Finalist Team Bios

De Anza College, CA

Project: The Micro-Buoy

MIA LIN is a student at De Anza College pursuing Data Science, Statistics, and Business with a 4.0 GPA. She is a Coca-Cola Leaders of Promise Scholar and has received the De Anza Physical Science, Math, and Engineering Scholarship and the Lockheed Martin Vocational Scholarship. Mia has experience in research, leadership, and innovation, including serving as a Budget Officer in NASA Community College Aerospace Scholars, where she managed a simulated $400 million Mars mission budget. She also contributed to an Advanced Air Mobility cargo transport project focused on workforce and finance solutions. At De Anza, Mia serves as President of both Phi Theta Kappa and the Taiwanese Student Association, leading student projects, cultural events, and cross-campus collaborations. She looks forward to the CCIC Boot Camp as an opportunity to strengthen her innovation, entrepreneurship, and communication skills while developing solutions with real-world impact.

HAC NGUYEN is pursuing her associate degree in Electrical Engineering and Computer Science at De Anza College, currently in her second year. She has hands-on experience in both software and hardware development, with a strong foundation in building creative and functional solutions. While working as a Research Intern at San Francisco State University, she developed an automated microscopy system and trained an AI model that reduced data analysis time by 30 minutes. Through her project De Anza RMPify, a Chrome extension now actively used by 100+ students, she demonstrated her ability to build practical tools that directly benefit her campus community. As a participant in the CCIC Boot Camp, she looks forward to learning from industry professionals and applying her creativity and technical skills to develop meaningful, real-world solutions. Outside of academics, Hac enjoys playing badminton and building robots.

MEHRDAD KHOSRAVI (Team Mentor) is Dean of Physical Sciences, Mathematics, and Engineering at De Anza College, where he leads initiatives that strengthen STEM education, expand student access, and support academic innovation. With a background in engineering and applied mathematics, Mehrdad combines technical expertise with a strong commitment to student success, faculty development, and interdisciplinary collaboration. As both an administrator and educator, he remains closely connected to teaching and mentoring, guiding students through applied problem-solving and engineering concepts. His leadership emphasizes inclusive learning, program growth, and creating pathways that connect classroom learning with real-world opportunities. Mehrdad brings extensive experience mentoring student teams, supporting curriculum development, and fostering innovation in STEM education. He encourages students to think critically, collaborate effectively, and apply their knowledge to meaningful challenges.

2026
COMMUNITY COLLEGE INNOVATION CHALLENGE

Advancing Student Innovation & Impact

Henry Ford College, MI

Project: Suclara – Intelligent Water, Tailored To You

HECTOR FUGON-GARCIA is a pre-engineering student at Henry Ford College. He will be transferring to Michigan Technological University to study Materials Science and Engineering.

NICHOLAS KROT is an electrical pre-engineering student at Henry Ford College who plans to continue into electrical engineering. He currently works at Detroit Diesel, a Daimler Truck North America subsidiary, building semi truck engines and gaining hands on experience with heavy duty manufacturing, quality inspection, and solving problems on the production floor. That background shapes how he looks at engineering. He is interested in projects that can actually be built, tested, and improved. Outside of work and school, Nicholas volunteers with a local nonprofit in Old Redford, Detroit, helping to clean up debris from abandoned houses and working in the community garden. He also spends time strengthening his coding skills through hobby projects. For the CCIC project, Nicholas is focused on the electrical and software side, including sensors, Raspberry Pi hardware, coding, and computer vision for reading water quality data and helping turn the idea into a working prototype.

AHMEYAH MARTIN is a student at Henry Ford College in the Design and Manufacturing Program, majoring in manufacturing and engineering, working towards an AAS degree centered around CAD and drafting. She is also a board member of the Engineering Club and a CNC machine operator. Ahmeyah's interest in architecture brought her to Henry Ford Community College. Her background in CAD is what directed the choice of her majors. As she continues to develop her skills in CAD and acquire new skills such as drafting, quality control, computer assisted programming, and machine tool processing, she is well on her way to a career that provides her with opportunities to improve the designs and machines that will be used to create safe and quality products for everyday use. She is looking forward to a future of contributions to help those in need.

