News Release: 2026-2027 Alumnae STEM Scholars

Evanston, IL—The Alumnae of Northwestern University has selected ten students to receive the 2026-2027 Alumnae STEM Scholarships, which are awarded to students who excel in a STEM discipline: including science, technology, engineering and mathematics.

Criteria for selection include academic excellence, honors achieved, and financial need. The intent of this scholarship is to free rising juniors from work commitments so they may more vigorously pursue their chosen area of study and other university projects.

The Alumnae of Northwestern are proud to support these talented, hard-working students pursuing STEM related studies in order to realize careers in diverse and highly competitive fields. The selection process is time-consuming and difficult in that there are so many deserving students whose talents and diligence all deserve recognition.

The Alumnae STEM Scholars for the 2026-2027 academic year are:

Abraham Flynn is studying for a Bachelor of Science Degree in the School of Engineering, specializing in AI and software development in order to transform technology. An engineer guided by innovation, Abraham has received both a 1st and 3rd in National Pitch Competition. He had founded a 501 (C) (3) non-profit and a tech start-up developing a "tool for self-reliance" focusing on digital literacy. A first-generation college student from Jamaican parents, Abraham received an Urban League of Broward County Scholarship, chosen a Quest-bridge Scholar, and accepted into the Management Leadership for Tomorrow, and serves as treasurer of the National Society of Black Engineers on campus. His professors state that "Abraham demonstrates a level of maturity and self-motivation, collaboration, and mentorship."

Amy Chen is from Westmont, IL A member of the Class of 2028, she is majoring in Environmental Science and Psychology. While at Northwestern she is studying the impact of human caused climate change on global earth systems and learning tangible methods for climate mitigation for at-risk populations. This work will enable her to support vulnerable communities through research and reform of both human psychology and the environmental impact. Outside of the classroom, she is currently pursuing research at Northwestern's Infant and Child Development Center where she is focused on the cognitive mechanisms behind racial bias development in preschool-aged children in the Chicagoland area. This work highlights her passion for social justice. She believes in the importance of advocating for impoverished and marginalized families, and to contribute to systematic change for communities who don't have the power to advocate for themselves.

Chizora Okolo is from Omaha, Nebraska, majoring in Biological Sciences and Psychology with a concentration in Human Health and Disease. As a freshman, Chizzy was selected for Northwestern's highly selective Bioscientist Program, which gave her the opportunity to conduct research at Lurie Children's Hospital in the pediatric surgery department. Her research project was designed to evaluate the diagnosis and treatment of children with colorectal cancers across multiple treatment centers; her findings were presented at a symposium with Deans, faculty and students. Currently she's involved in research within the Department of Communication Sciences and Disorders, where the focus is on the FMR1 gene and its role in autism. This experience has shown "how molecular research can inform our understanding of complex conditions" and shaped her goal of becoming a "physician who integrates research and scientific insight with clinical practice and compassionate care."

Kayden Ng is majoring in Chemical Engineering and taking classes toward an accelerated master's degree to graduate with both BS & MS in chemical engineering. Her goal is to become a PhD researcher "who can move confidently from molecular mechanisms to real world biomedical solutions, especially for women's health and autoimmune diseases." She has been conducting research since Fall Quarter freshman year. Last summer she received a Summer Undergraduate Research Grant, which led to her being a research peer mentor this summer and being admitted to the DeFeo Family Undergraduate Research Initiative, which will extend to her graduation. Her research, conducted in close collaboration with cardiologists, has been described as making important contributions to the measurement of microscopic blood flow.

Layan Manasrah is a Neuroscience and Global Health major from Fond Du Lac, Wisconsin. Her goal is to become a physician who provides reliable care to the most vulnerable patients who often struggle to access it. Layan made the Dean's List for all of 2025 and has been accepted twice to Northwestern's Summer Internship Program. She was chosen for the highly-selective King's College London Health and Society Program and the Dermatology Career Prep Program. She is committed to over 300 hours of research at Kalb Lab at Feinberg studying neuro-degenerative disease. Layan has taken on leadership roles in various Arab American organizations on campus. She is also co-founder and co-president of a student group focused on raising awareness about crises in the Middle East and supporting children affected by crises.

Michael Wightman is from Wayland, Massachusetts. A member of the Class of 2028, he is majoring in neuroscience. Inspired by a brother with a neurodevelopmental disorder, he plans to become a physician who is focused on family education and public policy, along with clinical treatment of neurological diseases. He balances his work in the Penzes Lab with independent research into a mutant protein that appears to underlie such neurological disorders as autism. Outside the lab and classroom, he serves as President of NU Heights overseeing 100 volunteers who tutor students from the Chicago Math & Science Academy and developing strategies for students with learning and intellectual disabilities.

Nezar Shakaki is a dual major of Neuroscience and History. Born in Damascus, his family settled in Akron, Ohio. Nezar's goal is to become a cardiologist. He would like to mitigate health inequities in marginalized communities, thus making a socio-economic impact in health care. Nezar is an active member of the Gianneschi Lab doing research on immune factors, and early detection of cancer. This summer Nezar will be doing research at the Oregon Health & Science University Equity Research Program. His professors state that "Nezar is reliable, demonstrates good communication skills, utilizes feedback, and acknowledges mistakes." Highly motivated, he is regarded as one of the top students in the rigorous sequence of Organic Chemistry courses.

Philip Jenouri, whose hometown is Brookfield, Wisconsin, is in the rigorous, highly selective Integrated Science Program with a focus on biology and physics. His goal is to become an academic researcher, most likely in the areas of cancer and immunology. In pursuit of that goal, he has received several grants to work in the Brickner lab at Northwestern. An exceptional student, "his thesis is very likely to receive not only honors, but potentially a named prize."

Sara Al Azzam, is from Fon Du Lac, Wisconsin. A member of the Class of 2008, she is majoring in Global Health and Neuroscience on the pre-medical path. Her goal is to become physician who integrates research, clinical practice,and global health perspectives. She currently conducts research at the Northwestern Feinberg School of Medicine investigating CNS hypoxia and its relationship to metabolic conditions such as high-fat and high-blood-pressure diets. She has an upcoming clinical internship in Kenya through International Medical Aid, where she will observe patient care in a high-volume, resource-limited setting, gaining insight into how physicians navigate systemic challenges such as limited resources, high patient demand, and structural health disparities. Sara also leads a local chapter of the Grey Matter Project, a neuroscience outreach effort affiliated with Yale School of Medicine. Through this effort she aims to make neuroscience more accessible to all students, especially those from lower income backgrounds and under-resourced schools

Vivian Tu is majoring in Neuroscience in the challenging Integrated Science Program and intends to pursue a PHD to investigate the mechanisms underlying cognition and neurological disorders. She has made the Dean's List every quarter at Northwestern. Vivian has spent over a year working with the Meade group developing a molecular probe for beta amyloid oligomers, a highly toxic species implicated in Alzheimer's disease and plans to present her research at the Northwestern Undergraduate Research Exposition. Vivian is passionate about sharing her interest in science and math working with high school students through Varsity Tutors, and as a peer instructor for after school programs with the Youth and Opportunities United program.