



NEWS RELEASE

Three Innovative Educators Selected as Winners of the Second Annual McGraw Hill Pathfinder Awards

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Columbus, Ohio (May 6, 2024) – McGraw Hill, a leading global education company, today announced the winners of its second annual McGraw Hill Pathfinder Awards. The program, launched in 2022, honors K-12, higher ed and post-graduate educators who have shown innovation and inventiveness in their approach to teaching, helping learners discover their unique path to success.

Each McGraw Hill Pathfinder Award recipient wins a \$5,000 cash prize, plus a 1-hour Professional Learning Consultation from CAST, a nonprofit education research, professional development, and learning organization that created the Universal Design for Learning framework to make learning more inclusive to all.

“It’s an honor to celebrate educators who use their passion and inventiveness to further student learning outcomes,” said Simon Allen, McGraw Hill CEO. “Our winners showcase the transformative power of teaching, and we hope their stories inspire others to break new ground in education.”

The winners of the 2024 McGraw Hill Pathfinder Awards are:

Melissa Collins

Second Grade Teacher, John P. Freeman Optional School

Memphis, Tennessee

An advocate for equity and inclusion, Melissa Collins believes everyone should have a voice at the table, including the elementary and middle school students at the John P. Freeman Optional School in Memphis. As an educator for over 25 years, Melissa's passions lie in making her students feel valued and empowered, and it's the driving force behind her "Future Leaders of STEM" program, which she initiated to inspire young students to pursue careers in STEM fields. Through this program, Melissa organizes events such as the White Coat Ceremony, where students are mentored by STEM professionals, fostering a sense of belonging and inspiration. Melissa's teaching philosophy emphasizes the importance of hands-on experiences and collaboration. She believes in providing her students with real-world exposure to STEM professions, organizing field trips, and facilitating interactions with professionals in the field.

Beyond her classroom duties, Melissa is deeply involved in various national initiatives and boards, including the National Professional Teachers Standards Board and the National Teacher Hall of Fame Board, which she was inducted into in 2020. Melissa also served as the Tennessee Teacher of the Year for the 2022-2023 academic year and is the first and only teacher to serve on the National Science Foundation Education Human Resources Advisory Board committee.

Lauren Hynicka, PharmD, BCPS

Associate Professor of Practice, Sciences, and Health Outcomes Research, University of Maryland School of Pharmacy
Baltimore, Maryland

Whether she's giving a therapeutics lecture on the complications of liver disorders or leading discussions on integrative medicine, Dr. Lauren Hynicka's remarkable adaptability and dedication to her students are always at the forefront of her teaching. Drawing from her experience as a pharmacist on an internal medicine team, Lauren created two innovative elective courses for her students in the Doctor of Pharmacy Program at the University of Maryland School of Pharmacy centered on integrative medicine and nutrition. Her hands-on Integrative Medicine course allows students to learn about the philosophy of integrative medicine – caring for the mind, body, and spirit – and explore the evidence behind different integrative medicine modalities to develop a plan to enhance their own wellness. The second course is an interprofessional culinary health and medicine elective, where students are provided with comprehensive, evidence-based nutrition instruction and can prepare a meal in the spirit of each diet discussed during the course – a first of its kind for the pharmacy profession.

Lauren aims to instill in her students not only knowledge but also open-mindedness and empathy. By encouraging them to consider the whole person and explore alternative approaches to wellness, she equips them with the skills to become compassionate and effective healthcare professionals.

Dr. Jennifer Rachel Prado
Chemistry & Biochemistry Senior Lecturer, Auburn University
Auburn, Alabama

Inspired by her own experiences and driven by the desire to bridge gaps in spatial thinking abilities among students, Rachel embarked on a groundbreaking project to develop educational resources that would aid her students' learning experience. By collaborating with colleagues and leveraging grants from Auburn University, she spearheaded the creation of an immersive 3D learning webXR activity designed to help students visualize complex molecular structures and reactions. The activity improved students' understanding of stereochemistry while strengthening their confidence in tackling complex organic chemistry concepts, with over 90% of students reporting that the activity significantly improved their ability to visualize in 3D, leading to a deeper understanding of stereochemistry.

A passionate educator, Rachel's commitment to student success and her willingness to embrace new challenges exemplify her dedication to the field of chemistry education.

Her ultimate goal is to share this webXR project with organic chemistry students nationwide, giving them an accessible resource to grasp complex concepts, and improving learning outcomes for all chemistry students.

For more information about these educators and the McGraw Hill Pathfinder Award, visit:

<https://www.mheducation.com/pathfinder-awards>.

McGraw Hill

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