2026 COMMUNITY COLLEGE INNOVATION CHALLENGE

Advancing Student Innovation & Impact

JORDAN WILLIAMS is a Mechanical Engineering student at Henry Ford College with a passion for innovation, hands-on engineering, and emerging automotive technologies. As President of the Engineering Club, he collaborates with fellow students on technical projects and engineering initiatives. Jordan also serves as the Communications Lead for the Battery Workforce Challenge, where he supports outreach efforts focused on advanced battery technology and workforce development. He enjoys using CAD software such as Fusion 360 to design and develop engineering concepts, combining creativity with practical problem-solving skills. Jordan is especially interested in electric vehicles, sustainable energy systems, and real-world engineering design that can create meaningful impact. He is also excited to represent Henry Ford College as part of the Community College Innovation Challenge in Washington, D.C.

ASHFIQUA CONNIE (Team Mentor) is an instructor in the Pre-Engineering department at Henry Ford College. She earned her Ph.D in Electrical and Computer Engineering from McGill University in 2015. Her research interests include nanotechnology, light-emitting diodes (LEDs), lasers, and multimedia communication.

2026
COMMUNITY COLLEGE INNOVATION CHALLENGE

Advancing Student Innovation & Impact

Hudson County Community College, NJ

Project: Hybrid Immersion Cooling for Long-Term AI Sustainability

FATIMA ELDEI IBRAHIM is pursuing an AS in Engineering Sciences at Hudson County Community College (HCCC) with plans to transfer into Mechanical/Aerospace Engineering. She brings hands-on technical skills including soldering, 3D modeling with AutoCAD and CadQuery, and Python programming. Fatima has conducted research on malaria prevention solutions and sustainable alternatives to plastic alongside her mentor, Professor Clive Li. As President of both the STEM Club and Girls Who Code chapter at HCCC, she creates opportunities for students passionate about science and technology. She also serves on the American Chemical Society and the Interclub Council. Outside academics, Fatima enjoys sewing her own fashion pieces, which has strengthened her design thinking and attention to detail—skills that translate directly to her engineering work. Through the Community College Innovation Challenge, Fatima looks forward to gaining industry insights, networking with fellow students and congressional stakeholders, and developing her entrepreneurial skills in pitching and public speaking.

ELIZABETH MARAVILLAS is pursuing her studies in physics at Hudson Country Community College (HCCC) with plans to complete a bachelor's degree in mechanical engineering. She has gained valuable research experience at New York University, working in a lab and developing hands-on experimental skills. She has continued expanding her research skills at HCCC through multiple projects that have strengthened her technical abilities, critical thinking, and problem-solving skills. She is an active member of the American Chemical Society Honors Society and Physics Honors Society, while serving as Vice President of both the STEM Club and Girls Who Code chapter, where she helps lead events, projects, and initiatives that support student growth in STEM fields. Beyond academics, Elizabeth enjoys expressing her creativity through music production, art, and video creation. Through the Community College Innovation Challenge, she hopes to further develop her public speaking skills while showcasing her technical expertise, leadership, and creativity.

CLIVE LI (Team Mentor) is an Associate Professor of Engineering Science at Hudson County Community College, dedicated to empowering undergraduate students to take ownership of their learning and think creatively beyond traditional boundaries. His teaching emphasizes critical thinking, real-world problem solving, and engagement through a strong enthusiasm for the physical sciences. His research focuses on smart polymeric composite materials, including compostable and antimicrobial systems, with an emphasis on interdisciplinary collaboration. Prior to academia, he worked as a research scientist in industry and completed postdoctoral research at the National Institute of Standards and Technology. His work has been recognized with several honors, including the 2024 AACC Faculty Member of the Year Award and the 2023 Dale Parnell Distinguished Faculty Award.

2026
COMMUNITY COLLEGE INNOVATION CHALLENGE

Advancing Student Innovation & Impact

Pasadena City College, CA

Project: Cortexa

JOSIAH CHUN is currently a student at Pasadena City College pursuing an associate degree in Computer Science. He has extended learning outside of the classroom through hands-on experience with EEG recording devices and signal processing using Python. His passion for neurotechnology was inspired by the Decoded Brain Club, where he is a Project Lead managing a team that is working on developing additional software to work with PiEEG products. Josiah also works on campus at the automotive shop, practicing organizational skills along with learning about machinery and electronics. As a participant in the Community College Innovation Challenge, he looks forward to exposure to entrepreneurship, innovation, and industry. Josiah hopes to apply his technical skills to focus product ideas and help develop solutions to answer real world needs. Outside of academics, he loves playing the double bass and guitar which he hopes to integrate into his studies on signal processing.

