

Disrupting Ableism and Advancing STEM

Sponsored by the National Science Foundation

Speaker Biographies

MONDAY, JUNE 5, 2023



Christopher Atchison, PhD
National Science Foundation

Dr. Chris Atchison is a Professor of Geoscience Education in the School of Education and Department of Geology at the University of Cincinnati, and the Founder of the International Association for Geoscience Diversity (www.TheIAGD.org). His research is based on the intentional development of inclusive communities of learning in classroom, laboratory, and field studies and the implementation of universally designed instructional strategies. Atchison advocates for more accessible methods of teaching and learning where students and scientists with disabilities are provided opportunities for active engagement and participation along accessible pathways to the STEM workforce.



David D. Caudel, PhD
Vanderbilt University

Dr. Dave Caudel is the associate director of the Frist Center for Autism and Innovation at Vanderbilt University in Nashville Tennessee. Diagnosed with Asperger's Syndrome in 2009, Caudel is a neurodivergence advocate, speaking to a variety of organizations, including the U.N. and autism conferences internationally. He received his Ph.D. in Physics at Vanderbilt University in 2017. He serves on the advisory committee for the Center for Discovery, Innovation, and Development (CDID) at Children's Specialized Hospital in New Jersey, the Clinical Advisory Panel on Intellectual & Developmental Disabilities for BlueCare Tennessee, the Vanderbilt University Diversity Council and the All Access Inclusion Network, and is a founding member of the Vanderbilt Autism and Neurodiversity Alliance.



**Alison Cernich, PhD, ABPP-Cn
National Institutes of Health**

Dr. Alison Cernich is the Deputy Director of the *Eunice Kennedy Shriver* National Institute of Child Health and Human Development (NICHD) and works to support the Institute’s mission to lead research and training to understand human development, improve reproductive health, enhance the lives of children and adolescents, and optimize abilities for all. Prior to this position, Dr. Cernich was the Director of the National Center for Medical Rehabilitation Research (NCMRR) at NICHD, Deputy Director of the Defense Centers of Excellence for Psychological Health and Traumatic Brain Injury in the Department of Defense, and multiple roles in the Department of Veterans Affairs. She is a board-certified neuropsychologist and is the lead or contributing author on multiple peer-reviewed articles and conference presentations, with an emphasis on disability and pregnancy, traumatic brain injury and computerized neuropsychological assessment.



**Vivian Cheung, MD
University of Michigan School of Medicine**

Dr. Vivian G. Cheung is an RNA biologist and child neurologist. She is the Frederick G.L. Huetwell Professor of Pediatrics at the University of Michigan. Dr. Cheung’s research focused on gene regulation and neurogenetic disorders. Dr. Cheung’s work has shown the import of RNA sequence and structure in the regulation of cell function. Dr. Cheung is a recipient of the Curt Stern Award from the American Society of Human Genetics. She is a member of the National Academy of Medicine. She served as the President of the American Society for Clinical Investigation in 2016. Dr. Cheung is one of the founders of the Physician-Scientist Support Foundation, and a determined advocate for a diverse biomedical workforce.



Jacquelyn Chini, PhD
University of Central Florida

Dr. Jackie Chini (she/her) is an associate professor in physics at the University of Central Florida. She completed her B.A. in physics at Drew University in Madison, New Jersey, and her Ph.D. at Kansas State University in Manhattan, Kansas. Jackie's research, which is funded by the National Science Foundation and an Innovation Fund grant from the American Physical Society (APS), explores how practices and attitudes in the physics community work to broaden or narrow participation. Jackie is Chair Elect of the APS Topical Group on Physics Education Research and an editorial board member for Physical Review Physics Education Research.



Michele L. Cooke, PhD
University of Massachusetts, Amherst

Dr. Michele Cooke is a Professor of Geosciences at the University of Massachusetts Amherst who researches fault evolution in the Earth's crust using numerical models, laboratory experiments and geophysical data. Michele's collaborative research integrates these approaches to illuminate how faults grow, which helps us constrain the hazard of damaging earthquakes. She is a fellow of the Geological Society of America and has served in leadership roles in several geoscience organizations as well as co-directing [The Mind Hears](#), a blog by and for deaf and hard of hearing academics. For her advocacy and outreach within the disabled community Michele was awarded the UMass Amherst Distinguished Academic Outreach Teaching Award in 2010 and the International Association for Geoscience Diversity Inclusive Geoscience Education and Research Award in 2020.



