

## Disrupting Ableism and Advancing STEM

Sponsored by the National Science Foundation

### Speaker Biographies Cultivating Accessible Educational Pathways and Spaces

THURSDAY, JUNE 15, 2023



**Emily Ackerman, PhD**  
**Harvard Medical School**

Dr. Emily E. Ackerman is a postdoctoral researcher in the Systems Biology department at Harvard Medical School. Her work uses computational methods to understand p53 signaling dynamics. Her activism centers around the interaction between disability, technology, and education; she has published writings and spoken publicly on her identity as a disabled woman in computational science and the exclusion of disabled voices in STEMM fields. She holds a second HMS appointment as a Disability Advisor and serves on the board of directors of Future of Research, co-leading a project aimed at assessing and improving the labor conditions of academic workers.



**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](http://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.



**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.



**Rasheera Dopson, MPH**  
**Morehouse School of Medicine**

Ms. Rasheera Dopson is a public speaker, podcaster, author, and qualitative researcher at the National Center of Primary Care at Morehouse School of Medicine. Her intersectional research approach has supported systems, organizations, and teams to advance equity and mitigate health disparities in multiply-marginalized communities through community engagement, policy development, education, and advocacy. She is the founder of the Dopson Foundation whose organizational aim is the advancement of professional, health, and social equity for women and girls with disabilities.



**Bradley Duerstock, PhD**  
**Purdue University**

Dr. Duerstock is an Associate Professor of Engineering Practice and the Principal Investigator of the [Institute for Accessible Science \(IAS\) Lab](#) at Purdue University. His research focuses on overcoming functional impairments and health challenges faced by those with disabilities. Dr. Duerstock is a recipient of the NIH Director's Pathfinder Award to promote the inclusion of persons with disabilities in the STEM workforce. He has participated in several committees and projects related to accessible biomedical laboratory spaces and is an AIMBE Fellow.



**Stephanie Feola, PhD**  
**University of Arkansas at Little Rock**




Stephanie Feola is a graduating doctoral student at the University of South Florida and a postdoctoral research associate at the University of Arkansas at Little Rock. They are discipline-based education researcher in chemistry and biochemistry. Their research interests are centered on understanding and supporting institutional change initiatives focused integrating asset and evidence-based teaching practices in STEMM higher education.



**Sam Catherine Johnston, EdD**  
**CAST**

Dr. Sam Catherine Johnston, Ed.D., is the Chief Postsecondary & Workforce Development Officer at CAST. In this role, Sam collaborates with a talented team to increase access to middle- and high-income careers for populations underrepresented in the workforce. Sam focuses on design-based research, translating universally designed tools and strategies developed through co-design with stakeholders into practical applications in the field to improve education, training and workplace practices. Sam is the principal investigator for two National Science Foundation (NSF) grants: One to co-design a [multigenerational STEM makerspace in affordable housing](#), and the other to design a [Dual Enrollment Pathway to Careers in Biomanufacturing](#), an emerging area within advanced manufacturing. Sam is also a parent to three spirited children including her nine-year-old daughter who has Down syndrome.



	<p><b>Mark H. Leddy, PhD, MS</b> <b>National Science Foundation</b></p> <p>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.</p>
	<p><b>Megan Lynch, MSc</b> <b>University of California, Davis and Founder of UC Access Now</b></p> <p>Ms. Lynch is a non-traditional disabled student who earned a BA in Art from UCLA and a California teacher's certification to teach social studies at the secondary level. On behalf of UC Access Now, she wrote the <a href="#">Demandifesto</a>, a document that has since influenced a number of other disabled people's movements in higher education. She also created and ran the presentation/panel/workshop "Beyond Law – Providing Accessibility and Inclusion Just Because" for ASPB Plant Biology 2021.</p>
	<p><b>Lisa Meeks, PhD, MA</b> <b>University of Michigan and Executive Director, DocsWithDisabilities Initiative</b></p> <p>Dr. Meeks is an Associate Professor of Learning Health Sciences and Family Medicine at the University of Michigan Medical School. She is also the executive director of the <a href="#">DocsWithDisabilities Initiative</a>, co-creator of their <a href="#">social media campaign</a>, and co-host of their <a href="#">podcast</a>. She is widely considered the leading expert on disability inclusion in health professions education and is the editor of two seminal books on the topic of disability inclusion in health sciences. Her work has been published in leading medical journals and has also been featured in several media outlets. Dr. Meeks also regularly collaborates with health professions associations and is the lead author of the <a href="#">AAMC Special Report: Accessibility, Inclusion, and Action in Medical Education: Lived Experiences of Learners and Physicians with Disabilities</a>.</p>



**Kimberly J. Osmani, PhD**  
**Cornell University**

Dr. Kimberly J. Osmani is a Senior Extension Associate with Cornell University's Yang-Tan Institute on Employment and Disability. In her position, Kim is the Project Director for the [Center for Advancing Policy on Employment for Youth \(CAPE-Youth\)](#). She is also part of a team leading an initiative with the Oregon Vocational Rehabilitation Agency, Inclusive Career Advancement Program (ICAP), helping people with disabilities access postsecondary education within community colleges working through career pathways. Dr. Osmani has extensive experience in working with youth with disabilities--first as a special education teacher, then as an Associate State Director of Special Education Services at the Oklahoma State Department of Education, and finally as the Statewide Transition Coordinator for the Oklahoma Department of Rehabilitation Services.