EVA MARDIGIAN is pursuing an associate degree in business administration at Pasadena City College with plans to transfer to a four-year university in 2027. Driven by a passion for innovation, she focuses on leveraging technology to help businesses address challenges. Her professional background includes three years in sales at StretchLab, where she fostered client relationships and communicated product value clearly across diverse audiences. As a student consultant with Core Consulting Group, she analyzes financial data for local businesses to deliver actionable growth recommendations. Eva's analytical focus led her to conduct independent research on AI automation in law firms, where she applied statistical methods to assess the relationship between AI use and operational efficiency. More recently, her work as Financial Officer for Decoded Brain supports real-world application of neurotechnology through Project Cortexa. By bridging her business background with technology, Eva is committed to driving innovation that makes a lasting impact.

JOSEPH (MASON) SAMANO is pursuing an associate degree in Business Administration with a focus on business development and growth strategy. He brings four years of experience as an Associate Banker at JPMorgan Chase, where he worked directly with clients, built long term relationships, and contributed to market expansion in a fast paced environment. Mason is recognized for his reliability, leadership, and ability to take initiative under pressure. He combines strong interpersonal skills with a results driven mindset, allowing him to support team dynamics while ensuring execution. He approaches challenges thoughtfully and remains decisive in action. He is particularly interested in exploring how business principles can be applied to emerging fields such as neurotechnology and innovation. Outside of academics and work, he enjoys learning about Armenian culture and spending time around ranches and animals, reflecting discipline and personal growth.

2026 COMMUNITY COLLEGE INNOVATION CHALLENGE

Advancing Student Innovation & Impact

ELLEN VARTANYAN is a political science student at Pasadena City College focused on governance, diplomacy, and the intersection of public policy and emerging technologies. She has developed experience in policy research, civic engagement, and organizational leadership through both academic and professional roles. She previously interned with the Armenian Assembly of America, contributing to bipartisan advocacy efforts on Capitol Hill, and served as a Program Associate at the Osgood Center for International Studies. At Pasadena City College, she founded and led the International Affairs Club and currently serves as Governance Officer for the Decoded Brain Club, where she oversees organizational bylaws, contracts, and policy development to support ethical and scalable innovation. Through her work, Ellen focuses on translating complex systems into practical and tangible frameworks that support responsible innovation and public impact.

JARED ASHCROFT (Team Mentor) is a Chemistry Professor at Pasadena City College (PCC) and the Principal Investigator (PI) of the Micro Nano Technology Education Center (MNT-EC). He leads efforts to advance education and workforce development in micro and nanotechnology, helping to create pathways for students into high-tech industries. Jared was recently named the Community College Lead for the National Network for Microelectronics Education, where he is helping to shape national strategies for microelectronics education and workforce development. He is passionate about expanding access to STEM education, particularly for underrepresented groups, and works closely with industry and academic partners to develop cutting-edge training programs. His leadership at MNT-EC has made PCC a key player in preparing the next generation of technicians and scientists in the semiconductor and nanotechnology fields.

2026
COMMUNITY COLLEGE INNOVATION CHALLENGE

Advancing Student Innovation & Impact

Passaic County Community College, NJ

Project: Rocky Road

GABRIEL BETANCUR is working towards his associate degree in Computer Science from Passaic County Community College. He currently serves as Membership Coordinator for Phi Theta Kappa and was a former College Project Chairperson. He successfully led the Empowerment and Resource Network (EaRN), which evolved into Career Champions—an impactful student-led initiative that actively promotes career readiness and empowers students to seize valuable opportunities. Gabriel interns with Laptop Upcycle, refurbishing laptops for GED students to expand their access to technology. He combines technical expertise with leadership and communication skills, demonstrated through presentations discussing generative AI. His experience includes C++, Python, SQL, and Lua, with additional work in game development and databases. He aspires to become a quantum programmer, determined to establish an academy that empowers underserved students to pursue their potential. Gabriel reflects a remarkable academic ethic and a steadfast dedication to his aspirations.

ARIEL MOLINA, JR. is a graduating student at Passaic County Community College, pursuing an Associate of Science in Engineering Science. His engineering experience includes an internship at Edmund Optics, where he designed a nine-turn laser maze system using precision optics and custom CAD-modeled hardware fabricated on a 3D printer and CNC laser engraver. A transformative campus leader, Ariel has united students, faculty, and administrators to drive lasting change. As Scholarship Coordinator of Phi Theta Kappa, he expanded scholarship awareness college-wide from a handful of students to over 300 members. As a previous Chapter Vice President, he earned the Presidential Officer and Gold Service Member Awards. He also co-founded Career Champions, delivering professional development programming to hundreds of students. Ariel aims to specialize in mechanical engineering and HVAC systems, combining technical precision with proven leadership to design sustainably built environments for the communities he serves.

