2026
COMMUNITY COLLEGE INNOVATION CHALLENGE

Advancing Student Innovation & Impact

Networking Lunch & Alumni Panel

Monday, June 8 – 12:00 – 1:45 p.m.

Meet the Speakers

JACOB BISSONNETTE is a manufacturing professional and student entrepreneur currently working at a tech startup that builds advanced circuit boards for companies including OpenAI and SpaceX. After participating in the Community College Innovation Challenge Innovation Boot Camp, he continued pursuing opportunities at the intersection of manufacturing, engineering, and innovation. Jacob will be attending the Isenberg School of Management to pursue a degree in Operations & Information Management with a minor in Engineering Sciences, with plans to later earn a master's degree in Electrical Engineering.

HOLLY DAHLSTROM recently graduated with honors from Des Moines Area Community College in Iowa with an AAS in Computer Information Systems, maintaining a 4.0 GPA and as a member of Phi Theta Kappa. After participating in the Community College Innovation Challenge (CCIC), she joined the Advanced Technology Technician Training (AT3) program and became involved in several professional development and technical training opportunities. Through AT3, she later took part in the NTEC innovation program, where she formed and led a team that advanced to the final in-person pitch round at the World Tech Connect conference in Raleigh, North Carolina. Her pitch earned a tied runner-up placement, and she was grateful for the opportunity to represent community college students alongside researchers and innovators. She enjoys learning about technology and innovation and hopes to continue exploring creative and entrepreneurial ideas in the future.

DEREK GONZALEZ is a Chemical Engineering student entering his junior year at the Rutgers University-New Brunswick School of Engineering. He has a passion for developing and scaling lab-scale techniques into real, sustainable solutions to issues that people encounter every day. He has fostered this passion through research fellowships across a variety of fields, including urban agriculture, drug delivery, and consumer-packaged goods. He was a member of the McEnnis Material Analysis in Biological Systems (MABS) lab, where he conducted research on novel methods of drug carrier fabrication and the crystallization kinetics of amorphous solid dispersions. He presented his research at the 2025 NJIT Undergraduate Research and Innovation Summit and was awarded 1st place honors for his work on jetting at the 2025 Bergen Community College STEM C^2 Summit. At Bergen Community College, he was a Phi Theta Kappa member and distinguished STEM Student Scholar. His research focused on establishing hydroponic community gardens on campus integrated with on-campus food services, such as the food pantry. In addition, he designed, developed, and constructed "Pop-Up Hydroponic Farm" (PUHF) units made from recycled materials as a method of combating food insecurity and vacancy in urban communities. His work has been celebrated at various conferences. In 2025, his team achieved first-place honors at the 2025 National Community College Innovation Challenge for their research and development in these "Pop-Up Hydroponic Farming Units." Right now, he is working in R&D at Colgate-Palmolive as a year-round intern, where he works in examining the chemical and material processes and mechanisms that make up the products people use every day, finding ways to make them more efficient, high quality, and sustainable.

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SOPHIA IBARGUEN is a first-generation college graduate who attended Pasadena City College from 2019 to 2021. During her time there, she helped conceptualize the Nano Bio MAB, a hybrid nanoparticle designed as an alternative cancer therapy, which earned first place at CCIC in 2021. In the fall of 2021, Sophia transferred to UCLA, where she earned a Bachelor of Science in Biology with a minor in Evolutionary Medicine. Upon graduating from UCLA in 2023, she began her current position as a postbaccalaureate research fellow at the National Eye Institute. In the fall, Sophia will begin the Vision Science PhD program at UC Berkeley, where she was awarded the Chancellor's Fellowship to support her graduate studies.

ELAF MAHMOUD graduated with honors from County College of Morris with an Associate Degree in Engineering Science and a certificate in Mechanical Technology. Early internships at MAC Products and New Jersey Institute of Technology sparked her passion for Electrical Engineering, which she now pursues while working toward becoming a licensed professional engineer. She has combined leadership, research, and entrepreneurship throughout her academic journey. She founded her college's Society of Women Engineers chapter, conducted semiconductor research at Michigan State University using nonthermal plasma reactors, and has pursued a women's health venture since participating in the CCIC boot camp, earning second place in the Kean University business competition. Currently, Elaf works in R&D at PureNanoTech, where she stress tests nanobubble generators, designs experiments, and supports agricultural commercialization efforts. Outside engineering, she conducts animal behavior research for the Wildlife Conservation Society, often spending hours observing her favorite zoo animals. She also enjoys tutoring middle and high school students in underserved New Jersey communities in STEM subjects like math and chemistry, helping them build confidence, improve academically, and develop a genuine love for learning.

OLGA PIERRAKOS (Facilitator) is currently the Lead Program Director for the Advanced Technological Education (ATE) program at the National Science Foundation. She is also the Founding Chair (2017-2022) and a Professor of Wake Forest Engineering. With a unique vision to Educate the Whole Engineer and a commitment to Human Flourishing, Olga led Wake Forest Engineering to be ranked as one of the top (14th) "Best Undergraduate Engineering Programs" by US News Report (2023). With this unique vision, Olga has also served as the principal investigator since 2019 on a multi-year Kern Family Foundation KEEN (Kern Entrepreneurial Engineering Network) award titled "Educating the Whole Engineer" to integrate important competencies such as virtues, character, entrepreneurial mindset, and leadership across the Wake Forest Engineering curriculum. She has led Wake Forest Engineering with a focus on innovation and excellence, curricular and pedagogical innovation, and creative partnerships across the humanities, social sciences, industry, entrepreneurs, etc. in order to rethink and reimagine engineering education. Olga is an engineering education researcher, biomedical and mechanical engineer, and national leader in transforming undergraduate engineering education. She has served as founding faculty of two brand new engineering programs (the first at James Madison University) and served in several national roles across ASEE, ABET, AAAS, KEEN, and NSF.