

The Southwest Summit:

Preparing for the Next Step

Agenda

Wednesday: July 23, 2025

Times	Topics and Speakers	Location
12:00 PM	Check-in & Boxed Lunch	1st floor lobby at Science and Health Building
1:00 PM	Opening Remarks, followed by Networking	Room 212
2:00-5:00 PM	Wired Differently, Working Brilliantly: Neurodiversity and Strengths in STEM Rebecca Whittaker Matte, MS Landmark College	Room 212
5:00 PM	Dinner on your own	

Thursday: July 24, 2025

Times	Topics and Speakers	Location
9:00 AM	Networking Bingo	Room 212
10:00-12:00 PM	Breakout Sessions: See Details on Next Page	
12:00 PM	My Journey Aaron Thomas, PhD University of Montana	Room 212
1:00 PM	Group Photo (Headshots-throughout day)	4th floor
2:00 PM	Social Media Branding for Your Career Tamara Thorpe, MA TNT Development	Room 212
3:00-5:00 PM	Mock Interviews (10 min each)	Rooms 211, 212, 333, 433, 502
5:00 PM	Happy Hour for 21+	Mother Road Brewing Company 7 S Mikes Pike St, Flagstaff, AZ 86001



[Online Program](#)



[Celebration Ceremony
& Poster Awards](#)



Northern Arizona University
Science and Health Building (#36)
700 S. Osborne Drive • Flagstaff, AZ 86011

July 24, 2025 Breakout Sessions 10:00 AM - 12:00 PM

High School & Undergraduate Students		
Times	Topics and Speakers	Location
10:00 AM	Planning Your Semester Jade Metzger, PhD Northern Arizona University	Room 502
11:00 AM	Panel: Tawnjerae Joe (NAU/iCURE) Alicia Clouser (UNM/AISES), Krystal Charley, PhD	Room 502
Graduate Students, Post-docs/Fellows, & Early Stage Investigators		
Times	Topics and Speakers	Location
10:00 AM-12:00 PM	Identifying & Applying for Science Positions	Room 212

Friday: July 25, 2025		
Times	Topics and Speakers	Location
9:00 AM	University Programs UA, UNM, NAU, Burrell, NMSU	Room 212
10:00 AM	Program Panel: SACNAS, AISES, ACS, AEOP Zoom Link , Password: 891338	Room 212 or Zoom
11:00 AM	Program Panel, Part 2: NINDS & NCI Zoom Link , Password: 891338	Room 212 or Zoom
12:00 PM	My Journey Nizhoni Chow-Garcia, PhD Cal State Monterey Bay	Room 212
1:00 PM	My Journey Jacob Schwartz, PhD University of Arizona	Room 212
2:00 PM	Scholar Oral Presentations	Room 105 & 212
3:00 pm-5:00 PM	Breakout Sessions: See Details Below	
5:00 PM	(Dinner on your own)	

Breakout Sessions 3:00 PM - 5:00 PM

High School & Undergraduate Students		
Times	Topics and Speakers	Location
3:00-5:00 PM	Poster Practice	Room 105, 106, 212
Graduate Students, Post-docs/Fellows, & Early Stage Investigators		
Times	Topics and Speakers	Location
3:00-5:00 PM	Workshop; feedback on applications	433

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Guest Speakers

Financial Literacy for Students: Building Credit and Funding Your Future



Krystal Charley, PhD

Postdoctoral Fellow, Northern Arizona University

Training Champion, STEAM Network NAU Campus

Dr. Krystal Charley received a B.S. degree in Biology with a minor in Chemistry from the University of New Mexico (UNM) (2016). She earned her Doctor of Philosophy in Microbiology and Immunology from the University of Utah (2024). She is a postdoctoral associate in Dr. Naomi Lee's lab at Northern Arizona University (NAU). Her current research is focused on the impact of oncogenic Human papillomavirus (HPV) in AZ Indigenous communities in collaboration with multiple institutions and facilities on or near tribal lands. She is also working with the Native American Cancer Prevention (NACP) organization at NAU in collaboration with the University of Arizona (UA), which provides students with support and research opportunities in the cancer biomedical field. Furthermore, she is a scholar and training champion (TC) with the Southwest Transformative Educational Advancement and Mentoring (STEAM) program based at the University of New Mexico (UNM), which provides early career investigators from graduate to early faculty with professional career development in numerous settings.

Wired Differently, Working Brilliantly: Neurodiversity and Strengths in STEM



Rebecca Whittaker Matte, BA, MS

Associate Professor of Education, Landmark College

Certified Consultant for Birkman Method and Gallup Clifton Strengths

ICF Certified Coach (ACC)

Rebecca Whittaker Matte, M.S. is a Professor of Education at Landmark College in Putney, Vermont. She holds degrees from the University of New Hampshire and New England College. Since the early 90s, her career has been shaped by her engagement with neurodiversity, accumulating nearly 30 years of expertise in learning disabilities as they impact student transitions to college and career environments. A proponent of strengths-based methods, Rebecca is a certified consultant for The Birkman Method and Gallup Clifton Strengths, as well as an ICF Certified Coach (ACC). Her teaching philosophy emphasizes a holistic approach, tailored to support students often overlooked by traditional educational systems. Rebecca is deeply involved in the National Science Foundation's Access to Innovative Education in STEM grant, aiming to enhance support for low-income, neurodivergent students in STEM through innovative programming and mentorship. Passionate about her work, she finds daily joy in teaching and mentoring. She is a frequent speaker and workshop facilitator. Outside of her professional life, she is parent to two emerging adults, a caretaker to a neurotic rescue dog and stays physically active while navigating the annoying challenges of aging.