PATRICIA MENDOZA (Team Mentor) serves as the Community Service VISTA Fellow with AmeriCorps at Passaic County Community College (PCCC). From the beginning of her term, she has been instrumental in empowering students on campus. In particular, she has successfully taken the lead with Alpha Eta Chi, a chapter of Phi Theta Kappa, to spearhead impactful community service and leadership initiatives. Her role includes aiding weekly workshops that enhance leadership skills and critical thinking among student leaders. Patricia has successfully guided students in various projects such as the College Project and Honors in Action, preparing them for presentations and cohesive teamwork. Her exceptional dedication to higher education has earned her the Path To Making The Difference Award while serving as Alumni Association President, reflecting her steadfast commitment to excellence. Both colleagues and student leaders recognize her contributions as essential to student success at PCCC.

2026
COMMUNITY COLLEGE INNOVATION CHALLENGE

Advancing Student Innovation & Impact

Pellissippi State Community College, TN

Project: 3D Modeling Accessibility for Visually Impaired Students

SHELBY COCHRAN is a Mechanical Engineering Technology student from Pellissippi State Community College. She has hands-on experience in CAD programs and mechanics. She looks forward to expanding her team's ideas through the CCIC competition.

ARIA COLLINS is finishing her associate degree in Mechanical Engineering at Pellissippi Community College in Knoxville, Tennessee. During her time there, she gained experience in CAD and CAM using SolidWorks and Fusion 360, and she will graduate with a CSWA certification in SolidWorks. She also has hands-on experience with CNC machines and 3D printers at Pellissippi. She is looking forward to participating in the CCIC to strengthen her public speaking skills and expand her industry knowledge and entrepreneurial skills. Aria enjoys music in her spare time and looks forward to applying creative and innovative solutions with the CCIC and her future career.

LOGAN KIRKLAND is pursuing an associate degree in Mechanical Engineering at Pellissippi State Community College. He worked as a CNC machinist and programmer, and returned to school to strengthen his technical knowledge and expand his opportunities within the field. Logan is a graduate of the Tennessee College of Applied Technology Knoxville, where he developed a strong foundation in manufacturing and machining. He is a dedicated and hardworking individual with strengths in solving complex problems. Logan is excited to be working with his team to develop accessible learning tools that make STEM concepts more understandable for students with visual impairments, using CAD design and 3D printing to create tactile models. He is eager to participate in the CCIC and take advantage of the opportunities it provides to innovate and collaborate. When not working or attending classes, Logan enjoys golf, mountain biking, and running.

WILLIE J. ROSS, III (Team Mentor) is a full-time temporary faculty member in the Mechanical Engineering Technology Department within the School of Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics at Pellissippi State Community College in Knoxville, TN. Originally from Northwest Tennessee, he began his studies at the University of Tennessee at Martin before transferring to the University of Tennessee at Knoxville, where he earned both his bachelor's and master's degrees in Industrial Engineering. In 2015, he served as an academic and career coach for the Universal Pathways to Employment Project, a federally funded grant program supporting students with disabilities in completing their degrees and securing employment in their fields. In 2017, he became an authorized OSHA General Industry trainer. While still an adjunct from 2023-2024, he worked as the Workforce Trainer at Knoxville Area Urban League. He is committed to supporting students in their engineering education and preparing them for successful careers.

2026
COMMUNITY COLLEGE INNOVATION CHALLENGE

Advancing Student Innovation & Impact

Perimeter College at Georgia State University (GSU), GA

Project: Enhanced Drain Obstruction Prevention (EDOP)

SAIHAN GONZALEZ is a GSU Perimeter College student pursuing a civil engineering degree with interests in industrial and environmental engineering. She is a driven student focused on developing strong analytical and problem-solving skills while exploring structural design, building systems, and sustainable engineering applications in collaborative environments. Saihan serves as president of her engineering club, vice president of the Society of Women Engineers, and vice president of the math club, where she organizes events that increase student engagement and support academic and professional growth. She also coordinated a speaking/networking panel featuring the former senior executive of Georgia Power alongside engineers, creating opportunities for mentorship and career insight. In addition to her leadership roles, she is actively involved in her community and church through volunteer service. As a participant in the Community College Innovation Challenge, she aims to apply her leadership, creativity, and technical skills to address real-world engineering challenges.