**Yvette E. Pearson, PhD**  
**University of Texas, Dallas**

Dr. Pearson is Vice President for Diversity, Equity and Inclusion (DEI) at the University of Texas at Dallas. She is a Fellow of the American Society of Civil Engineers (ASCE) and the American Society for Engineering Education (ASEE). Dr. Pearson is recognized globally for over 25 years in higher education, particularly for her work to advance sustainability, justice, equity, diversity and inclusion (JEDI). Her efforts have led to changes in policies and practices of universities and global engineering organizations, including but not limited to increased equity and inclusion for individuals with disabilities. Among Dr. Pearson's awards and honors are ABET's Claire L. Felbinger Award for Diversity and Inclusion and ASCE's President's Medal. Her podcast, [Engineering Change](#), has audiences in over 80 countries. Her book, *Making a Difference: How Being Your Best Self Can Influence, Inspire, and Impel Change*, was released in February 2023.



**Luis Pérez, PhD  
CAST**

As the Disability & Digital Inclusion Lead for CAST, Dr. Pérez promotes the creation, delivery and use of high quality accessible educational materials and technologies to support equitable learning opportunities for all students. He is embedded with the Postsecondary and Workforce Development group at CAST that works to increase access to middle- and high-income careers for populations underrepresented in the workforce, including people with disabilities. His perspective is informed by his own lived experience as a person with a disability and multilingual learner. Dr. Pérez has published three books on accessibility, mobile learning, and UDL: *Mobile Learning for All* (Corwin Press), *Dive into UDL* (ISTE) and *Learning on the Go* (CAST Publishing). He currently serves as a Transition and Workplace Accessibility strand advisor for the Assistive Technology Industry Association (ATIA).



**Caroline Solomon, PhD  
Gallaudet University**

Dr. Solomon is a marine ecologist who focuses on nutrient cycling and phytoplankton physiology. She is heavily involved in research that looks at water quality issues in local waters such as the Anacostia River that flows through DC. Dr. Solomon's work also includes mentoring deaf and hard of hearing students in the classroom, through providing internship opportunities, advising students as they navigate graduate school, and she is currently one of the organizers of the [2023 Global Year of STEM Sign Language Lexicons](#) looking at the ethical and linguistic underpinnings, effectiveness for K-12 education and their sustainability for future generations.





**Hari Srinivasan, BA  
Vanderbilt University**

Mr. Srinivasan was diagnosed with autism and ADHD as a toddler. While his spontaneous talking skills are a work in progress, he primarily uses AAC to communicate. His autism presents numerous other challenges that do present significant obstacles to his daily living. Mr. Srinivasan graduated from UC Berkeley and is currently a PhD Neuroscience student at Vanderbilt University, a PD Soros Fellow, a Public Voices Fellow and a NISE Fellow at the Frist Center for Autism and Innovation at Vanderbilt. His nonacademic affiliations include IACC, DREDF, ASAN, ASA, INSAR, Brain Foundation and Duke University's ACE.



**Laureen Summers, BA  
American Association for the Advancement of  
Science (AAAS)**

Ms. Summers manages the AAAS Entry Point! program which recruits, screens, and refers undergraduate and graduate students with disabilities for summer internships to partners in industry and university research programs. A woman with cerebral palsy, Ms. Summers advocates for students and scientists with disabilities to be included and recognized for their talents and contributions to every STEMM venue. She is fierce about the importance of building relationships as a way of contradicting the assumptions and stereotypes about the potential of people like herself. Ms. Summers published her first chapbook of poetry, *Contender of Chaos*, in 2020 and is completing a second manuscript, *Dancing to the Moon*.



**Taryn M. Williams, MA  
Office of Disability Employment Policy (ODEP)**

Ms. Williams is the Assistant Secretary of Labor for Disability Employment Policy. In this position, she advises the Secretary of Labor on how the Department's policies and programs impact the employment of people with disabilities and leads the Office of Disability Employment Policy (ODEP), which works with employers and all levels of government to promote evidence-based policy that improves employment opportunities and outcomes for people with disabilities. Previously, she was the managing director for the Poverty to Prosperity Program at American Progress. There, she worked on a variety of issues related to education and workforce policy.