Planning Your Semester



Jade Metzger, PhD

Research Associate; University Instructor;

Communication Specialist, Northern Arizona University

Dr. Jade Metzger is an accomplished researcher and educator with experience in qualitative research methods, program evaluation, and facilitating inclusive and collaborative learning environments. Her expertise spans queer, feminist, and disability content; inclusive and transparent STEM education; conflict resolution and consensus building; virtual community building strategies; and creating inclusive learning environments via Universal Design, Backwards Course Design, and Transparency in Teaching and Learning.

As a research associate for the Institute for Human Development at Northern Arizona University, she helps manage federally funded projects focused on improving post-secondary environments for people with disabilities. She conducts interviews, focus groups, surveys, and scoping reviews to answer questions about how programs are operating and how they can improve. In addition to research accomplishments, she has taught communication courses at both the undergraduate and graduate levels with a focus on public speaking, professional communication, communication theory, conflict management, and privacy communication management. She strives to create inclusive classroom experiences that empower students by applying critical pedagogy frameworks.

Dr. Metzger mentor's students, particularly disabled students in STEM fields and neurodivergent students through research projects. As a neurodivergent, queer scholar she wants more research with us, by us, rather than research about us. Her mentoring efforts have been recognized through awards such as Northern Arizona University's Commission on Disability Access and Design Staff Award, Northern Arizona University's Educator of Influence Award, and Wayne State University's Athletic Department's Student Awarded Favorite Professor.

With strong project management abilities, qualitative analysis skills, and a commitment to diversity and inclusion, she has contributed to initiatives that expand educational access and opportunity for all students. She welcomes connections to discuss potential research collaborations or professional opportunities.

My Journey



Aaron Thomas, PhD

Professor, Chemistry and Biochemistry,
University of Montana

Director, Indigenous Research and STEM Education (IRSE)

Dr. Aaron Thomas works closely with Native undergraduate and graduate students while establishing relationships with the tribal colleges and reservation communities in working towards better Native STEM education and STEM research collaborations. He has established the Montana American Indians in Math and Science Program (MT AIMS) and is the primary PI for the NSF INCLUDES Award for the CIRCLES Alliance which focuses on Native STEM Education in collaboration with 5 other EPSCoR jurisdictions, and a Howard Hughes Medical Institute Direct Change award focusing on Native STEM education within UM.

Social Media Branding



Tamara Thorpe, MA

Founder, Real Mentors Network
Leadership & Inclusion Strategist

Tamara Thorpe is the Founder of the Real Mentors Network and a globally recognized leadership and inclusion strategist. Known as “The Millennials’ Mentor,” she has spent over two decades empowering emerging leaders to build authentic brands and lead with impact. With a background in organizational development and cultural competence, Tamara designs and delivers transformative learning experiences around the world. At the 2nd Annual STEAM Summit, she will lead a dynamic workshop on Social Media Branding, guiding students on how to craft a powerful and purpose-driven online presence.

My Journey



Nizhoni Chow-Garcia, PhD

Associate Vice President for Community & Belonging, Cal State Monterey Bay

Tribal Liaison

Nizhoni Chow-Garcia, Ph.D., is Diné, born to the Tódích'íí'nii (Bitter Water People) and To'tsohnii (Big Water People) clans. She earned her undergraduate degree from UCLA and her Ph.D. from the University of Rochester and now serves as the Associate Vice President of Community & Belonging and Tribal Liaison at Cal State Monterey Bay. Her work, broadly supporting Natives in STEM and critical Indigenous frameworks, has been recognized as the 2017 NASPA Melvene D. Hardee Dissertation of the Year Award and the 2017 ACPA Marylu McEwen Dissertation of the Year Award. Nizhoni can usually be found running, beading, being a sports mom to her two boys, and dreaming of future travels.

My Journey



Jacob Schwartz, PhD

University of Arizona Associate Director, Cancer Research
Training and Education Coordination

Dr. Jacob Schwartz obtained a Ph.D. in Biophysics at the University of Texas Southwestern Medical Center and studying transcription regulation by nucleic acids and nucleic acid mimics. He did postdoctoral training in the lab of Dr. Tom Cech at the University of Colorado Boulder and studied transcription regulation by an RNA-binding protein through an assembly process known as phase separation. He was awarded the Al Gilman award, two NIH NRSA awards, and an NIH K99 Pathway to Independence award. Dr. Schwartz joined the Department of Chemistry and Biochemistry at the University of Arizona in 2014. He was named a 2015 Kavli Fellow by the National Academy of Sciences and awarded a Research Scholar Grant by the American Cancer Society.

THANK YOU!

We would like to extend our sincere gratitude to all the generous contributors that made the 2025 STEAM Annual Summit possible:





THANK YOU!

A special thank you to our Training Champions and the Comprehensive Cancer Center Staff for their support and enthusiasm!

Training Champions



Krystal Charley



Martha Martinez Grimes

Comprehensive Cancer Center Staff



Mark Montoya



Michelle Wingo



Lisa LaMastra