SARAH MOBLEY is a GSU Perimeter College student pursuing a Biomolecular Engineering degree. She has an interest in the medical field, with a focus in medical research, development for regenerative medicine, and increasing public health initiatives for all. She is pursuing research at her institution, through the CORE Research program, hoping to gain experience in bio-chem research applicable to future medical research. Sarah engages in community involvement in the university system as the President of the Society of Women Engineers, and outside the university system by volunteering at the Grady Hospital Public Health Initiative: Food as Medicine Program. As a participant in the Community College Innovation Challenge, Sarah is dedicated to improving the lives of all those in her community by developing and advocating for the implementation of equitable programs and structures to improve living conditions for all.

KEARA THOMAS is an Honors Industrial Engineering student, President of the Dunwoody Engineering Club, and a founding committee member of the Society of Women Engineers at GSU Perimeter College. Driven by a passion for systems that improve quality of life, her work focuses on sustainability, process optimization, and human-centered problem solving across disciplines. Keara believes meaningful impact comes from understanding how technical systems, communication, policy, and people interact at every level. That perspective was shaped in part by her first bachelor's degree in Film and Mass Communications, where she focused on documentary-style storytelling and learned how narratives influence public understanding. She later studied macroeconomics in Eastern Europe, further expanding her interest in infrastructure, policy, and global systems. Keara participates in student-led engineering design and innovation projects focused on efficiency, resilience, and lasting impact. She hopes to use industrial engineering as a bridge between technical innovation and large-scale social improvement.

2026 COMMUNITY COLLEGE INNOVATION CHALLENGE

Advancing Student Innovation & Impact

RALPH ZAFAR is an Honors College computer science student at GSU Perimeter College, building at the intersection of artificial intelligence, computer vision, and robotics engineering. He currently holds three concurrent research positions, nationally selected for a competitive computer vision internship through the DIVAS Alliance at Doane University, and contributing to two additional faculty-led research programs at GSU-Perimeter, while working hands-on with autonomous robotics systems at Amazon. Ralph's focus is deliberate: intelligent systems, computer vision, and the engineering problems that live at that frontier. Outside of research and industry, Ralph coaches peers in mathematics and stays grounded in community. Upon completing his associate degree, he intends to pursue AI and Robotics at MIT, a destination every role he has taken and every program he has entered has been built toward. Ralph comes to the CCIC to sharpen his entrepreneurial instincts, build meaningful industry connections, and find the people worth building the future with.

KIMMY KELLETT (Team Mentor) is an Associate Professor of Biology at Perimeter College, where she has taught biology and environmental science courses since 2016. She holds a PhD in Ecology and loves to help students learn about and appreciate the natural world though experiential learning. Through her work as Faculty Associate for the Perimeter College Hub for Innovation and Entrepreneurship, she has also created programming, including a Perimeter College Innovation Challenge, that helps students develop their innovative and entrepreneurial skills. She is excited to return to the CCIC Boot Camp this year with a new team of students after an excellent first CCIC experience last year.

2026
COMMUNITY COLLEGE INNOVATION CHALLENGE

Advancing Student Innovation & Impact

San Jacinto College, TX

Project: Trustline

THIERRY KAMDA NOUSSI is a zealous and hard working student working toward his degree in cybersecurity at San Jacinto College. He has experience in electrical maintenance and construction and currently works in an HDPE spool manufacturing plant. Being an electrician has strengthened his problem-solving skills and deepened his understanding of technical systems. He is drawn to the "how" and "why" behind things, always taking time to think critically and explore solutions at a deeper level. Beyond his technical career, Thierry is passionate about helping others and using technology as a force for good. His ultimate goal is becoming an ethical hacker, focusing on protecting vulnerable individuals, especially the elderly, from online scams. He aims to build the TrustLine app to be the front line of defense for everyone, especially our retired citizens. Outside of work, Thierry enjoys soccer and lives by the quote from entrepreneur Jim Rohn, "Discipline is the bridge between goals and accomplishments."

ASHLEY MORENO is a motivated student, loving mother, and coffee enthusiast. She is currently pursuing her associate degree in cybersecurity and is passionate about raising awareness for those most vulnerable as technology continues to evolve. Born and raised in Texas, she is proud to represent San Jacinto College and the Cybersecurity Club at the Community College Innovation Challenge Boot Camp. She looks forward to connecting with other driven students and learning from everyone she meets.

DENISE PARKS brings curiosity, resilience, and a little sparkle to everything she does. She can often be spotted with glitter nail polish and a pink can of Monster in hand, ready for the next challenge. Before enrolling at San Jacinto College to pursue cybersecurity, she studied accounting, which helped her build a strong foundation with detail and problem-solving. Having once been an underdog herself, Denise is now thriving, and hopes to champion others who need support, encouragement, and protection. She is especially passionate about helping people feel safer and more confident in an increasingly digital world. Denise is thrilled to be a part of the 2026 CCIC and is eager to meet other students who want to change the world.