Wanda Díaz-Merced, PhD
European Gravitational Wave Observatory

Dr. Wanda Díaz-Merced is an astronomer and the leading proponent of "sonification," a way to turn huge data sets into audible sound. She realized that she could use her ears to detect patterns in stellar radio data and could uncover connections obscured by graphs and visual representation. Dr. Díaz-Merced has held positions at the Harvard Smithsonian Center for Astrophysics and the South African Astronomical Observatory. She also co-chaired the 2019 conference Astronomy for Equity, Diversity and Inclusion, at the National Astronomical Observatory of Japan. Wanda was awarded the first Google scholarship for peoples with disabilities and is an honorary ambassador of Soka University in Japan. Dr. Díaz-Merced is an important voice and leader in increasing equality of access to astronomy and STEM.



Anjali Forber-Pratt, PhD
National Institute on Disability, Independent Living and Rehabilitation Research (NIDILRR)

Dr. Anjali J. Forber-Pratt is a disability activist, a two-time Paralympian, Fellow of the American Psychological Association and the Director of the National Institute on Disability, Independent Living and Rehabilitation Research (NIDILRR) in the Administration for Community Living. Dr. Forber-Pratt serves as the Chair of the Interagency Committee on Disability Research which exists to promote coordination and collaboration among federal departments and agencies conducting disability, independent living, and rehabilitation research programs. As a researcher, her primary area of work relates to disability identity development. As a wheelchair-user for over 35 years, Dr. Forber-Pratt is nationally and internationally recognized as a disability leader and mentor. She was a White House Champion of Change in 2013 and the American Psychological Association awarded her the 2020 Citizen Psychologist Award for Advancing Disability as a Human Rights and Social Justice Issue Award.



Logan Gin, PhD
Brown University

Dr. Logan Gin is the Assistant Director for STEM Education in the Sheridan Center for Teaching and Learning at Brown University where he works on initiatives related to STEM graduate student and postdoc teaching professional development. Prior to arriving at Brown, Dr. Gin was an NSF Graduate Research Fellow at Arizona State University and served as the Program Manager for an NSF S-STEM program focused on involving community college transfer students in undergraduate research. Dr. Gin holds a Ph.D. in Biology from Arizona State University where his dissertation work centered around the experiences of STEM students with disabilities in active learning classrooms, online courses, and laboratory and research environments.



Emily Harris, MA
Disability & Philanthropy Forum

Prior to becoming the Executive Director of the Disability & Philanthropy Forum, Ms. Harris was the founding Executive Director of Disability Lead, the nation's first disability civic leadership program, and a Senior Director at the Chicago Community Trust. In previous positions she focused on regional economic growth, open space conservation, early childhood education policy, non-profit strategy, and urban planning. Ms. Harris earned a B.A. from Oberlin College and an M.A. from the University of Chicago. She is President of Jewish Reconstructionist Congregation and serves on Forest Preserves of Cook County Conservation and Policy Council, and the Local Initiatives Support Corporation Chicago Advisory Board.



Andrew Imparato, JD
Disability Rights California

Andy Imparato is a disability rights lawyer and policy professional who has been working inside and outside government to advance policies and practices to improve employment outcomes for people with disabilities for over 30 years. His perspective is informed by his lived experience with bipolar disorder. He is the executive director of Disability Rights California, a \$44 million legal services and policy advocacy organization based in Sacramento with 26 offices across California. Since 2016, he has led the planning for four international summits on disability employment that have attracted participation from over 40 countries. He has been an advisor on disability inclusion and accessibility to a number of large employers, including Walmart, Verizon, AT&T, Microsoft, IBM, Walgreens, and SAP.



