each year
- 93% transfer rate from community college to 4-year institutions—9x the state average
- 2–3x higher graduation rates compared to campus and national peers
- Up to 95% of scholars enrolling in graduate school immediately
- A 37% PhD/MD-PhD attainment rate, 19x the national average

CTREE's true impact is seen in the capable scientists it helps cultivate—many of whom return to mentor the next generation.

Additionally, faculty—particularly early-career researchers—gain access to vital lab support, grant management, and a network that empowers their research and teaching.

This work would not be possible without the dedicated efforts of CTREE's exceptional staff: **Rita Cooper, Valerie Ramirez, Nikki Adams, and Paige Davis**—the unsung heroes whose tireless work has rippled across campus.

The 2024 CSTEM Gonfalonier

Awarded to **Dr. David Barsky**

Dr. David Barsky, emeritus faculty in the Department of Mathematics, has had a profound impact on both CSUSM and the broader academic community. Arriving in 1995, his exceptional career includes groundbreaking research in percolation, with influential papers that have shaped the field. His work is cited in major textbooks, such as Geoffrey Grimmett's *Percolation*, underscoring his intellectual contribution.

Dr. Barsky's dedication to teaching is equally remarkable. He taught the first complete STEM calculus sequence, mentored several master's theses, and spearheaded innovative programs like MAPS (Mathematical Acceleration Program), which helped thousands of students succeed. His development of MATH 101 and 1, serving diverse student groups, has been a cornerstone of CSUSM's mathematics curriculum.

A leader in both the department and the university, Dr. Barsky served as Program Director, Pre-Baccalaureate Mathematics Coordinator, and numerous committee roles, significantly shaping university policy. He has received multiple prestigious awards, including the Ernest and Leslie Zomalt Outstanding Service Award and the President's Award for Service Leadership. Dr. Barsky's contributions have spanned across teaching, research, and service, making him an exemplary candidate for this prestigious recognition.



Harvey Neufeld Faculty Hero Award

Awarded to **Dr. Denise Garcia**

This award, established in the name of President Neufeldt's father's recognizes leadership and dedication to inclusive excellence and enhancing the academic and research landscape at CSUSM.

As the director of CTREE, Dr. Garcia has been instrumental in securing millions of dollars in external funding, advancing opportunities for both students and faculty.

Under her leadership, CTREE has supported over 200 students, with many now matriculating into Ph.D. programs or other graduate programs nationwide. She provides valuable professional development opportunities for undergraduate students, helping them secure funding and networking experiences that position them for success at conferences and beyond. Her commitment to supporting junior faculty is particularly noteworthy, as she serves as a mentor, guiding them through the intricacies of research, grant writing and the tenure process.

New Student Clubs and Organizations

Artificial Intelligence Club—Aiman Madan, Daniel Esparza, Ken

Lopez-Martinez, Ethan Chiu Maldonado, Cristian Tapia

Harmony Hacks — Rosemary Cardoso, Natalie Raphael, Havanna Robbins

ColorStack Chapter — Maria Hernandez Gallegos, Tariq Elamin

Women in Cybersecurity — Estrella Sanchez Garcia, Erika Villalobos

CSUSM President's Outstanding Lecturer Award

Awarded to **Karen Kinnison**

Professor Kinnison has been teaching in the Mathematics Department since 2019, and her work consistently centers on creating inclusive, engaging, and supportive learning environments. She teaches courses such as MATH 212 and MATH 311, where her use of real-world applications, interactive methods, and alignment with Common Core standards has left a lasting impact on future educators.

Professor Kinnison's ability to foster a sense of belonging in the classroom has deeply resonated with students. One student shared that her efforts to adapt the curriculum to their career in Special Education made them feel truly seen and supported. Another reflected on Professor Kinnison's ongoing mentorship and availability, even years after completing her class.

Professor Kinnison's dedication extends beyond the classroom. She actively engages in campus and community service through organizations like Showers of Blessing and United Women in Faith, further demonstrating her commitment to equity and student support.

Professor Kinnison's excellence in teaching and mentorship embody the mission of CSUSM: Student Success.



CSUSM President's Outstanding Faculty Award for Teaching Innovation & Excellence

Awarded to **Dr. Karno Ng**

The President's Outstanding Faculty Award for Teaching Innovation and Excellence recognizes faculty who introduce innovative teaching methods that significantly impact student education. Dr. Karno Ng has demonstrated a remarkable commitment to student success through the use of innovative tools like Peardeck and Quizizz, which allow for real-time feedback and help address learning gaps effectively.