YULISSA TIJERINA is a cybersecurity student at San Jacinto College. Fueled by purpose and possibility, she is determined to create meaningful change in the world around her. Driven by curiosity and a strong work ethic, she approaches her education with focus and discipline, always striving to grow and excel. She is excited to learn from her new peers and mentors at the 2026 CCIC Boot Camp, and can't wait to share her ideas. Her favorite famous quote is "Do or do not, there is no try". –Master Yoda

2026 COMMUNITY COLLEGE INNOVATION CHALLENGE

Advancing Student Innovation & Impact

ALYSSA LOZANO (Team Mentor) is a cybersecurity professional with over a decade of experience in federal cyber operations and cyber threat intelligence. She began her career at the National Security Agency, where she supported national missions and trained military and civilian personnel in adversary TTP analysis, attribution, and operational decision making. She later served in a senior leadership role within a strategic cyber operations organization, leading threat intelligence and data analytics efforts while advising leadership on adversary behavior and mission impact. Today, Alyssa is a cybersecurity faculty member at San Jacinto College, teaching advanced topics such as cyber defense, incident response, and digital forensics. She also designs hands-on training environments that prepare students for real world cyber roles. Her work focuses on strengthening the cyber workforce through applied intelligence, training, and mission aligned education.

2026
COMMUNITY COLLEGE INNOVATION CHALLENGE

Advancing Student Innovation & Impact

Shawnee Community College, IL

Project: Groundtruth

GRACIE NICOLE EDWARDS, also known as Nic, is a twenty-four year old student at Shawnee Community College. She is working towards her AA degree and has a desire to start a career in the music industry. Nic is a CCIC finalist with the GroundTruth project, focusing on helping with its messaging, accessibility, and impact. She has first-hand experience with the realities of food insecurity after working in a town that did not have access to fresh, available meat or vegetables for seven years. She saw her community come together with a new store that was underfunded and watched the hope slowly fade. Nic joined this project because of her love of human connection. She enjoys practicing her guitar and singing after school hours, but also always enjoys helping others if opportunities come along—as she feels it is important to connect and to feel a connection to community.

ROBERT EDWARDS is the founder of Viable Food Systems and a nontraditional student at Shawnee Community College. His work focuses on helping communities open, operate, and sustain grocery stores in places where access is fragile or disappearing. After helping launch Rise Community Market in Cairo, Illinois, Robert saw firsthand that community support alone is not enough to sustain a store. That experience drove him to return to school to better understand the structural forces behind long-term viability. He is building Viable Food Systems to provide the tools, training, and guidance communities need to make informed decisions. Through his work with the Illinois Grocery Initiative, he works directly with grocers and communities on planning, training, and stabilization, with a focus not just on opening stores, but keeping them open.

TY SCHUETZ is a sophomore at Shawnee Community College and the policy-focused member of the Viable Food Systems project. During high school, Schuetz worked at his local grocery store as a cashier until the property was sold. Since then, Ty has become a teller at Southern Trust Bank. While in high school, Schuetz was a member of clubs and organizations. He served as class president for four years. In addition, Ty was a member of the student council for four years, serving as president for one year. Upon graduation, Ty was awarded the Shining Star Award. This award is given to a student who has excelled academically and carries a positive attitude. This fall, Ty will be attending George Washington University in Washington, D.C., where he will earn a bachelor's degree in International Relations and Foreign Policy.

REECE RUTLAND (Team Mentor) is a journalist turned educator who teaches Government and History and Shawnee Community College. Combining a background in covering state and local policymakers, Reece seeks to make history and political science both active and engaging for his students. He has been published in national newsstand publications and was a two-time recipient of Tennessee Press Association honors. After earning a Master's in Public Policy, as well as his graduate credentials in history, he has now turned his attention to empowering the next generation of leaders through engagement, motivation and innovative teaching techniques.

2026
COMMUNITY COLLEGE INNOVATION CHALLENGE

Advancing Student Innovation & Impact

Springfield Technical Community College, MA

Project: HydroShield

SHAHMEER ALI is a first-year student at Springfield Technical Community College. Shahmeer recently shifted his major from biology to general studies due to upcoming curriculum requirements. He hopes to gain valuable and competitive experience from the Community College Innovation Challenge Boot Camp. Shahmeer enjoys exploring new things, learning about them, and staying active in his extracurricular activities. He has hands-on experience in digital art and photography, and one of his long-term goals is to pursue a career in dentistry. He brings strong time-management skills, the ability to work effectively in a team to achieve high-quality results, and a natural curiosity that drives him to take on new challenges.