Jae Kennedy, PhD
Washington State University

Dr. Kennedy is a professor of community and behavioral health in the Elson S. Floyd College of Medicine at Washington State University in Spokane WA. He received a PhD in Health Services and Policy Analysis from UC Berkeley in 1996 and has been teaching and advising graduate students in public health and health administration for the past 25 years. He is a Switzer distinguished research fellow and recent recipient of the Allen Meyers Award for Research, Teaching and Advocacy. He has written over 60 peer-reviewed journal articles and has been the principal investigator on more than \$3m extramurally funded grants projects on disability and health policy. He currently directs a NIDILRR-funded postdoctoral training program on disability and health policy, which actively recruits and supports research scholars with disabilities.



**Angela Lean, MBA
Microsoft**

Angela Lean has over twenty years of experience working for financial services and technology brands. Her functional expertise spans marketing sales readiness to program management. In her current role as the Senior Business Program Lead for Accessible Employee Experience at Microsoft, she manages cross-functional teams dedicated to building an accessible and disability inclusive workplace environment where employees with disabilities can succeed and thrive. She is also the benefits policy lead for the leadership board of Microsoft's Employee Resources Group dedicated to families and is a member of Yale University's Disability Alumni Group. She was recognized by Women's Wear Daily this past March as one of the top 25 most inspirational women leaders of 2023. Angela graduated from Yale in 1993 with a degree in History and earned an MBA from the Stern School of Business at New York University in 1999.



**Mark H. Leddy, PhD, MS
National Science Foundation**

Dr. Mark H. Leddy is a permanent Lead Program Director in the Division of Equity for Excellence in STEM, in the Directorate for STEM Education, at the National Science Foundation. Dr. Leddy leads the new Workplace Equity for Persons with Disabilities in STEM and STEM Education activity, and he co-leads the Alliances for Graduate Education and the Professoriate program. Before joining NSF in 2006, Dr. Leddy worked at the University of Wisconsin-Madison, the University of Alaska-Fairbanks, and the University of Wisconsin-Whitewater. He has a PhD from the University of Wisconsin-Madison and an MS from Columbia University.



Cassandra McCall, PhD
Utah State University

Dr. Cassandra McCall is a visually impaired Assistant Professor in the Engineering Education Department at USU. In her work, Dr. McCall leverages emergent qualitative approaches and Universal Design for Research practices in exploring the intersections of disability, identity formation, and cultural implications within engineering and academia. At USU, she is the Co-Director of the Institute for Interdisciplinary Transition Services. Her work with civil engineering students with disabilities and positionality practices have won best paper awards both nationally and internationally. She is an advocate for the increased participation of people with disabilities in the engineering fields and is a founding member of the Equity, Culture, and Social Justice in Education Division of the American Society for Engineering Education.



Marcia McNutt, PhD
National Academy of Sciences

Dr. Marcia McNutt is a geophysicist and president of the National Academy of Sciences. She previously served as editor-in-chief of the Science journals, and the director of the U.S. Geological Survey (USGS), where she was awarded the U.S. Coast Guard's Meritorious Service Medal. Dr. McNutt also served as president and chief executive officer of the Monterey Bay Aquarium Research Institute (MBARI) and as the president of the American Geophysical Union (AGU). She holds membership in numerous professional organizations, in addition to being the recipient of several honorary doctoral degrees. She is a fellow of AGU, the Geological Society of America, the American Association for the Advancement of Science, and the International Association of Geodesy. Dr. McNutt's full biography can be found [here](#).



Karen Marrongelle, PhD
National Science Foundation

Dr. Karen Marrongelle is the Chief Operating Officer of the National Science Foundation, where she oversees operations of the \$10 Billion federal agency whose mission includes support for all fields of fundamental science and engineering. Previously, she served as Assistant Director of the National Science Foundation’s Directorate for Education and Human Resources. Prior to joining NSF, Marrongelle was Dean of the College of Liberal Arts and Sciences at Portland State University and Professor of Mathematics and Statistics, where she oversaw 24 departments and programs across the humanities, social sciences, and natural sciences. Marrongelle has a PhD in mathematics education from the University of New Hampshire and a master’s degree in mathematics from Lehigh University.



