

Disrupting Ableism and Advancing STEM

Sponsored by the National Science Foundation

Speaker Biographies

Fostering Effective Mentorship in the STEM Ecosystem

TUESDAY, JUNE 13, 2023



Edmund Asiedu, MPA
National Disability Mentoring Coalition (NDMC)

Mr. Asiedu is a proud person with disability and a passionate accessibility, disability inclusion, and inclusive mentoring advocate who raises awareness on the needs of persons with disabilities in educational institutions and workplaces. He uses he/him/his pronouns. He co-chairs the National Disability Mentoring Coalition (NDMC) and works as the Accessibility Policy Analyst/ADA Coordinator and serves on the DEI Committee at the New York City Department of Transportation (NYC DOT). Mr. Asiedu has also held positions at Columbia University School of Public Health, National Disability Rights Network, and Ghana Society of the Physically Disabled.



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.



Erica Avery, PhD
Johns Hopkins University

Dr. Avery recently received her doctoral degree from Johns Hopkins School of Medicine from the Cellular and Molecular Physiology Program where her thesis research was focused on mitochondrial phospholipid metabolism. She was diagnosed with a chronic illness known as fibromyalgia syndrome in 2012 and recently with Long COVID in 2022 and began her disability advocacy journey at Johns Hopkins as co-chair of the Equal Access in Science and Medicine Committee from 2019-2023, hosting programming and working with leadership with the goal of improving accessibility, awareness, community, representation, equity, and inclusivity. Dr. Avery received her BS from Rowan University with a major in Biochemistry and minor in journalism. She has written for publications such as ASBMB Today, Scientific American, and American Chemical Society discussing her disability and health journey.



Ana Caicedo, PhD
University of Massachusetts, Amherst

Dr. Caicedo grew up in Bogotá, Colombia fascinated by the topics of evolution and genetics. She came to the U.S. for graduate school, obtaining her PhD at Washington University in St. Louis, and, after a postdoctoral experience at North Carolina State University, she joined the Biology Department at the University of Massachusetts Amherst as faculty. Dr. Caicedo's research focuses on the genetic basis of plant adaptation, with a particular interest in the processes of domestication and weedy plant evolution. In 2018, with Dr. Michele Cooke, she co-founded [The Mind Hears](#), a blog by and for deaf and hard of hearing academics.



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.



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.



**Raja S. Kushalnagar, JD, LLM, PhD
Gallaudet University**

Dr. Kushalnagar is a Professor and Director of the Information Technology undergraduate program and Accessible Human-Centered Computing graduate program at Gallaudet University in Washington, DC. He has a Ph.D. in Computer Science and Master of Laws (LLM) in Intellectual Property and Information Law from the University of Houston in 2010 and Juris Doctor (JD) from Texas Southern University in 2008.

As a Deaf professor, he brings consumers, industry, and policymakers together on accessibility issues with focus on a deaf/hard of hearing perspective and evidence-based research. He has mentored over 130 undergraduates, including over 80 who are deaf or hard of hearing. Dr. Kushalnagar focuses on increasing the numbers of people with disabilities in the computing pipeline through community involvement.



**Edward Ombati Manyibe, PhD, CRC
Langston University**

Dr. Manyibe is the Capacity Building Director and Research Associate Professor at the Rehabilitation Research and Training Center on Research and Capacity Building for Minority Entities at Langston University (LU-RRTC). He has served as Co-Principal Investigator on several National Institute on Disability, Independent Living, and Rehabilitation Research (NIDILRR) sponsored projects at the RRTC- focused on both enhancing minority-serving institution research capacity and improving disability and rehabilitation services for multiply marginalized people with disabilities. He has authored or co-authored numerous peer reviewed research publications, monographs, and policy briefs on topics such as mentorship and research capacity building. He is the recipient of the National Association of Multicultural Rehabilitation Concerns (NAMRC) Bobbie Atkins' Research Award.






Melissa McDaniels, PhD
University of Wisconsin, Madison

Dr. McDaniels is the Associate Executive Director & Associate Scientist at the Center for the Improvement of Mentored Experiences in Research (CIMER, <http://www.cimerproject.org>) at the University of Wisconsin-Madison. She is a co-investigator and community advancement manager for the NIH-supported National Research Mentoring Network (NRMN, <https://nrmnet.net/>). In her prior role as a member of the Michigan State University Graduate School leadership team, Dr. McDaniels worked to support graduate students and postdocs as they developed their capacities as postsecondary instructors and mentors. Previously, she served as Director of their NSF ADVANCE Grant where she spearheaded efforts to diversify their STEM faculty. In this role she was responsible for the development and implementation of MSU's new faculty mentoring policy. Dr. McDaniels has over twenty years of experience in graduate student and faculty development, undergraduate and graduate teaching and learning and organizational change.