VINCENT GITHIRI is currently enrolled in his second semester of freshman year at Springfield Technical Community College as a biology major. Vincent plans to obtain an associate degree and transfer to a four-year college to further his studies and pursue a career as a physician assistant—as well as pursue a soccer career. He captained the college's soccer team during the fall semester to its first conference semifinal in almost a decade, and brings leadership and compassion to the team. He is naturally curious and enjoys tackling innovative questions and ideas. Vincent hopes to strengthen his critical thinking at the Community College Innovation Challenge Boot Camp and come up with a secure way of collecting microplastics to help reduce pollution levels and bring about a positive change in the community.

SOPHIA LANDRAU is finishing her associate degree at Springfield Technical Community College as a biology transfer student. Sophia will be transferring to the University of Massachusetts Amherst in the fall of 2026 as an animal science major. She served as a student ambassador at Springfield Tech for the 2025-2026 school year and had the pleasure of serving as a student leader on campus—helping to organize events and engaging students on campus while serving as an outlet for resources and information. Sophia plans on continuing to use her leadership skills at UMass Amherst as a way to grow as a well-rounded student and to get involved with meaningful causes around campus. Her plan for the future is to become a veterinarian with a specialization in exotic animals. She hopes to apply her skills to better our environment and to advocate and educate her community about the importance of environmental conservation.

2026 COMMUNITY COLLEGE INNOVATION CHALLENGE

Advancing Student Innovation & Impact

REENA RANDHIR (Team Mentor) is Associate Professor of Biology at Springfield Technical Community College (STCC), where she transforms challenging biology courses into spaces of curiosity, and possibility. Trained in cell and molecular biology, she brings deep scientific grounding, a global perspective, and a profound commitment to student transformation and success. Her teaching blends rigor with compassion through research posters, makerspace learning, field experiences, open educational resources, and mentorship that helps students see themselves as scholars, and leaders. She has mentored STCC students in undergraduate research, founded and lead STCC's annual Sustainathon and Celebrate events. She advises Phi Theta Kappa, helping students grow through scholarship, service, leadership, and fellowship. As mentor for HydroShield, she is honored to guide students address microplastic pollution in innovative ways to protect our waterways.

2026
COMMUNITY COLLEGE INNOVATION CHALLENGE

Advancing Student Innovation & Impact

SUNY Broome Community College, NY

Project: Hands-On Quantum Education

ALEXANDRA BOUILLON is pursuing dual degrees in Engineering Science and Computer Science at SUNY Broome (May 2026). She has received Phi Theta Kappa, Women in STEM, and mathematic scholarships. She co-founded the Math Club and serves as Engineering Club Secretary, and IEEE Treasurer. Through IEEE, she supported the Watson Combat Robotics League at SUNY Binghamton with pit support and parts for student builders. Alexandra volunteers for STEM outreach—including the Southern Tier Scholastic Science Fair and as a judge for a LEGO robotics competition. She developed and built, a wireless mini piano, and presented it at the STEM Showcase, growing her quantum-optics skills in an NSF-supported Syracuse series for SUNY Broome's CCIC kit. She also organized the campus screening of Python | The Documentary, including a dedication to SUNY Broome from Python creator Guido van Rossum. As co-chair for the ONLY One Earth committee, she organized a Clean Energy and Savings event with Cornell Cooperative Extension. Selected to represent SUNY Reconnect to Chancellor King, Alexandra looks forward to the CCIC Boot Camp for pitching, customer discovery, and teamwork.

MARKO BOYKO is an Electrical Engineering student at SUNY Broome interested in pursuing a career in sustainable electronics. As part of this pursuit, he currently interns at BAE Systems with the Aircraft Electrification Program and hopes to concentrate on power electronics during his undergraduate studies at Binghamton University. Marko enjoys exploring projects and concepts across multiple disciplines, including physics and art, which sparked his involvement in the Ed Quantum program, where he currently creates technical illustrations to help break down complex photonics concepts for the everyday person. He is also a member of the Ukrainian American community and seeks to help raise awareness for the ongoing humanitarian crisis in his family's homeland by volunteering with a local organization, Together for Ukraine. As a participant in the Community College Innovation Challenge, Marko looks forward to strengthening his scientific communication skills and creating awareness of the need for accessible, hands-on quantum education.