Mona Minkara, PhD
Northeastern University

Dr. Mona Minkara is an Assistant Professor in the Department of Bioengineering and an Affiliate Faculty in the Department of Chemistry and Chemical Biology at Northeastern University. She heads the COMBINE (Computational Modeling for BioInterface Engineering) Lab. Dr. Minkara uses computational methods to study biological interfaces at the atomic and molecular scales. Her current research examines pulmonary surfactant, the complex protein-lipid substance lining the alveoli. As a scientist who is blind, Dr. Minkara is committed to making science more accessible and inclusive through designing new tools for blind scientists. Dr. Minkara received a B.A. from Wellesley College and a Ph.D. in Chemistry from the University of Florida. Before joining the Northeastern University faculty, she held a postdoctoral appointment at the University of Minnesota Twin Cities Chemical Theory Center with a Ford Foundation Postdoctoral Fellowship.



Jordan Rodriguez, MS
Civil Engineer in Training, Phoenix DPG Co-Lead,
Stantec

Jordan Rodriguez is a Civil Engineer-in-Training at Stantec based out of Phoenix, Arizona. He has five years of experience in the design, rehabilitation, and management of water, wastewater, and conveyance infrastructure. His disability experience is shaped by having Leber's Hereditary Optic Neuropathy (LHON) and Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD). Outside of project work, he promotes accessibility and disability inclusion through co-leading internal document accessibility trainings, sitting on the Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion committee of the Arizona Water Association and the Arizona Chapter of the American Public Works Association, as well as providing STEM career advice to local blind and low vision high school students.



Barbara R. Snyder, JD
Association of American Universities

Barbara R. Snyder is president of the Association of American Universities. Prior to that, she served as president of Case Western Reserve University from 2007 to 2020. She was a faculty member at the Ohio State University from 1988 to 2007, and she served as Executive Vice President and Provost from 2003 to 2007 and held the Joanne W. Murphy/Classes of 1965 & 1973 Professorship at OSU's Moritz College of Law. She is an elected member of the American Law Institute. She currently serves on the board of the National Humanities Alliance and was previously the chair of the board of the American Council on Education and the Business-Higher Education Forum and vice chair of the board of Internet2.



Mahadeo Sukhai, PhD
Canadian National Institute for the Blind

Dr. Mahadeo Sukhai is the world's first congenitally blind geneticist. Mahadeo is Vice-President Research & International Affairs and Chief Accessibility Officer for the CNIB (Canadian National Institute for the Blind), having previously served as a researcher at the University Health Network in Toronto. Dr. Sukhai is a leading expert on accessibility of graduate and postdoctoral research training in science, technology, engineering, mathematics and healthcare disciplines. Dr. Sukhai is the Chair of the Employment Technical Committee for Accessibility Standards Canada, as well as the External Co-Chair of the Canadian Institutes of Health Research Expert Advisory Committee on Accessibility and Systemic Ableism.



Bonnielin K. Swenor, PhD, MPH
Johns Hopkins Disability Health Research Center

Dr. Bonnielin Swenor is an associate professor at The Johns Hopkins Schools of Nursing, Medicine, and Public Health, and is the founder and director of the Johns Hopkins Disability Health Research Center, which aims to shift the paradigm from 'living with a disability' to 'thriving with a disability'. Motivated by her personal experience with a visual disability, her work takes a data-driven approach to advancing health equity for people with disabilities and promoting disability inclusion in higher education, STEMM (science, technology, engineering, mathematics, and medicine), public health, and research.



Holden Thorp, PhD
Science Family of Journals/ AAAS

Dr. Holden Thorp is the Editor-in-Chief of the Science family of journals. Prior to joining Science, he spent six years as the provost at Washington University in St. Louis and was the chancellor of the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill before that.



Rupa Sheth Valdez, PhD
University of Virginia

Dr. Rupa Valdez is an associate professor at the University of Virginia. She merges engineering and social sciences to understand and address questions of health equity across home, community, and clinical spaces and has been supported by numerous federal agencies including NIH, NSF, AHRQ, and USDA. She recently testified before Congress on the topic of health equity for the disability community and received the Jack A. Kraft Innovator Award from the Human Factors and Ergonomics Society for her pioneering work in patient ergonomics. She holds numerous appointments, including as founder and president of the Blue Trunk Foundation, as a board member for the American Association of People with Disabilities, and as a member of PCORI's Patient Engagement Advisory Panel and NCQA's Health Equity Working Group.