In her CHEM 275 lab, Dr. Ng fosters independent problem-solving by guiding students through the process of data analysis rather than providing direct answers. She incorporates real-world applications such as Course-Based Undergraduate Research Experiences (CURE) and collaborative group projects, allowing students to connect theoretical knowledge with practical experience.

Dr. Ng is dedicated to building strong relationships with her students, offering personalized support and creating an inclusive, engaging classroom environment. Her "no child left behind" approach, along with flexible assessment strategies, ensures that all students have ample opportunities to succeed.

Through her innovative teaching methods and commitment to student development, Dr. Ng has made a lasting impact on her students' academic and professional growth, embodying the qualities of a truly exceptional educator.



CSUSM President's Outstanding Faculty Award for Scholarship & Creative Activity

Awarded to **Dr. Nahid Majd**

Dr. Majd's research focuses on network security, specifically cryptography, cryptocurrency, blockchain, and the use of AI, machine learning, and deep learning. Since joining CSUSM in 2014, she has integrated her research into her teaching, providing students with valuable hands-on experience in emerging technologies. Her work on blockchain, particularly optimizing smart contracts and securing networks, has garnered national recognition, with her research presented at top IEEE conferences.

In addition to publishing papers with her students in premier journals, Dr. Majd has mentored over 30 students, many of whom have secured positions in network security and AI. She has redesigned several courses, including Blockchain and Network Security, incorporating her research into hands-on labs and projects that give students practical experience in these fields.

Dr. Majd's contributions to both academia and the professional world make her a highly deserving recipient of the President's Faculty Award for Scholarship and Creative Activity. Her work continues to shape the future of network security, equipping students with the knowledge and skills needed to succeed.



Special Recognitions:

CSUSM Kerri Mowen Excellence in Faculty Mentoring Award

Awarded to **Dr. Dennis Kolosov & Dr. Nahid Majd**

Biology Professor Dennis Kolosov and Computer Science Professor Nahid Majd received the 2024-2025 Kerri Mowen Award, honoring their dedication to advancing undergraduate involvement in research and creative activities that go beyond the classroom.

This award honors faculty and lecturers who have excelled in mentoring and guiding students in research or creative endeavors. It also recognizes those who have significantly increased the number and diversity of students involved in research.

Dr. Kolosov has mentored 33 students, most belonging to groups underrepresented in STEM fields. Kolosov provides career-advancing opportunities to his students by offering co-authorship of publications and helping with conference presentations. He has two publications with student co-authors with nine more in review.

Dr. Majd has also put mentoring students at the forefront of her career since starting at CSUSM in 2014. She has mentored 40 students in research, 24 graduate students in their master's theses and 14 undergraduate students.

Shout out to CSTEM ASI Reps:

2024-25 — Reece Harris, Haley Burch

Incoming 2025-26 — Haley Burch, Morgan Harris



CSTEM Finalists at the Symposium on Student Research, Creativity and Innovation

These students were selected represent CSUSM at the Annual CSU Systemwide Student Research Competition. The competition is held to promote excellence in undergraduate and graduate scholarly research and creative activity by recognizing outstanding student accomplishments throughout the twenty-three campuses of the CSU.

Imaan Sahid - Dr. Darcy Taniguchi, Faculty Mentor
Characterizing temporal changes in the marine environment off Oceanside, California

Matthew Leslie - Dr. James K. Jancovich, Faculty Mentor
Characterization of the *Ambystoma tigrinum* virus 89R Gene

Maya Qaddourah - Dr. Sajith Jayasinghe, Faculty Mentor
Bioinformatics Analysis Suggests That SE_1780 protein from *Staphylococcus epidermis* may be a member of the Fph Family of Lipases

Mikaela Speets-Drake - Dr. Elinne Becket, Faculty Mentor
Exploring Microbial Communities and Their Spatiotemporal Patterns Across Mission Bay

Erica Rodas Montego—Dr. Carlos Luna Lopez, Faculty Mentor
Synthesizing RGD-alginate Hydrogel to Support Stem Cell Differentiation into Adipocyte

COAST Undergraduate Research Awards

The CSU Council on Ocean Affairs, Science, & Technology (COAST) is the CSU system-wide affinity group for marine and coastal related activities. COAST promotes interdisciplinary, multi-campus collaborations to advance the knowledge of California's natural coastal and marine resources, and the processes that affect them.

Marisa Mendoza—Dr. Elinne Becket's lab. 'Exploring Taxonomic and Functional Profiles of Microbial Community Compositions in Oceanside Beach Surf Zone: A Cross-Sectional Study of Water and Plastic Marine Substrates.'

