

CCPI-STEM FELLOWS PRAISE PROGRAM'S MENTORS

The high quality mentoring and numerous networking opportunities that [CCPI-STEM](#) Fellows receive were mentioned frequently during the discussion between four Fellows and two mentors featured in [CCPI-Cast Episode 16](#).

[South Texas College](#) Biology Instructor Elizabeth Ann A. Gonzalez pointed out that as a person early in her teaching career she rarely spoke with people outside her department, much less college leaders, until she was selected as a 2024 CCPI-STEM Fellow. As a participant in CCPI-STEM's third cohort of Fellows she now interacts frequently during virtual meetings with other Fellows and community college leaders from around the United States. She also receives one-one-one mentoring from her CCPI-STEM Mentor Dr. Melanie Williamson, the academic dean and dean of innovation at [Bluegrass Community and Technical College](#).

CCPI-STEM Fellows Program Coordinator Dr. Ashok Agrawal said that the current and retired college presidents, chancellors, and administrators who serve as CCPI-STEM mentors "understand what it means to be a college leader and give Fellows a sounding board for their research and career plans."

He noted that many Fellows not only carry out their community college faculty duties while working on their STEM-focused graduate degrees, but they also have social and community leadership roles. For instance, two of the 18 Fellows serve on city councils.

The 2025 Fellows criteria and application are available on [CCPI-STEM's website](#). Applications are due Friday, November 14, 2025. In addition to mentoring and networking opportunities each Fellow receives a \$5,000 stipend, which can be renewed for a second year depending on the Fellow's performance and the availability of funds from the [National Science Foundation \(NSF\)](#), which supports CCPI-STEM through a grant from its [Advanced Technological Education](#) program.

Other Fellows' Perspectives on CCPI-STEM

[Madison Area Technical College](#) Math Instructor Bethany Sansing-Helton, who was in the first Fellows cohort in 2022, said she was drawn to the CCPI-STEM program because of the opportunity to build a community with the other Fellows.

"There's not that many people working [as] full-time faculty at community colleges and getting doctoral degrees, and it's hard work. So having people in the STEM space going through the same thing as me was really incredibly appealing. I was also really excited about the mentoring," she said.

Receiving mentoring from Dr. Marcia Pfeiffer, president emerita of [St. Louis Community College](#), "has been a really important part of my journey ... Marsha is incredibly approachable and she's really honest," Sansing-Helton said. Pfeiffer has offered Sansing-Helton helpful advice on everything from her career plans to the data framework for her dissertation.

Pfeiffer explained that mentors helped her through "some twists and turns" in her career. Consequently, she said, "The opportunity to serve as a mentor is very gratifying to me."

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To Pfeiffer mentoring is “helping people understand their own strengths; think about their own communication styles. What is it really that they want from their career?”

Pfeiffer and Sansing-Helton first met through Achieving the Dream, where Pfeiffer has been a leadership coach. During the webinar Pfeiffer said Sansing-Helton has “made a lot of advancements” and that she was glad to hear that her mentee appreciates her candor: “It’s hard for me to beat around the bush. I can be very direct in the things I have to say.”

2023 Fellow Laurel Carpenter, who is an assistant professor of environmental science at [Holyoke Community College](#), said “I feel like I hit the jackpot” with Dr. Debra D. Bragg as her mentor. Bragg is the founding director of the [Office of Community College Research and Leadership at the University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign](#) where she is an emerita professor.

“I don’t know where I would be without her,” Carpenter said, explaining that Bragg’s deep knowledge and vast connections have “given her a seat at the table” of community college researchers. Bragg also provided “instrumental help” as Carpenter developed a pilot study for her dissertation about STEM community college students’ experiences.

2024 Fellow Amanda Hanley, an assistant professor of mathematics at [Cuyahoga Community College](#), is being mentored by DeDe Griffith, the vice president of Workforce Development at [Temple College](#) who was a 2022 CCPI-STEM Fellow.

Just in the first few months of her fellowship this year, Hanley explained that Griffith had provided directions and corrections that have saved her time. She’s also provided introductions and a safe space to talk.

“She offers incredible feedback that’s applicable, constructive and productive,” Hanley said, expressing her gratitude for the connections Griffith has already made for her.

Mentor Provides Assistance She Did Not Receive

Dr. Danielle Jacobs Duda, a professor at [Rider University](#), became interested in working with community college faculty after realizing that 85% of the graduates from NSF Noyce grant-funded program she led at Rider were community college transfer students.

This sparked her interest in strengthening the university’s relationship with New Jersey community college faculty that led to her participating in another ATE grant project and then becoming a CCPI-STEM mentor.

Duda praised the diligence of her mentee Fellow Qurat-ul-Ann Mirzanna, who chairs the physics department at [Rowan College at Burlington County](#) and teaches multiple courses while pursuing her doctoral degree.

Duda said she had not received good mentoring in graduate school and hopes that the “alternative thinking” she shares in conversations with Mirzanna will provided the assistance she missed.

The webcast was moderated by Dr. Elizabeth K. Hawthorne, CCPI-STEM co-principal investigator and senior professor emerita at [Union College](#).

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