Michelle Olson, BS
Rochester Institute of Technology

Ms. Olson graduated with a bachelor's degree with a human-centered computing in May 2023, and is presently enrolled in the Human-Computer Interaction (HCI) master's program at the Rochester Institute of Technology (RIT). Currently, she works in the Center for Accessibility and Inclusion Research (CAIR) Lab as a research assistant with Dr. Kristen Shinohara and Ms. Loam Shin on a project that explores various methods for guaranteeing accessibility to users and designers who are hard of hearing or deaf using the think-aloud protocol approach. Prior to her position as a research assistant, Ms. Olson served as an ASL consultant for the RIT Department of Access Services.

	<p>Alyssa Paparella, BA Baylor College of Medicine</p> <p>Ms. Paparella (she/her) is a third year PhD Candidate at Baylor College of Medicine. She is a passionate disability advocate. In 2020, Ms. Paparella created the DisabledInSTEM platform, where she sparks conversations regarding disability inclusion and access within STEM. Additionally, she founded a DisabledInSTEM Mentorship Program, which is currently in its third year, as she believes mentorship is vital to success within STEM. Through her platform, Ms. Paparella has had an impact at multiple institutions, conferences, and national organizations to raise awareness of disabled scientists.</p>
	<p>Matthew Seita, PhD Rochester Institute of Technology</p> <p>Dr. Seita is a recent doctoral graduate from the Computing and Information Sciences PhD program at the Rochester Institute of Technology (RIT). He is an accessibility and human-computer interaction researcher, and during his PhD, conducted research at the Center for Accessibility and Inclusion Research (CAIR) Lab at RIT, advised by Dr. Matt Huenerfauth. His work was generously supported by the National Science Foundation Graduate Research Fellowship and the RIT AWARE-AI NRT Fellowship. Currently, Dr. Seita works for Dr. Raja Kushalnagar as a research assistant at Gallaudet University and continues to work on research involving improving accessible technologies for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing. Matthew is profoundly Deaf and fluent in English and American Sign Language.</p>
	<p>Loam Shin Rochester Institute of Technology</p> <p>Ms. Shin is a fourth-year undergraduate Human-Centered Computing major at the Rochester Institute of Technology (RIT). She works as a research assistant in the Center for Accessibility and Inclusion Research (CAIR) Lab under the mentorship of Dr. Kristen Shinohara. Along with her colleague, Ms. Michelle Olson, they are conducting a project to investigate different ways to make the think-aloud protocol accessible to deaf/hard-of-hearing designers and users.</p>



Kristen Shinohara, PhD
Rochester Institute of Technology

Dr. Shinohara is an Assistant Professor in the School of Information at the Rochester Institute of Technology where she co-directs the Center for Accessibility and Inclusion Research (CAIR) Lab. Kristen's research is at the intersection of human-computer interaction, accessibility, and design, with a focus on accessible design, research, and computing education. Her NSF funded research projects focus on how to empower disabled graduate students and designers, and on how to improve accessibility practice in the tech industry and in computing education. She is a recipient of a 2022 Google Scholar Award to improve the think aloud design method for deaf and hard of hearing users and designers.



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, STEM (science, technology, engineering, mathematics, and medicine), public health, and research.



Dean J. Tantillo, PhD
University of California, Davis

Dr. Tantillo is a Professor of Chemistry at UC Davis. His research can be broadly described as applied theoretical organic chemistry and spans the disciplines of organic, physical, computational, mechanistic, medicinal, natural product and organometallic chemistry. He also has a long-standing interest in making chemistry accessible to the blind and visually impaired. Dr. Tantillo has won multiple awards for his teaching and mentoring, including UC Davis' campus-wide awards for both undergraduate and graduate teaching (the only faculty member to win both), the Inclusion & Diversity Prize from the Royal Society of Chemistry and an ADVANCE Scholar Award from UC Davis, which acknowledges "faculty who advance diverse perspectives and gender equity in STEM through their teaching, research and service."



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.



Hoby Wedler, PhD
Wedland Group

Dr. Wedler has been completely blind since birth. He is a chemist, an entrepreneur, a sensory expert, and is driven by his passion for innovative, creative, and insightful thinking. He earned his PhD in organic chemistry from the University of California, Davis in 2016. Prior to that, he founded a non-profit organization to lead annual chemistry camps for blind and visually impaired students throughout North America. In the same year, he began opening doors to the world of wine aromas by developing *Tasting in the Dark*, a truly blindfolded wine experience, in collaboration with Francis Ford Coppola. He has since expanded the program to a global market in a variety of industries and special projects. Dr. Wedler uses his highly-trained palate and acute sensory insight of his surroundings in his work as a sensory expert and product development consultant. He now works as a global motivational speaker, scientist, mentor, educator, and entrepreneur. President Barack Obama recognized Hoby by naming him a Champion of Change for enhancing employment and education opportunities for people with disabilities. Dr. Wedler believes that everyone should pursue their dreams, challenge themselves, and elevate their happiness as they grow and progress through life and their careers. He is committed to making the world more inclusive and accessible for all. Learn more about Dr. Wedler [here](#).