TOBIAS DOAK is and always has been fascinated by science and technology. From peering through microscopes to building machines out of Lego, the principles of engineering have captivated him since childhood. Having completed an associate degree at SUNY Broome Community College in Engineering Science, he is now pursuing a bachelor's degree in Mechanical Engineering. Tobias has worked in industry with a civil engineering firm, developing both technical engineering and business skills. In addition, he worked in a flexible electronics lab at Binghamton University, where he gained experience in the research and design process. Tobias has a strong set of interpersonal and communication skills and an affinity for understanding technical concepts, and is already applying his knowledge and experience in design projects and team leadership. Looking forward, he aspires to further develop those skills with the goal of eventually starting and running his own engineering business.

2026 COMMUNITY COLLEGE INNOVATION CHALLENGE

Advancing Student Innovation & Impact

VIVIANNA RICCI is an ambitious student currently pursuing engineering science at SUNY Broome Community College, and will transition to SUNY University at Buffalo this fall to pursue an undergraduate degree in physics, with a specialization in astrophysics. She possesses hands-on experience in quantum technology and laboratory manual fabrication, gained through working under Syracuse University and EdQuantum on an NSF-funded quantum technology workforce preparation project, alongside her team. In addition, she represented the student body as a Senator in the Student Government Association program in various committees, while also representing engineering students as a Co-President of the college's Engineering Club. She currently builds her strength in excellent customer service, communication skills, and team collaboration, assisting customers in the restaurant food industry as a sushi chef. Vivianna brings an enthusiastic, resilient, and proactive forefront to the communities she serves and is eager to bring her skills to the Community College Innovation Challenge.

ROBERT LOFTHOUSE (Team Mentor) is an Associate Professor and Chair of the Engineering Science and Physics Department at SUNY Broome Community College. He holds a bachelor's degree in Mechanical Engineering from Clarkson University and a master's degree in Mechanical Engineering from Binghamton University. He teaches engineering mechanics, design, and clean energy classes. Robert is a passionate advocate for student success with a focus on helping students transfer to world-leading four-year engineering programs. He has also mentored student teams entering multiple state and national design competitions and worked on numerous educational and clean energy grants.

2026
COMMUNITY COLLEGE INNOVATION CHALLENGE

Advancing Student Innovation & Impact

Wake Technical Community College, NC

Project: GridGuardAI

BETHANY HILL is a computer programming and data science student at Wake Technical Community College, with a background in linguistics and cognitive science from UNC Chapel Hill. Her work at the intersection of language and technology has built a strong foundation in Python, machine learning, and data analysis, reinforced by hands-on experience validating AI annotation data for speech recognition systems NLP systems at DataForce. Bethany brings a collaborative mindset and a passion for turning complex data into meaningful solutions. She looks forward to the CCIC Boot Camp to deepen her technical expertise, connect with innovators across disciplines, and apply data-driven thinking to challenges that matter.

HAN NYAN is pursuing an Associate in Business Administration and Management at Wake Technical Community College. She approaches every industry with the mindset of how it can be improved and how it can better serve people. From managing restaurant operations to supporting refugees and coordinating real estate transactions, she has built experience across multiple industries to understand how businesses truly function and how they can create real impact. That same drive led her to help organize Wake Tech SGA's first business entrepreneurship competition and become the incoming Executive Officer of the N4CSGA, advocating for students across North Carolina. Now as a participant in the Community College Innovation Challenge, Han brings that same people-first mindset to solving problems that matter. Curious, growth-oriented, and unafraid to fail, her long-term goal is to build her own businesses and use that success to give back, starting with improving education access in Myanmar.

CALE ROGOYSKI is studying toward his associate degree in science and engineering at Wake Technical Community College in Raleigh, North Carolina. He is also dually enrolled at NC State in the master's program in nuclear engineering. At Wake Tech, he has served as the student government senate chair, won the Eagle Innovation Challenge, and was project lead for a NASA-funded high altitude ballooning challenge. Outside of academics and work, Cale loves to spend time with his wife and kids.

EMMALENE (EMMIE) MERCER (Team Mentor) is the Associate Dean of Information Technology at Wake Technical Community College in Raleigh, NC. She holds a Doctor of Business Administration (DBA), a Master of Science in Information Systems (MSIS), and a Bachelor of Science in Mathematics and has extensive experience teaching and leading programs in analytics, data preparation, and computer programming. Emmie leads college initiatives focused on faculty AI fluency, industry-aligned certifications, and curriculum development in data analytics and workforce-ready programming pathways. She collaborates closely with faculty, deans, and industry partners to expand experiential learning, mentoring, and certification opportunities. She received Harding University's Teacher Achievement Award in 2022 and holds various certifications in Python, Tableau, Excel, and Alteryx.