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# *National Science Foundation awards \$650,000 to Eastern for Success Scholars program*



An Eastern student uses a microscope in a biology lab in the Science Building.

Eastern Connecticut State University has been awarded a \$649,957 grant from the National Science Foundation (NSF) to implement a scholarship program for lower-income students in pursuit of science-related careers. Titled "Beyond the Curriculum: A Learning Community for Success," students accepted into the program, who are designated "Success Scholars," will receive an annual scholarship and benefit from a supportive STEM education rooted in the liberal arts. Each scholarship is valued at \$9,750 per year for four years. Five students will be accepted for the fall 2021 cohort.

Carmen Cid, dean of the School of Arts and Sciences, explains the value of STEM embedded in the liberal arts. "Critical and creative thinking, combined with good communication ability, is an essential skill for all STEM professionals. Eastern's liberal arts education focuses on promoting those attributes in the career development of all our students."

The program is tailored for students who intend to pursue science-related careers, have a demonstrated financial need, have a high school GPA of 3.4 or higher, and plan to major in biology or mathematics. The GPA requirement may be modified for students whose academic potential is demonstrated through their personal essay, recommendation letter and experiences.

"Many lower income students are from underrepresented groups, and often are the first in their family to attend a university," said Barbara Murdoch, biology professor and director of the Success Scholars program.

"Navigating the university system to the final goal of degree completion can be tough, especially without guidance. A key feature of this program is to provide the NSF Eastern Success Scholars with close faculty and peer mentoring, to support them throughout every aspect of their time at Eastern."

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Success Scholars will participate in a summer orientation program, take a STEM-focused first-year seminar, and conclude the program with a capstone project in their senior year. Throughout their time at Eastern, Success Scholars will advance with their cohort in a learning community that works closely with designated faculty and peer mentors as they participate in research projects and career seminars.

Success Scholars will be required to develop a research project with a faculty mentor and present their results at an academic STEM-related conference. Additionally, Success Scholars will benefit from working with advanced-level students - selected by faculty - who will serve as peer mentors and hold structured study sessions in biology and mathematics.

In addition to supporting lower-income students who face added barriers to persisting through college, the program aims to diversify the STEM field by fostering STEM identity.

"Being recognized for competences and performances in STEM by meaningful others has been found to be one of the most important elements in the development of STEM identity," said Education Professor Laura Rodriguez, who will lead the program's effectiveness monitoring efforts. "By creating a learning community of scholars, we hope to create a sense of belonging in STEM for these students."

"Beyond the Curriculum" is a five-year program that will enroll two cohorts of five Success Scholars each in fall 2021 and fall 2022. As part of the program, students will be monitored for competence, performance and recognition - three important constructs for the development of STEM identity. The effectiveness of the program's support measures and learning community will be studied throughout the project and publicized.

In addition to Cid, Murdoch and Rodriguez, the program's lead faculty members include Biology Professor and Department Chair Elizabeth Cowles and Mathematics Professor Kim Ward.

For more information, visit <https://www.easternct.edu/success-scholars/index.html>.

**Written by Michael Rouleau**

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