Imaan Sahid — Dr. Darcy Taniguchi's lab. 'Near-shore monitoring of marine plankton and associated environmental parameters.'

CSUSM Grad Slam

The Annual Grad Slam is a campus-wide research communication competition where students present their research and scholarly work in a concise and engaging manner to a non-specialist audience. It challenges participants to distill complex ideas into clear and compelling presentations within a short time frame.

UNDERGRADUATE 1st PLACE

Callie Steppat - Biological Sciences

Voltage Gated Ion Channels regulate Ion Transport in Larval *Trichoplusia ni*

GRADUATE STEM RUNNER-UP

Loly Saenz - Biological Sciences

Examining extra pair copulation events in African penguins



Students Graduating with Honors

Summa Cum Laude

Sebastian Aguero	Mark Rusnak
Hunter Alan	Marianne Sadik
Maya Arushanyan	Audrey Street
Jelina Rose Aviles	Sarah Turner
Diego Beauseigneur-Jimenez	Megan Waples
Sean Blythe	Kurt Williams

Eliza Capitulo

Ashleigh Fernandez

Ashleigh Fischer

Ji Guo

Justinas Janovskis

Ellisa Khodr

Matthew John Leslie

Mireya Lugo

Jasmine Ly

Kyler Magnuson

Kathleen Nguyen

Vanessa Orozco

Kate Paduganao

Emily Pham

Nicole Poirier

Baili Popal

Maya Qaddourah

Graduating Veterans

Kimberly Ard
Diego Beauseigneur-Jimenez
Jason Gray
Megan Hewitt
Daniel Houser
Peter Klarwein
Ken Lopez Martinez
Tirta Mccunney
Daniel Mireles
Mary Reichelt
Simon Rodgers
Astrid Russell
Epifanio Solano
Jonathan Vaughn
Bryce Walker
Kerry Wilcher Garcia
Kurt Williams

Students Graduating with Honors

Magna Cum Laude

Jacob Almon	Tirta McCunney
Matthew Andreas	James Meadows
Neo Argatides	Zara Mendivil
Lucas Birkenstock	Emma Mills
Brooke Bounyavong	Josue Navarrete
Elisa Byfield	Judith Pineda
Kyle Andrew Cabrera	Thomas Poleno
Valeria Castellanos Rodriguez	Alastair Raymond
Eden Chaplik	Eduardo Rocha
James Cusack	Christopher Rubin
Garrett Donohue	Chetana Sachdeva
Cristian Enriquez Tapia	Maya Samhat
Calvary Fisher	Alexis Sanchez
Gavin Fung	Neila Serumaga
Lucas Gomes	Takehiko Shibuya
Francisco Gonzalez	Jeremiah Shue
Carmen Gutierrez	Griffin Strater
Alin Hanna	Christian Thompson
Tarek Hatoum	Josue Torres
Farah Jaber	Howell Thanniel Trinidad
Jaron Jon Javier	Mason Vick
Maxwell Kooiker	Bryce Walker



Students Graduating with Honors

Cum Laude

Leonardo Andaluz	Andrew Nazarov
Brian Baena	Alexander Nicholas
Isabel Camacho	John Olson
Diego Carrillo	Kassandra Ortiz
Ty Childers	Jalina Perea
Jake Coast	Jorge Robles
Cesar De La Torre	Mariposa Rodarte-Iman
Daniel Duran	Erica Rodas Montejo
Aimee Eilar	Josue Rodriguez
Ernesto Espinoza	Johnny Rodriguez
Alvaro Espinoza Merida	Riley Saliba
Mayra Fonseca Encarnacion	Brandon Santos
Aaron Hamilton	Steven Schwarzmann
Sklyer Hanson	Guadalupe Soto Gonzalez
Sarah Harden	Minh Tran
Michael Hauge	Aaron Trujillo
Lindsay Hawkins	Shane Wasserman
Megan Hewitt	Kasidee Wickman
Josue Juaren Manzano	Connor Wiemann
Justin Light	Michelle Yeh
Noah Magalei	Miranda Zinda
Mauro Malekshamran	
Gieslle Merino	

Thank You

Support for our students, faculty and programs is always welcomed. Find out more at www.csusm.edu/cstem

Twitter: [@CSUSM_CSTEM](https://twitter.com/CSUSM_CSTEM)

Instagram: [@CSTEM_CSUSM](https://www.instagram.com/CSTEM_CSUSM)

Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/California-State-University-San-Marcos-College-of-Science-Mathematics-178875692193272/>

